BOOK REVIEW

Title: Songs in Their Heads: Music and Its Meaning in Children's Lives
(2nd ed.).

Author: Patricia Shehan Campbell

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Looking back on my childhood, it is difficult to remember a time when I was not in formal music training. As a music educator, I often ponder the circumstances that sparked my desire to play musical instruments. Did I always have melodies running through my head? Did I naturally engage in musical activities or sing songs to myself? In her book, *Songs in Their Heads: Music and Its Meaning in Children's Lives*, Patricia Campbell addresses these questions while exploring how children of diverse ages, classes, and cultures use music in their daily lives, how *ethnomusicology*, the study of music through cultural influences (Aubert, 2007), shape their musical experiences, and how recent advancements in technology and the influence of popular culture affect their musical choices.

Campbell (2010) introduces her inspiration for the studies through a story of a young boy in a schoolyard saying that every morning he wakes up with songs in his head. This seemingly simple statement triggered numerous questions for Campbell (2010) as she then wondered if these were "songs of the musically gifted? Or do all children carry within them musical gifts- songs, musical 'urges,' and thoughts about music- at the edge of their consciousness?" (p. 3).

Part 1, "In Music: Children at Musical Play", documents the natural musical engagements of children through descriptive ethnographic field-based observations and graphic musical notations. The musical examples embedded within the text support the observations, and allow the reader to interpret various transcriptions of rhythms, vocalizations, songs, and chants that Campbell audio/video taped. Campbell concludes that, through "musicking," (Elliott, 1995) children "kinesthetically expel their energy ... and make their own music to fit their movements and their imaginations" (Campbell, 2010, p. 95).

Through substantial descriptions, Campbell supports her claims regarding intrinsic "musical doodlings" (Kartomi, 1991) in children. However, she ventures too far in her analysis of rhythmic behaviours. In one example Campbell (2010) describes a young girl who changed the meter unknowingly while singing a song. Campbell states that metric shifts in music "may be perceived by musicians who perform complex works Yet here was a preschool child who had

demonstrated the concept with ease and nonchalance, and with considerable feeling” (p. 35). Campbell also describes a young boy tapping his milk carton on the table in a “syncopated pattern” (p. 37), and a fifth grader who struck a metal dustpan against the garbage can in a notated repeated pattern (p. 41). The children described here appear to be inadvertently creating sounds in their activities which Campbell over-zealously attributes to an understanding of rhythmic behaviour. What makes her argument questionable, is the distinct difference between rhythm with intent and simple sounds.

Part 2, “On Music: Conversations with Children”, presents twenty candid interviews, followed directly by Campbell’s reflections and commentary. Through the interviews, Campbell determines common threads amongst the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and circumstances of the children. She also provides an ethnomusicological perspective of the musical genres children hear at home, engage in with friends, the way they view music in their schools, and how they view themselves as singers or instrumentalists. The interview format in this portion of the study is effective. As Campbell captures the uninhibited perspectives of the children, it allows the reader to form interpretations before being exposed to the opinions of the author. Through the commentary, the reader can then naturally engage in critical analysis as their opinions are either reinforced or challenged.

Part 3, “For Children: Prospects for Their Music Education”, serves as an additional forum for commentary and reflections, intended to “examine the collage that they form together” (p. 215). Campbell explains that recent influences of technology and mass media on children serve as the inspiration behind publishing the second edition. Campbell is undoubtedly passionate about this issue, but she presents a deterministic claim in stating that “today’s children are born digital” (p. 219). Although technology is undeniably influential in Western culture, Campbell could have stated that one cannot be born digital but rather one adjusts to a digital age. Is it one’s interaction with technology that is influential, or the fact that it exists? Through her statement, Campbell seems to be homogenizing all children, when in reality, access to certain technologies is still part of a privileged class.

In addition to media, Campbell also addresses the place and weight of music education in the curriculum and offers interdisciplinary (Klein, 2004) insights for music educators to consider. While Campbell believes that intellectual growth can occur when “songs, rhythms, and listening experiences [are] integrated into lessons on social studies, the language arts, mathematics, and the sciences” (p. 272), she does not address a standard for quality of music presented in the classroom. Successful integration occurs when all subject areas are equally cultivated, and although this method may foster learning, it does not necessarily foster musical development. As a result, the success of integration is dependent on the abilities of the teachers, and their willingness to maintain a high standard of pitch and rhythmic proficiency in their students. Although Campbell attests to the positive effects of integration in general, she neglects essential aspects of music education, which undermine her philosophies surrounding musical development in children.

In this section, Campbell also addresses issues of musical choice and warns parents of the poor musical quality present in music specifically made for young children. She suggests consulting the *Billboard* charts to see what is popular, and advocates exposing students to all of the various genres. However, from a musician’s perspective it is apparent that many artists in popular culture utilize technologically altered voices and studio effects rather than organic talent. Therefore, suggesting that popular music translates as good quality is a severely overstated argument and should be seen as equivalent to Campbell’s opinion regarding children’s music and the adverse effects of poor quality.

Although Campbell's credible intentions in providing perspective, knowledge, and insight into the inherently musical lives of children are apparent, she expresses deterministic ideas that could benefit from further massaging. Extra support from external sources may have added more credibility. Additionally, a biography listing Campbell's musical and educational background would have been advantageous to understand the context that contributed to the development of her philosophies. In essence, although Campbell presents bold arguments, she is successful in capturing children's intrinsic musical perspectives and behaviours.

References

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