

Music Theory as a Tool for Music Creation

Kids can create their own music! Even very young children are capable of composing songs. It is astonishing to hear the music composed by a child, and I guarantee that the child you teach will amaze you.

The most rewarding part of the whole process is seeing the look on a child's face when she finishes performing her composition. She knows that the piece she composed is *hers*. She worked hard and created something she didn't before realize she could. And her confidence soars.

A solid understanding of music theory is the best tool for anyone who wants to create music. The typical approach to teaching music theory is a long and dreary path that takes much too long to show kids the application of the theory. If, right from the start, you show kids that music theory helps them create fun and impressive music, they'll be continually thirsty to learn more.

Teaching Techniques

Choose a teaching approach that correlates with the child's disposition. An engaging, activity-based approach is superior for most children. At Eartrainingandimprov.com, you will find a large supply of resources, including printable games and worksheets that you can utilize with the child you teach. Although both accomplish essentially the same goal, most kids prefer playing a game over flash card drills. When the child enjoys the activity, she's more likely to have the desire to engage herself and master the concept.

Always show the child how to apply the theory concept to music creation. You can generate fun composing activities based on each concept. For example, after teaching half steps and whole steps, ask the child to describe the sound and emotions created when you play only half steps. Show the child that half steps can be used to create a spooky sound for Halloween and ask the child to compose a spooky song with half steps.

How to Start Teaching and Applying Music Theory

Begin with scales and chords

First teach the scale and chords and then show the child that the notes from this scale can be used to create a song. The chords can be used to harmonize their song. I've taught kids as young as four years old this concept and they've all had success and been tremendously pleased with themselves.

Don't worry if you're not sure how to teach scales and chords to kids. The Piano Magic series on Eartrainingandimprov.com was developed to teach these concepts to kids. The kids master the scales and chords in small, incremental phases. Each level comes with instructions for the parent or teacher and fun progress charts.

Introduce more chords

As the child is ready, introduce suspended chords, augmented chords, diminished chords, and seventh chords. Point out the sound qualities of each chord and show the child different ways to utilize these chords in the music he composes.

You might wait until the child is very comfortable with major and minor scales and chords and has a great deal of experience composing with these fundamentals. You'll know that the child is ready when he shows signs of wanting more advanced techniques to make his songs more interesting.

More theory concepts

Teach the following concepts. Follow the pace of the individual child as you present each new idea and help her fully understand the theory and the application of the theory.

- Music dictation. Knowing how to correctly write down her music enables the child to preserve her songs so that she doesn't forget them, and also enables her to share them with others.
- Harmonic and melodic intervals. An interval is the distance between two notes. Some composers set the mood for the entire piece with just a carefully selected opening interval. Each interval possesses a certain musical quality. When children understand this, they know exactly which notes to use to convey the feeling they wish their song to express. Eartrainingandimprov.com has resources to help you and the child you teach understand and apply intervals.
- Playing in key. Teach kids to understand the concept of playing in key. There are patterns and formulas that, once understood, can be easily applied to create music. Within a given key, certain notes sound final, while others convey tension. Resolving that tension sounds pleasant to the ear. Kid Composer and other resources on Eartrainingandimprov.com can help you teach these concepts to children.
- Transposing. Once a child knows how to play a song in a given key, he can learn to play that same song in a different key. This is a useful skill that composers and performers apply often.

- The flow of chords. Kids can learn to play chords in series to convey emotion. For example a series that includes both tense chords and restful chords will have a rich and complex sound that engages the listener. Understanding how to utilize chords in series enables kids to create impressive music. This concept can be easily mastered by children with the resources available at Eartrainingandimprov.com.
- Musical style. There are formulas for jazz music, oriental music, rock and roll, Middle Eastern music and nearly every genre you can think of. All songs that fit into each genre follow the patterns of that genre. These patterns are easy to learn and kids love experimenting with different styles.

Music Theory Guarantees Success

Young composers will never have to guess- there are patterns and formulas that always work to create beautiful music. Music theory teaches these formulas, and with a sound understanding of theory, kids will be empowered to successfully compose.

The attitude of the parent and teacher determine in large part how the child responds to the process of learning theory concepts. When the parent and teacher are enthusiastic about music theory and excited about creating music through the application of the new knowledge, kids mirror that enthusiasm. When you're equipped with a positive attitude and engaging teaching tools, the child you teach will thrive.