

Creative ICT for
the under-fives



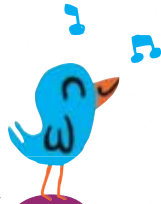
Observations
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Early Years

THE MUSIC ISSUE



Shake rattle and roll

Using music to boost learning,
language and creativity in the EYFS



PLUS

Julian Lloyd Webber
on why music matters

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Children love the sound of their voices playing back through the loudspeakers

Wired for sound

Using simple technology during music-making sessions is lots of fun but can also open children's ears to a world of sound around them

By **Richard Webber** Photography **Andrew Godfrey**

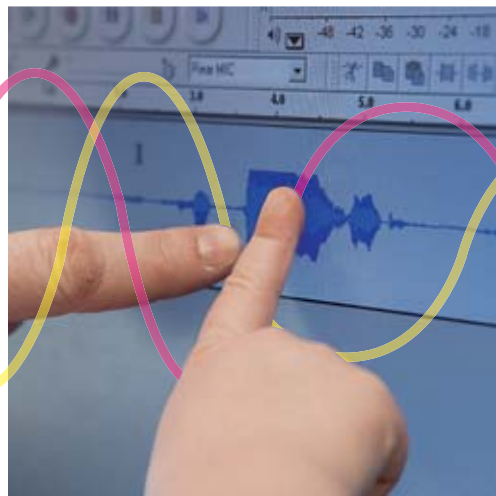
After singing her name into a microphone, four-year-old Evie rushes back to the keyboard to hear her first ever music recording. Music leader Mat Andasun, who has turned this corner of Huntingdon Nursery School into a temporary music studio, presses a few buttons on his laptop before Evie hits a key and delights in the sound of her own voice playing back through the loudspeakers.

Mat is a self-taught musician who runs Storytime, a project designed to get under-fives excited about sound and music-making. What's unusual about these sessions, which run at children's centres and nurseries in Nottingham, is the use of hi-tech equipment to get children hooked – in this case a keyboard, microphone, and sampling software (which enables the digital capture and playback of sounds via a computer).

“Music technology allows people the chance to work with sound in a way that was previously impossible,” says Mat, whose work is funded by the charity Youth Music and Nottingham City Council.

“Working with the computer is developed over several sessions. As well as recording children's voices and mapping them on to a keyboard, we record sounds of items the children find in the setting, such as by shaking a box of crayons. These can then be applied





MAT'S MUSIC RESOURCES

Mat's five favourite early years music resources:

- **Audacity** is a free software recorder for Windows PCs. Like an electronic tape recorder, it enables you to record sounds. For a free download go to <http://audacity.sourceforge.net/download>
- The lightweight **M-Audio KeyRig 49** keyboard is an easy-to-use 49-note USB-powered model that doesn't need an external power supply. You simply plug it in and play. Available for around £69.
- **Microphones:** look for an entry-level model that can be connected to a PC with a USB cable.

- A simple software sampler enables you to transfer and play recorded sounds onto the keyboard. It also allows you to alter the nature of the sound, such as introducing an echo. Mat recommends **Native Instruments' Kontakt**, costing around £300.
- **Halloween Haunted House** sound effects software lets you record and manipulate voices before transferring to the keyboard. Visit www.scienceshareware.com/sw3.htm

to a favourite book, perhaps *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*, to act as a soundscape for the story.

"The children find objects which sound like 'swishy, swashy' grass or squelchy mud and record them. Then, whenever those sounds appear in the story, a child comes up and plays the sound on the keyboard by simply pressing a key."

Today's session, the first of several at Huntingdon, begins with a simple vocal warm-up, before all the children in the small group take turns at sampling and playing their voices. Then Mat introduces a more traditional instrument, strumming away on his guitar and encouraging the children to join in his song 'Dig, Dig, Dig'. This is a role-playing musical game in which the children pretend to be on an archaeological dig – when the music pauses, they reveal what they have unearthed and what sound it might make.

Mat, who's worked with children as young as two, believes his sessions help children gain an awareness of sound, become better listeners, build self-confidence and encourage co-operation.

Although he stresses the need to balance music technology activities with other aspects of music-making, such as singing songs and exploring natural sounds, the use of computers has proved key to the success of Storytime.

Mat encourages children's centres to invest in the necessary equipment so practitioners can continue the work not only with their own stories

but plays and other drama activities. To help them feel confident enough to use the technology, he provides up to two days training. "Training is reinforced at the end of each session so people feel comfortable working with the technology and the programmes once I've gone."

For maximum effectiveness, Mat suggests, keep groups small: "Six children maximum – sit them in a circle and keep the age difference minimal because the capabilities of a three-year-old compared to a five-year-old are very different."

Sessions must be flexible and geared towards concentration levels on the day. "The children must drive the activity forward, too, so involve them in pressing buttons and using instruments. Finally, remember that you're the interface between the child and the technology so always face the children rather than the computer."

Mat extols the benefits of using music technology in early years, recalling many shy children who came alive during sessions. "At one centre, one girl, Lucy, was always among the first to put her hand up. She dominated the group, so I was flabbergasted when the practitioners said that she's invisible outside this time – they didn't hear a peep out of her."

FURTHER INFORMATION

Mat Andasun, www.matandasun.com
Youth Music, www.youthmusic.org.uk

