

Welcoming the New Year in Song

“If you can walk, you can dance. If you can talk, you can sing.”
– Zimbabwean proverb

ACTUALLY, BABIES CAN SWAY to a dancing beat before they can walk or talk. Current scientific study focuses on how music aids infant and child development. Music classes for babies and toddlers now abound. However, if you’ve ever attended one of these programs, you know that the most important product is definitely delight. Music makes people happy at every age, and holding that perspective in our awareness can help us enjoy life.

That’s why singing directions to young children often makes them more willing to comply. Research shows that children are more attracted to the singing voice. You can investigate this premise yourself by spontaneously singing words you would normally have to repeat (“Time to clean up,” “Time to wash hands for dinner”). The truth is we probably sing with more cheer.

The greatest mutual satisfaction, however, comes from singing or making music together. Before home entertainment centers, families produced their own “glee” by creating their own music. Growing up, Einstein played the violin after dinner with his mother accompanying on piano. Today we’re encouraged to play Mozart to raise a baby’s IQ. However, after-dinner recreation in the Einstein house wasn’t aimed at increasing his intelligence. These musical sessions developed the ecstasy and spiritual inspiration Einstein experienced through classical music throughout his life.

Do you remember the conviviality of singing with your family or members of your faith community? What about the pride and power that came from knowing the song’s words? A recent episode of the hit TV show *Modern Family* depicted the humor and isolation of family members hooked up to individual electronic devices, each tuning into his or her own “thing” at the breakfast table. What a contrast to the swelling satisfaction universally felt by singing or enjoying music together! One study examined blood specimens of singers taken before and after rehearsing Mozart’s *Requiem*. The results? The evidence revealed the presence of chemicals that promote immune function and good feeling after singing.

You can counteract stress by taking every opportunity to sing or enjoy music together. Sing in the car, while making dinner or baking cookies, or instead of watching TV. Make videos of a family song session and send them to grandparents as gifts. Surprise relatives by singing on the phone. A feeling of unity can be summoned by producing a few musical notes that attract others to join in!

January 5, 2011