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Teaching Kids to Sing

Kate Tiefel, M.M.

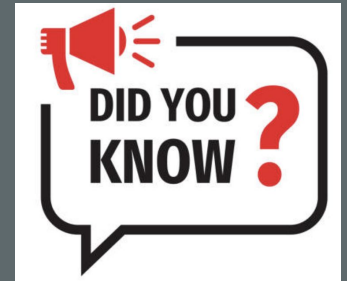
WELS National Conference on Music,
Worship, & the Arts
August 2024

A little about me



Today's Plan

- ❑ Why should we teach singing?
- ❑ **Infants & Toddlers** (Age 0-2)
- ❑ **Young Children** (Age 3-7)
- ❑ **Older children** (Age 8-12)
- ❑ Picking music



**Why should we teach
SINGING?**

1

Because we are preparing children for lives of worship

“From the lips of **infants and children** you have ordained praise.”
(Psalm 8:2)

“I will sing to the Lord **as long as I live.**” (Psalm 104:33)

“**Sing to the Lord**, all the earth!” Psalm 96:1

Sing to him a new song; **play skillfully**, and shout for joy. (*Psalm 33:3*)

The 30-Year Goal

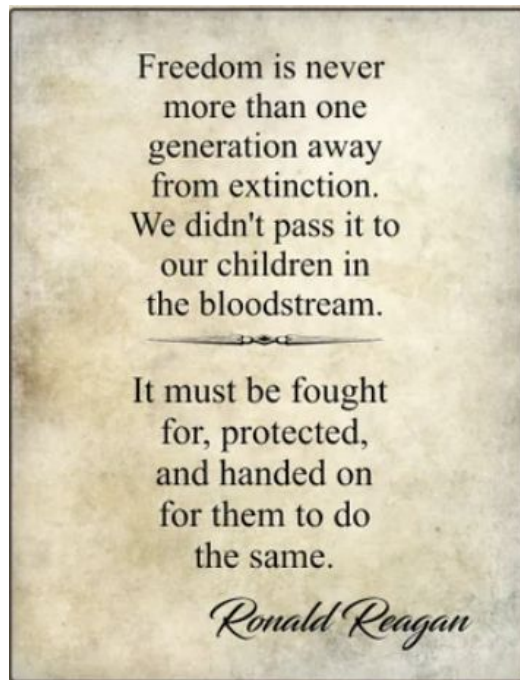


2

Because it's up to us to pass down the legacy of the “singing church”

“Who will teach our children the songs of faith? **Home, school, and church all have a part to play.** And unless we are ready to give up a generation with no strong roots in the church's treasury of song, **we had better get busy.**”

Carl Schalk



“Simply put, **heirs of the Reformation** recognize if music is this important to Lutheran worship it needs to be part of the curriculum of Lutheran schools.”

Pastor Jacob Haag

3

Because God has blessed every child with musical ability that we are called to steward



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

4

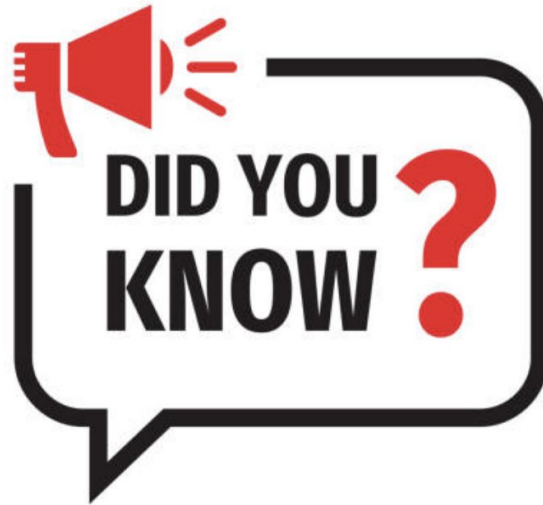
Because the voice is a complex instrument and singing is a skill that must be taught

“Singing is a learned behavior.”

Helen Kemp

“The piano teacher does not expect the coordination needed to play the piano to appear naturally, not does the band instructor. They spend hours teaching children eye-hand coordination and fine muscle motor control. However, many teachers of child and adolescent singers seem to expect that the coordination of the singing voice will happen automatically!”

Kenneth Phillips, *Teaching Kids to Sing*



**Children learn music like they learn
language**



**Dr. Edwin Gordon
(1927-2015)**

**Exposure
Exploration
Babble
Imitation
Vocabulary acquisition
Reading, Writing
Creating, Analyzing, Responding**



The early years at home matter most

*By the time a child reaches approximately **age 9**, his or her level of music aptitude can no longer be affected by the music environment, even by a music environment of extremely high quality”* (Edwin E. Gordon, *A Music Learning Theory for Newborn and Young Children*, 1997, p. 10)

*With inappropriate instruction or no exposure to music whatsoever, a child’s **developmental music aptitude usually decreases.*** (Music Aptitude and Related Tests, Edwin E. Gordon, GIA Music Publications, p. 5)

*In a 1962 study, **musical homes** produced preschoolers who were singers or partial singers, while poor home environments produced no singers at all.* (Phillips, 32)

We are stewarding the musical gifts God has apportioned to these children!

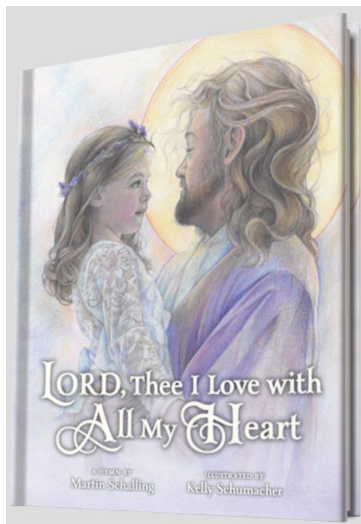
INFANTS & TODDLERS

(Birth-2)

1

Sing to them

- Sing lullabies (try humming or singing on loo)
- Sing picture books
 - [Kloria Publishing, Folk Song Bundle](#)
 - [Comprehensive Book List by Topic and Holiday](#)
- Have a music [“conversations”](#), Pitch or [rhythm](#)
 - [Leave spaces in your song for babies to respond](#)
- Use short songs in everyday life (Rain, rain go away; Ants go Marching)
- Offer a rich musical vocabulary of modes, meters, and styles.
- Sing the church’s heritage of hymns, psalms, and liturgy!



2

Bounce, Tickle, Wiggle, & Move



What songs/rhymes do you remember from your childhood?

The Little Mice Go Creeping

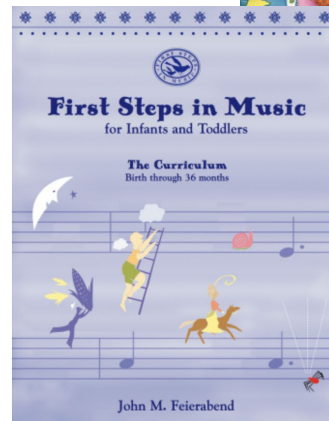
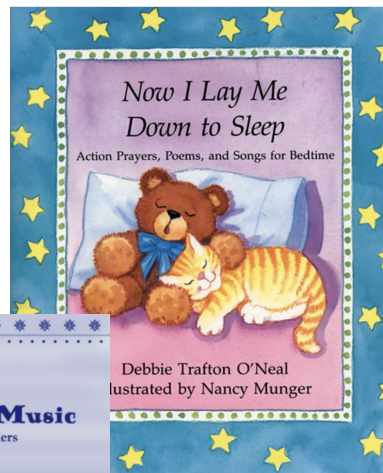
There was a little grasshopper (rhythm)

Humpty Dumpty (rhythm)

Ride-O, Ride-O

Moving to music

Matching pitch Example



Fingerplays: Daddy finger, Where is Thumbkin, Twinkle Twinkle, Eency Weency Spider, 5 Little Ducks, 5 Green and Speckled Frogs...

3

Pick high quality music

“Let us take our children seriously! Everything else follows from this... only the best is good enough for a child.” - Zoltan Kodaly

What is high quality music for kids?

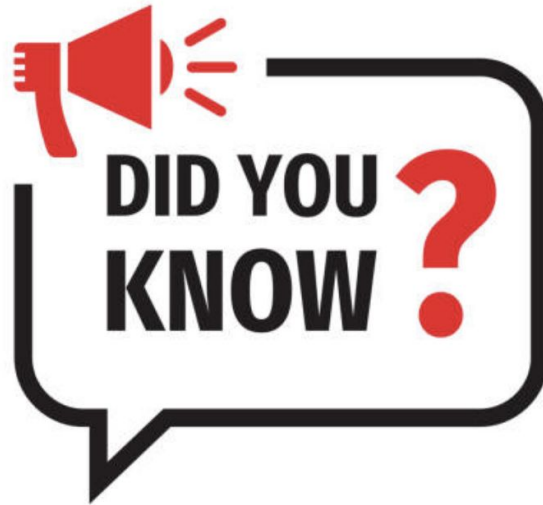
- acoustic instruments
- healthy vocal models (light woman’s voice or children’s head voice)
- correct vocal range
- lasting music with a heritage (folk music, hymns)

Recordings for your home and car:

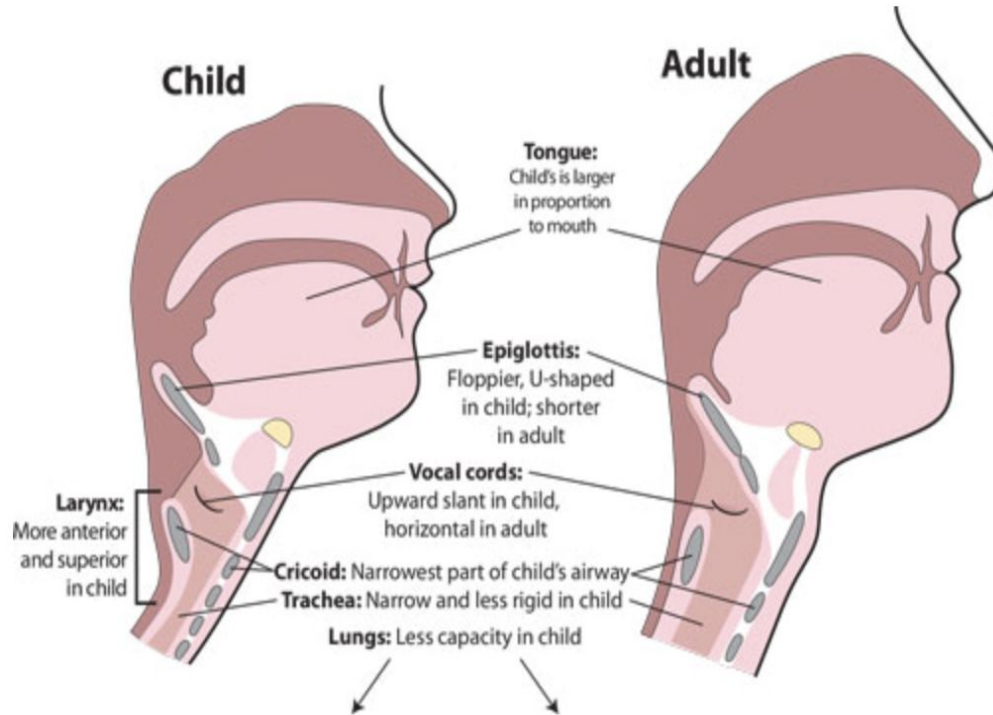
- [CPH: One and All Rejoice \(5 sets\); My First Hymnal](#)
- [Songs for Saplings](#)
- [Jill Trinka](#) “Had a Little Rooster” “There’s a Hole in the Bucket” “Old Joe Clark”
- “New” classics - Laurie Berkner, Raffi

YOUNG CHILDREN

(Ages 3-7)



**Children's voices are NOT like adult voices.
They are growing and changing**



Vocal fold length in newborn infants measure .24 – .31 inches - smaller than a ladybug! The vocal folds **increase their total length by about 6.5mm** between the ages of 1 to 12.

In the first few years of life, the **vocal folds** are one layer - primarily mucosal tissue - while adult folds have five layers. The **vocal ligament** (elastic tissue inside the vocal fold) develops between ages 1-4. The vocal folds gradually increase in stability and structure through **age 10**. Foster, J., Dawson, J., Davis, P., & Dahlen, H. 2017,

The child's **vocal tract** is short. **By age 9** the curve and contour of the tract are adult-like, but still smaller.

The **respiratory system** is not fully mature until around **age 8**.

Children's voices have limited RANGE

Ages 3-5



Ages 6-8



Ages 9-12



Silent Night - VIDEO #1

Musical notation for the hymn 'Silent Night'. It is presented in two systems, each with a treble and bass staff in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The lyrics are written between the staves.

1 God is so good; God is so good;
2 God cares for me; God cares for me;
3 God loves me so; God loves me so;
4 God is so good; God is so good;

God is so good; God's so good to me.
God cares for me; God's so good to me.
God loves me so; God's so good to me.
God is so good; God's so good to me.

Children's voices have limited VOLUME

Singing too low or asking for a developmentally inappropriate loud sound can lead to **pressed phonation and shout-singing**. These are bad habits that make it harder for students to access high notes and can even lead to **vocal damage**.

We have a great responsibility. The way kids sing in early elementary sets up vocal habits for life! **Heavy, chest-voice singing limits children!**

VIDEO 2-3rd grade

VIDEO 3-4th grade

VIDEO 5-8th grade (unchanged)

What does this mean?

- **Change the paradigm: “soft and sweet” > “loud and proud”**

Prioritize children’s vocal health over parent “entertainment” ... *“oh, how cute!”*

Never ask children to sing “louder” - instead, work on proper breathing for singing

- **Examine yourself as a model**

What range do you sing in? What is your vocal timbre? Young children need us to sing at a higher pitch than most of us would naturally pick for ourselves.

- **Select music in a correct range**

You might have to let some “favorites” wait until older grades. That’s okay!

- **Choose accompaniment carefully and use microphones**

Use light piano, guitar, or ukulele. Consider singing unaccompanied! Avoid recordings.



Which of these is the hardest?



VOCAL EXPLORATION ACTIVITIES

Children need to explore their voices
before they can sing
accurately.

- ❑ Follow the line (TPT pictures or videos)
- ❑ Puppets (birds, bugs)
- ❑ Scarfs (after free dance or move/freeze)
- ❑ Balloon or ball toss
- ❑ Slide whistle
- ❑ Pipe cleaners, string, draw a roller coaster
- ❑ Picture Books (How to Speak Moo, Papa Get the Moon for Me)
- ❑ Teach the “Four Voices” - Hickety Pickety Bumblebee



Folkmanis Mini Spotted Owl Finger Puppet

★★★★★ [237](#)

\$10⁸²

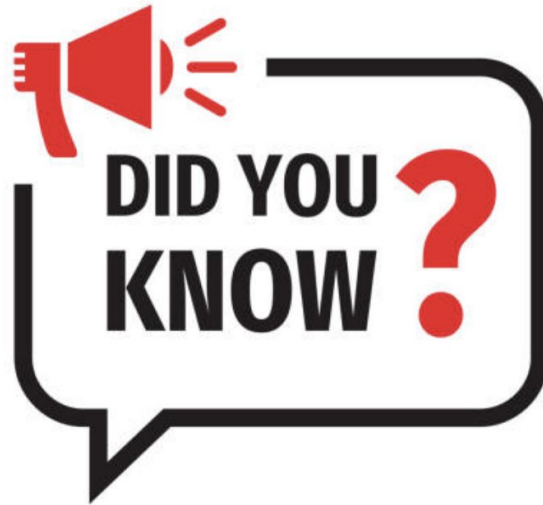


Item No. 400464

American Plating 302 Song Whistle

\$ 25.99 ~~\$ 48.99~~

In Stock



**Children learn to sing best when they
hear themselves and other children**

Kids learn to match pitch best when they hear...

- 1) Their own voice and the voices of other children
- 2) Female teachers (with child-like quality - head voice, limited vibrato)
- 3) Male teachers in falsetto
- 4) Male teachers in bass register
- 5) Piano/recordings

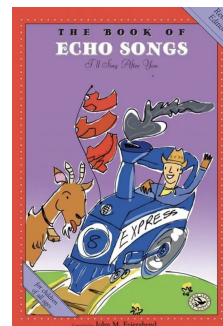
(Kramer, 1985; Montgomery, 1988; Wolf, 1984) Kenneth Phillips, Teaching Kids to Sing, p. 28



ECHO SONGS

Children learn to match pitch when hearing themselves and their peers

- ❑ John the Rabbit
- ❑ Down By the Bay
- ❑ The Littlest Worm
- ❑ Oh My Aunt Came Back
- ❑ The Other Day I Met a Bear
- ❑ Wise Old Owl
- ❑ Somebody's Knockin' At Your Door
- ❑ Nothing But the Blood of Jesus



What ECHO SONGS do you know?

Any song can be an echo song!

- 1) Have the whole class echo you for several classes
- 2) Have individual students echo you and assess pitch matching

TIPS for solo singing with kids

- **Any response is a good response!**
Do not offer correction, but offer a simple “**Thank you.**” (Remember the stages of music “language” development - many kids are still in the babble, exploration, and imitation stages!)
- **Use props and puppets to take the pressure off!**
Make eye contact with the puppet, not the child
Try a fun microphone prop!
- **Be patient. Many kids won’t match pitch until grades 1-2**
Especially when they need remediation from a non-musical home environment
- **Any song can have solos!** Try adding solos to your regular classroom or Sunday School songs: Who Built the Ark, God is So Good



SOLO SINGING GAMES

Games get kids singing by themselves
in a low-stress environment and give
teachers a chance to assess individuals

- ❑ *Pass the Puppet Round the Room (Tune: London Bridge)
- ❑ *Charlie over the Ocean
- ❑ There's Someone Standing on a High, High Hill
- ❑ Doggie, Doggie Where's Your Bone
- ❑ Let's Go Around the Circle (stretchy band)
- ❑ Button You Must Wander
- ❑ Pull the Anchor (Older Kids)



Bear Paw Creek Stretchy Band,
Creative Movement Prop for Group
Activities, Direct from USA
Manufacturer

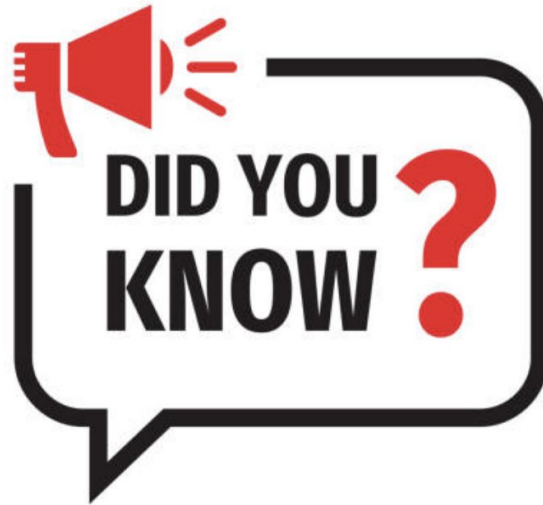
★★★★☆ ~ 62

\$83⁰⁰

✓prime FREE Delivery Tue, Jun 7

OLDER CHILDREN

(Age 8-12)



Research indicates that failure to match pitch in the intermediate years results from inability to coordinate the vocal mechanism more than poor pitch discrimination.

***Izzy story: "No one ever taught me how to sing."*

Helping older *inaccurate* singers

Start coachings in 3rd grade (classroom teachers, too!)

- GOAL: “Every child in my class will match pitch by year’s end!”
- It is critical to match pitch and build confidence before adolescent voice change, or we might lose a singer for life.
- Provide opportunities to sing individually, in pairs, and in small groups



VOCAL COACHING

Activities to help kids match pitch one-on-one

1) Explore different vocal registers

- Use terms like: speaking/singing; light/heavy; head voice/chest voice
- Use “elevator” hands to show: Basement - first floor - attic voices
- “Hoo-Hoo” - light, like a baby owl...or coyote, ghost, siren, train whistle, wind, kitten
- “Sheesh!”
- “Yoo hoo!” fancy lady
- Puppy dogs whimper (thanks, Sarah H!) :-)
- Vocal exploration stories: Wizard of Oz, Boarding a train, melodrama

2) Sing descending patterns: start in head voice and work down

- “Yoo hoo” minor-third descending
- Shoo - 54321
- Remember that a vocal model is best - have them echo your voice

3) Start at their speaking pitch

- Have them count backward from 10 to find an average speaking tone. Call out “*Hey there!*” and sustain first syllable; build the feeling of sustaining a sound and gradually expand range

Dr. Joanne Rutkowski research:

1) pre-singer, 2) speaking-range singer, 3) initial range singer, 4) singer

4) Vocalize in different registers

- “Down to the Bottom of the Deep Blue Sea” - 54321 (CHEST VOICE)
- “I am a Bear, I am a hoot owl” (CHEST → HEAD)

5) Continue echo songs and limited range songs

- We Will Rock You, Jingle Bells (add elevator analogy)
- Camp songs and echo songs
- Sing familiar hymns echoing one phrase at a time

Getting creative and not giving up...

- **Try a different tonal model**
 - Use a xylophone or recorder - have them play a pitch and you match it, then they try to match
 - Invite a friend to sing with them, so they have a child vocal model to match
- **Use the kinesthetics or props to show melodic contour and pitch direction**
 - Elevator hands, drawing shapes in the air, tracing shapes on paper
- **Use imagery**
 - Unicorn/narwhal horn, tin man's hat funnel
- **Give TONS of praise!**
 - Use the one-on-one time to build rapport and trust. Make it fun and low-pressure (bribes work!)
- **Give specific feedback**
 - Ask them to discriminate - can they hear if they were in tune, too high, or too low
- **Remember, this takes time!**
 - You are training both the brain/ear and the vocal mechanism



WARM-UPS FOR ALL CHILDREN

Vocal instruction should be for all children, and not reserved only for those in choral groups

5 minute Warm-up with grades 2-3

5 minute Warm-up with grades 3-4

Warm-ups with the Indianapolis Children's Choir

Youtube Playlist of Children's Choir Warm-Up

****Use Kinesthetic engagement as much as possible**

Warm-Ups for Elementary Singers

Pick a few warm-ups before you sing your hymn or anthem. 5 minutes total.

Breath and **head voice** are most important!

- 1) **Physical/Mental Focus** (*be my mirror; shake out*)
- 2) **Posture/Stretching** (*raise arms & lower slowly; pull the balloon string; hold the suitcase, posture positions 321*)
- 3) **Breath** (*pant like big/little dog, oo sips; blow out candles; elevator; fill balloon; Row Your Boat*)
- 4) **Vocal Exploration** (*echo sounds; draw rollercoaster, Vocal Exploration cards Vowel shapes and tone (Echo "Shoo" 54321, dooby dooby doo, alphabet @ different ages, Give Me Cookies - rude vs. polite, I Love to Sing - Texas vs. England)*)
- 5) **Diction, Range Extension, Agility, Ear Training** (*cheese and crackers, bumble bee*)

Resources for warm-ups

Warm-Up Collections:

- 1) **Quick Starts for Young Choirs**, Miller/McKenna (for kids!)
- 2) **The Complete Choral Warm-Up Book**, Robinson/Althouse
- 3) **The Choral Warm-up Collection**, Albrecht
- 4) **Vocalize!** Andy Beck (for kids and middle school)
- 5) **Choir Builders**, Rollo Dillworth (with piano)
- 6) **Building Beautiful Voices**, Weston Noble (with piano)
- 7) **Warm-Ups for Changing Voice**, Andersen (with recorded accomp)

Singing in Harmony

- 1) **The Joy of Part-Singing**, Mark Patterson
- 2) **The Vocalize Canon Collection**, Andy Beck
- 3) **Choose Your Partner**, Jacobson/Billingsley

Choosing the Right Music For Children's Voices

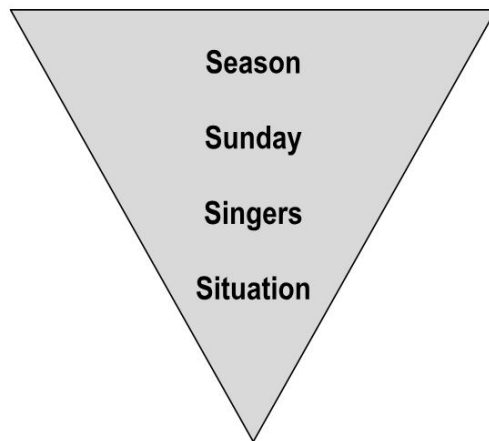
How do I pick music for kids to sing in church?



*Do we turn **FIRST** to the church's heritage of hymns, psalms, & liturgy?*
Do the children function liturgically in the service?

- Is the vocal range appropriate?
- Is it repetitive for easy learning?
- Is the melody lyrical and memorable?
- Is the accompaniment supportive?
- Is it beautiful and well-composed? Do you like it? Will the kids like it?
- Is quality music/text that will last?
- Does it proclaim Christ and teach the faith?

"I have no one to sing and chant about but Christ."²⁶



Tried & True resources for children's voices

Publishers

- 1) Choristers Guild
- 2) Growing in Grace ([Celebrating Grace](#))
- 3) NPH

Collections

- 1) [CPH: One and All Rejoice](#) Children's hymnal
- 2) [Let All the Children Sing](#) (Vol. 1, 2, 3)
- 3) [Sing and Celebrate](#) (Vol. 1-10) With lesson plans
- 4) [Can't Wait to Sing](#) (Vol. 1,2)
- 5) [The Concordia Children's Choir Book](#) (Vol. 1, 2) - Grades 5-8
- 6) [Call Forth Praise](#) (NPH)

Composers

Dale Witte, Linda Moeller, Mary Dorn Lippert, Karen Maio, Jacob Weber, Mark Patterson, Mark Burrows, Becki Slagle Mayo, Natalie Sleeth, Michael Burkhardt, Greg Gilpin, Terry D. Taylor, Helen Kemp, Andy Beck, Ruth Elaine Schram, Jay Althouse, Russell Robinson

Bibliography & Further Reading

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Leck, Henry, Creating Artistry Through Choral Excellence, Hal Leonard 2009

Bartle, J. A. Sound Advice, Oxford University Press 2003

LUTHERAN INSTITUTE FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (LIME)

The Lutheran Institute for Music Education exists to partner with the teachers and leaders of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod to promote excellence in the music education of all students. We provide training and professional development, materials, and curricular resources to assist these groups in carrying out the important work of training up the next generation of musicians and worshippers, to the glory of God.



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LUTHERAN INSTITUTE FOR MUSIC EDUCATION (LIME)

Vision Statement

God has made every child innately musical. Music is a core curricular subject and an integral part of a complete education, starting with our youngest learners. Our vision is to realize Psalm 33:3, “Sing to him a new song; play skillfully, and shout for joy” as we help facilitate excellence in music education for all students in the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

Mission Statement

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Questions? Get in touch with us at [welsmusiced@gmail.com]



LIME Resources

LIME - [Youtube playlists](#)

- Curated playlists
- New “LIME Lessons”

LIME - [Facebook](#)

- New posts weekly
- Connect with other music teachers

LIME - [Website](#)

- Upcoming conference presentations
- Curriculum consulting

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Thanks!

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