

UNLOCKING THIS WEALTH OF MUSIC

Music we can see and hear, Peter Magadini. Illus. Carole Precious. Frederick Harris Music Co. Ltd., 1982. 70 pp. \$7.95 paper. ISBN 0-88797-162-8; *Baby beluga book*, Raffi. McClelland and Stewart, 1983. 48 pp. \$9.95 paper. \$14.95 cloth. ISBN 0-7710-7160-0; 0-07710-7161-9.

Current children's music books are of two types: the "how-to" guide toward music appreciation in listening and participation¹ and the traditional song book comprising old and new materials with suggestions for activities and imaginative play. Two seasoned musicians have put together a fine example of each in Peter Magadini's *Music we can see and hear* and Raffi's *Baby beluga book*.

Peter Magadini received his musical training from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and the University of Toronto, where he took a Master's degree in percussion and performance in 1971. *Music we can see and hear* is the product of an active career in teaching and research with children from kindergarten to grade four. Magadini's aim is to present a complete course in music to the uninitiated — adult as well as child — designed to "unlock this wealth of music inside themselves."²

Music we can see and hear begins with seven chapters on rhythm followed by five on pitch and notation; the third section discusses the piano and improvisation. The chapters on rhythm are especially well prepared: we remember that Peter Magadini is primarily a percussionist. Concepts of rhythm are dealt with from a visual as well as an auditory approach — hence the significance of the book's title. Rhythmic patterns in a picket fence, windowpanes, eggs in a carton, simply and capably drawn by Carole Precious, allow the child to proceed from familiar everyday experience.

Where will all this take us? One thinks, perhaps, of the repetitions of incessant rhythmic motifs (representing those of Nature?) in the opening movement of Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony.

Tempo, dynamics, steady and unsteady rhythms are treated comprehensively in a series of handclapping exercises and the creation of simply-made rhythm instruments. Finally, the appreciation of rhythm is applied to dance movement in a number of suggestions for free interpretation. Throughout this section of the book, I was impressed both with Peter Magadini's use of the visual world to explain the mysteries of rhythm and his ability to clarify rhythmic concepts through their opposites: sound-silence; regular-irregular; rhythm-non-rhythm. I was reminded of being taught the equal importance of rests and notes in the opening of Chopin's B-flat minor Scherzo!

The section on pitch and composition is somewhat less imaginatively conceived. High, medium, and low pitch are discussed visually as a circle — but, surely three large pages of text and illustration are hardly necessary to show the simple

differences. Visual composition through a series of symbols is discovered in Chapter 11, and I think this would be exciting if handled properly by the group leader.

The chapters on the piano and improvisation on the piano are attractively presented although here, as elsewhere in the book, I am puzzled as to whom the text addresses: adult or child. The definition of the *sostenuto* pedal, for instance — printed in regular type — sounds bookish and adult; yet, there are passages elsewhere in italics which Magadini has specifically designed for the adult leader observing the reaction of his pupils. The adult who has not had piano lessons should be interested in learning about and conveying his knowledge of the construction of grand and upright, pedals, and hammers. Quite naturally, it is the percussive quality of the piano that is stressed in the section on improvisation: parents not teaching the course should be warned that when their child sits down at the piano and plays forcibly on the lower register, he is not banging but creating a marvellous “thunderstorm.”

The book concludes with additional activities and a helpful discography listing the old favourites (*Nutcracker*, *Peter and the Wolf*) as well as some interesting mood and novelty pieces, classical and contemporary.

Music we can see and hear presents a full course in the preliminaries of rhythm, pitch, dynamics and *timbre*; yet, at the end, the child will be able neither to read or play written music. These seem to me to be serious limitations: could these activities not be combined with at least an elementary approach to written music and performance? Twelve to fifteen weeks — the suggested length of the course — seem so long to learn so little. Ultimately, it must depend on the personality of the leader and his ability to hold the interest of his pupils. Judging from the photographs of Peter Magadini in enthusiastic classroom action, there seem to be no problems here. But, what about the rest of us?

Raffi's *Baby beluga* book is an attractive must for those who enjoyed his fourth certified platinum record, *Baby beluga*. The songs, both traditional and original in the usual Raffi style, can generally be summed up as an overwhelming celebration of life and love. Life, especially in the title song, is represented as caring for — and being thankful for — everything that lives, grows, and, in the case of Beluga, whose survival is threatened. Love is portrayed as a child — or the baby whale — in a protective family unit.

The songs about things that grow (“Oats, Peas, Beans, and Barley” or “Day-o”) are traditional but appropriate. Doing things together (“Biscuits in the Oven,” “Morningtown Ride,” “This Old Man”) proceed from a warm familial sense of belonging. There is, however, a pronounced atmosphere of thanksgiving and devotion explicit in “Thanks a Lot,” “Kumbaya,” and “All I Really Need,” which transcends the frivolity of Joshua Giraffe toward a mood of quasi-religiosity. To attain this without over-sentimentalizing is a feat in itself and here, as usual, Raffi is master.

The illustrations by a number of artists (but chiefly Franklin Hammond)

present a variety of styles which blend amazingly well. I was especially impressed with the three-dimensional effect Hammond achieves on the cover and elsewhere as well as stylized wall-paper designs on pages 46-48.

The *Baby beluga book*, written and illustrated by Canadians, was printed and bound in Canada — and yet, with the exception of the reference to the Vancouver Aquarium on the title page and the French words for “To Everyone in All the World,” there is no Canadian material whatsoever. It is not that we need beavers and maple leaves jumping out of every illustration, yet even a distinctively Canadian parody of a traditional song or a recognizably Canadian setting in the artwork would be refreshing and supportive to our sense of national identity and would, incidentally, have carried the theme of life, living, and belonging to a satisfying and appropriate conclusion.

If used creatively, both these books should bring children happily together in active participation and enjoyment of life and along the way a real wealth of music will surely be unlocked.

NOTES

¹See, for example, Louise Glatt. *What to do until the music teacher comes*. Toronto: Berandol Music Limited, 1978. My review appeared in *CCL*, No. 17 (1980), pp. 56-58.

²Magadini, p. ix.

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BONNIE MCSMITHERS EN FRANÇAIS

Anne-Marie Maginol, tu me rends folle, Sue Ann Alderson, Illustré par Fiona Garrick. Traduit par Claire Sabourin. Tree Frog Press, 1981. 1974 pour l'original *Bonnie McSmithers, you're driving me dithers*). 48 pp. 4,95\$ broché. ISBN 0-88967-043-9; *Hurry up Bonnie!*, Sue Anne Alderson, Illustré par Fiona Garrick. Tree Frog Press, 1977. 48 pp. 3,25\$ broché, 5,95\$ relié. ISBN 0-88967-023-4; 0-88967-024-2; *Bonnie McSmithers is at it again*, Sue Ann Alderson. Illustré par Fiona Garrick. Tree Frog Press, 1979, 48 pp. 3,95\$ broché, 5,95\$ relié. ISBN 0-88967-028-5; 0-88967-029-3.

Vous souvenez-vous? Ces illustrations naïves, à la plume, le papier à fleurs, les robes à fleurs, le gazon à fleurs . . . et l'éternel oiseau curieux installé comme une ponctuation à la fenêtre?

La publication d'une édition française de *Bonnie McSmithers you're driving*