

“Children don’t sing anything except ‘pop’, anymore and they certainly don’t sing hymns.”

So many people who never actually talk to children in church hold these opinions – but it isn’t actually true!

Children in school work with tuned and un-tuned percussion and actually compose music and record it electronically or write it down using their own symbols, in order to play it back. The music they listen to is not just a few inappropriate “classical” composers but a wide range of genres from different cultures. And yes they do sing – with great gusto. The songs may be different but they do sing!

Instrumental teaching is available (ignore the press) but it is expensive. In the past it was funded by the Local Authority and not many local authority schools had it. Now schools have to find their own funding from constantly reducing budgets. There are many more specialist music teachers and that includes peripatetic instrumental teaching. So although not every child learns an instrument, (they never have in spite of rumours) there are opportunities for those who want it.

So take heart children do sing. In churches we need to find out what they know for it is certainly not “*Jesus bids us shine*” nor “*Praise my Soul the King of Heaven*”, or even those rather sentimental *Child Songs* by Carey Bonner.

How do we go about including children (those between 4 and 11/12 – primary school children) in our worshipping communities.

A good starting place is to find out what children already sing in school assemblies. They do have assemblies and they do sing but not all may be appropriate in a church setting. You may be pleasantly surprised!

Ask them and make a list. Then get the music and choose what is appropriate for church needs. There are often CD/tapes available. Include these in services and children’s activities.

When choosing new songs make sure that the words are appropriate. Words should be simple with no complex metaphors. Do be wary of adult theological terms. Don’t put words into the children’s mouths that are not true.

There is a real need to recognise that when there are very small numbers of children they may not want to sing because with a few voices they sound loud and can feel embarrassed. If you use a CD/tape of pre-recorded music then they can join in. These are available for most song collections.

The tunes should not be complex musically or too atonal.

Find out if any child plays an instrument. Be aware that they will probably be at the beginning of the learning curve—so no solos! But it is easy for a musician to put in chords using recorders, violins, flutes etc and the children can become a real part of the church music.

Purchase some tuned and untuned percussion instruments and use them. Don’t let the children just bang but get a rhythm going. Use the tuned percussion, like the instruments to create chordal sequences rather than play a difficult tune badly. Children are quick to master BellePlates or similar and they don’t necessarily need to read the musical notation. Start off with just the letter names of the notes on a chart – you may be surprised how keen some become on actually reading the music .

Use children to accompany singing, but not for a solo performance that is often inappropriate in worship or play the music whilst the offering is being collected.

It is possible to write words to existing tunes that children may know from the media or nursery rhymes and get the children to write their own words too. They can be brilliant at this. Even if it isn’t poetry. It will be the worship from their own hearts and not something an adult has put into their mouths.

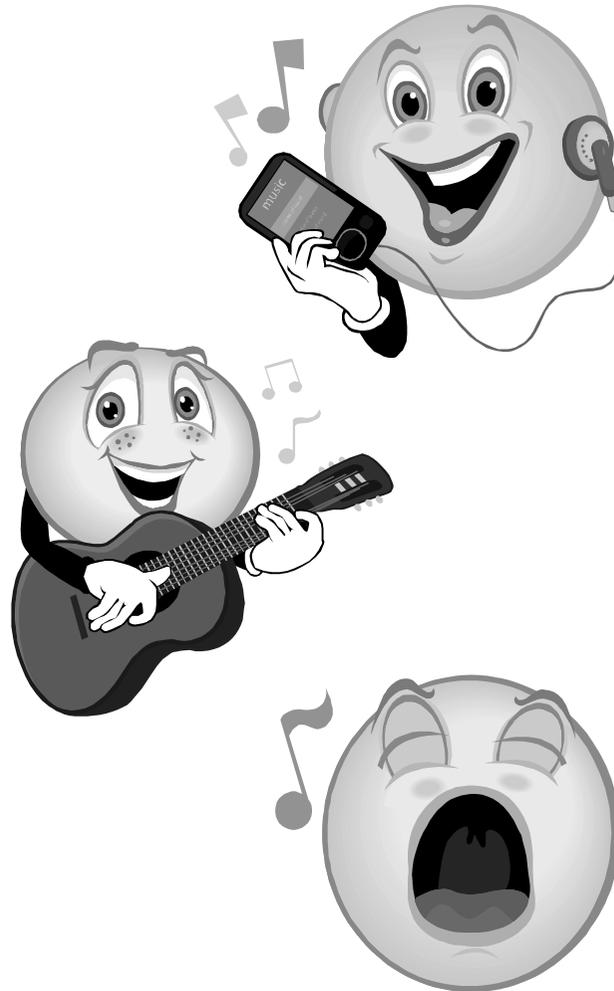
Encourage children to work alongside a musical and trusted person (who has had full Criminal Record Bureau clearance to work with children to create a special piece of music for church. This enables the child to be mentored into the use of their music in worship.

The United Reformed Church Musicians' Guild

Some churches have a Children's Choir and some of these are extremely successful . There is an excellent article on <http://hubpages.com/hub/how-to-start-a-choir> which is well worth reading. A "Google" search brings up several other relevant sites too.

There are huge amounts of music suitable for using with children in church. Again an internet search brings up a wide selection (in order to narrow the choice somewhat include UK in the criteria!)

Do encourage children to be part of a mixed age music group. Everyone can learn from each other and often it is the children doing the teaching! It also a n excellent way of introducing different age groups to each other and making sure that the congregation really is a family of all God's people.



Children, Music and the Church

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