

# Take note!

**THERE'S A growing body of research evidence pointing to the benefits of introducing children to music as early as possible. It enhances not just their musical ability, but is also linked to improved all-round achievement.**

**Here, MICHAEL ALEXANDER talks to the founder of a St Andrews-based organisation which, after much local success, is now rolling-out pioneering music classes for babies and toddlers on a national scale.**

WHEN FRENCH Ear Nose and Throat specialist Alfred A. Tomatis coined the phrase "Mozart effect" for the alleged increase in brain development that occurs in children under the age of three when they listen to the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, it stimulated a whole industry.

The idea for the Mozart effect originated in 1993 at the University of California with physicist Gordon Shaw and Frances Rauscher, a former concert cellist and an expert on cognitive development.

They studied the effects on a few dozen college students of listening to the first 10 minutes of the Mozart Sonata for Two Pianos in D Major. They found a "temporary enhancement of spatial-temporal reasoning".

Then in 1997, Rauscher and Shaw announced that they had scientific proof that piano and singing instruction are superior to computer instruction in enhancing children's abstract reasoning skills.

The experiment included three groups of pre-schoolers. One group received private piano/keyboard lessons and singing lessons; a second group received private computer lessons, and a third group received no training. Those children who received piano/keyboard training performed 34% higher on tests measuring spatial-temporal ability than the others. The findings indicated that music uniquely enhances

higher brain functions required for mathematics, chess, science and engineering.

Research is continuing, with CDs even available now especially designed for playing classical music to babies in the womb.

But one person who has no doubts about the positive impact music has on the development of unborn babies

classes in their own local area.

Cathy, who was brought up in a musical family, first came to St Andrews 20 years ago to study music at the university, but had to finish her degree in Glasgow when St Andrews University decided to close its music department.

In Scotland, she was always conscious that music tended to be an elitist activity or a spectator sport. "If you don't go to church or go to football matches, most people never sing!" she said.

But after graduation, when she took a year out and spent six months teaching music at an international school in the Peoples' Republic of Congo, she was enthused to discover the African villages' strong sense of community and central to this was the emphasis they placed on music and singing.

Returning to Scotland after inter-raiding around Europe with only a guitar for company, she went into primary teaching for a few years teaching at schools in Glasgow and the east end of London.

When her first son Archie (now five-and-a-half) was born, she decided not to go back to work and, quickly recognising that there was a social need for something she could do with her young child, and to meet other new mothers. She subsequently took Archie to music classes at her local toddlers club.

But from her own knowledge of



Above (from left): Roddy Yarr, George (who is nearly four) and Cathy.

and young children, is former primary school teacher Cathy McCallum, of St Andrews.

She is about to take the leap from running a small business that specialises in music classes for infants to launching a potentially national or international organisation that will licence mums (and dads and any other suitable candidates) to operate



music and teaching, Cathy thought she could do better and, in May 2002, decided to set up her own classes in Milngavie based on quality and structured musical teachings.

In March 2005, she and her by now two-child family moved back through to St Andrews when her husband Roddy Yarr, who also studied at St Andrews, got a job as the university's environmental and sustainability manager.

Helped by Roddy, her Sound Start company has since been offering music-based classes for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers in St Andrews and Cupar.

"What makes us different to standard toddlers classes is our carefully structured musical games involving musical skills, patterns and pitch. I've drawn from techniques such as Kodaly musical education in Hungary which has proven that through simple singing techniques and rhythms, overall achievement in the children also improves. Research suggests that these techniques do help children learn to read and develop. There's an educational benefit behind it, although you might not know it at the time!"

Cathy said her classes also have a

huge focus on fun, and parents also benefit. "They feel as if they are spending one-to-one quality time with their children. We have separate social nights for the parents, but during the classes it is very much a focus on the musical activity—something which I feel is lacking at regular toddler classes where parents often end up chatting amongst themselves, taking attention away from the child."

But a major development now taking place is Cathy's plans to launch teacher-training courses, to train and licence parents and other suitable people to operate in their own local area. As of this week, the business will be renamed Musical Steps with the aim to truly bring music to the masses. While classes, she says, are slightly more expensive than standard toddlers classes (babies are currently charged £3.50 a time and toddlers £4), she hopes the quality, franchise approach, with a focus on teaching rather than business, will lead to the growth of a community of members.

Cathy feels that while parents want to do right by their children, there's a lot of ignorance and lack of confidence amongst parents when it comes to music. With demand out

there, she hopes the classes and materials will give these proven methods the structure to expand.

"The aim is to help the development of children, but I would like to see everyone singing—adults, too! The rush of endorphins people get from singing is amazing. There's a huge push about exercise nowadays, but music is really good for the health too!"

"Four or five generations ago, people would sit on granny's knee and sing nursery rhymes. Today, people might sing along with The Tweenies on TV, but they aren't really singing together and getting the benefits. Nursery rhymes are really important for young children as the rhyme helps them put words together."

"I would also like to help some other mums do what I've done. It can be stressful going back to work when you've had a child. I would like to give people the option of running their own classes to generate a second income, in a flexible manner, and still be able to spend quality time with their child."

The Musical Steps website [www.musicalsteps.co.uk](http://www.musicalsteps.co.uk) goes live on January 8. Further information can be found on the website.