

 parents

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I'm Trying To Show My Kids Music Is Something We Create, Not Just Consume

BY JOSEPH WILSON

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This Labour Day, to cap off a busy summer, I invited all my musician friends over for an old-fashioned East Coast kitchen party.

We were in the living room, to be exact, and sometimes on the porch, or in the backyard, but the goal was the same: to pass around instruments, sing songs together and annoy the neighbours with out-of-tune sing-alongs.

My friends arrived sometime after noon with a handsome selection of instruments: guitar, banjo, mandolin, ukulele plus a wide assortment of percussion instruments. With a piano, bass and paired down drum kit already set up in my living room there was barely enough room for the people.

Joseph Wilson has had some struggles getting his kids to appreciate learning music. (<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/we-want-our-kids-to-play-music-like-we-do-but-nothing-is-working>)

Ten musicians in total, plus at least as many kids.

Most of the people didn't know each other. These were friends from all over the place: high school, university, work or from the neighbourhood. The only thing they had in common was the shared language of music, a collective knowledge of chords and melodies interwoven with their own personal histories.

I asked everyone to bring chord charts for songs they wanted to sing. We ended up writing the chords on my daughter's chalkboard so everyone could see them. Someone counted in and we played our first song, *Fisherman's Blues* by the Waterboys, a simple tune of four chords. Those who knew the words sang along; those who didn't sang as well, often making up harmonies on the spot.

A Little Something For Everyone

The selection was eclectic including well-known songs by Bob Dylan and Neil Young, with left-field songs tossed in from Jimmy Buffet and REM. A song by Mitski was passed around somewhere in the twilight hours. A friend, recently returned from Newfoundland, sang the traditional sea shanty *Heave Away*.

Being immersed in this mish-mash of songs is a valuable experience for kids. It reminds them that music is not just something that magically appears from an enchanted place called Spotify, but something that is made, with fingers and instruments and voices.

At any point during the party the kids could join in by picking something from the communal laundry basket: a ukulele, a shaker, a tambourine, a hand-drum — even if they didn't really know how to play it.

"It reminds them that music is not just something that magically appears from an enchanted place called Spotify."

As such, there was a constant rotation of kids joining the band.

Giulia played a *djembe* larger than she was; Farrah played the piano sitting on her dad's lap; Ava played castanets for all the ballads; and Liam kept time, hitting the tambourine on the two and the four for the entire afternoon.

A friend's daughter, currently enrolled in the music theatre program at Etobicoke School of the Arts, sang a few favourites.

Kids Can Play

The kids also heard us make mistakes. Lots of them.

They saw us take risks with instruments we didn't really know how to play, or with songs we didn't really know, or with tricky chords we were still trying to figure out. They saw us struggle, but they saw us do so with a smile on our faces and with encouraging nods from the others.

Some of the kids hung out for the whole afternoon with us making music. Some ran for the backyard with fingers in their ears to play Jenga.

It's not just music this dad is sharing with his kids, it's opera too. And when it comes to opera, his kids love it.

(<https://www.cbc.ca/parents/learning/view/we-dont-force-our-kids-to-love-opera-they-just-do>)

But they were all part of a communal experience that centred around music.

At one point I looked out the bay window and saw a couple of neighbours sitting on our stoop, listening to the tunes. These are the little details that make the experience so rich.

Music, as a thing created and not consumed, builds community one song at a time. The strangers who met each other at my house on Labour Day now know each other a little better, connected by the power of song.

And the kids know what a decent kitchen party looks like and how to make mistakes with grace under the cover of a good tune.

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