

## Why Mixed Ages

Parents attending Music Together for the first time often wonder why children of different ages are in the same class. Wouldn't it make more sense, they wonder, to divide children up by age and teach them bits of information or skills in the right sequence, as they are ready? And shouldn't they be with their own age group socially? Although this approach is typical for older children and adults, developmentally appropriate practice recognizes that young children don't learn in bits. They learn by experiencing whole songs and movement activities just as they learn language by being immersed in the whole sentences and paragraphs of grownups and older siblings. Absorbing the sounds and energies around them, they focus on what really grabs their interest: this bit of melody, that drumbeat, the texture of the rug, Mommy's hair, as well as more complex perceptions of differences in tone or rhythm.

When music is provided that is both simple and sophisticated with many points of access, children find their own way to learn. This child-directed music learning, which is based on pleasurable play experiences, is a respected goal among early childhood educators. Age differences can be an important source of learning. Researcher and author Lilian G. Katz (1995) notes: "The differences within a group of children can be a source of rich intellectual and social benefits. ... Younger children are capable of participating and contributing to far more complex activities than they could initiate if they were by themselves." Meanwhile, researchers of older-child development recommend mixed-age grouping because it fosters natural, family-style learning. Younger children enjoy watching and imitating the older ones; older children learn by leading the younger ones; and the family can go to class together. "Mixed-age grouping can provide older children with the opportunity to be helpful, patient, and tolerant of younger peers' competencies, and thus give them some of the desirable early experiences of being nurturant that underlie parenting and helping others who are different from oneself." (Katz, 1990) In Music Together, each child participates in his or her own way in singing, moving, listening, watching, or exploring musical instruments. We hope your family will join us.

— Lynne Ransom, D.M.A. CMYC Education Director