

Songlines and Star-Singers: Making the Most of the World's Voices for School Children

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"We sing because we must." So said Keri Kaa of the tribe Ngati-Porou and of the clan Ngati-Porou of the eastern district of the north island of New Zealand, and that phrase has resounded in me ever since. Keri Kaa is a Maori musician and teacher, a singer of songs, lullabies, and laments, and a composer of *moteatea* (traditional song-poems of the Maori on subjects of ancestors, customary practices, and continuing rituals). Keri Kaa's proclamation at a gathering of teachers several years ago, that no Maori gathering, be it a wedding or a welcome ceremony, a festival or a funeral, is complete without singing and dancing, is a thing to marvel in a passive, post-modern world. When professional singers and song-teachers gather, it is no wonder that we will sing. But when a whole society values song as vessel of culture and a human need to be fulfilled, that is a thing of great beauty and awe.

Child-song and Song-singers

Children also sing because they must. They have their rhymes and "rhythmic" behaviours, their jump-rope chants and communal jams, their hand-clapping routines and singing games. Where adolescents and adults may prefer mediated music while they work (with the music of their favourite CDs and radio stations piped to them through headphones, or from a central sound system), children are still compelled to make their own music to fit their movements and their imaginations. Their verbal lore is frequently embedded in rhythm and pitch, so that they may convert their rhymes to songs and their speech to rhythms and recitative-like melodies. They are inspired (in unequal ways) by the popular music of the media, the seasonal, patriotic, and "school songs," and the music of their home and family surroundings. They use what music they know and make it meaningful and fitting for their own functions. Their "musical utterances," short musical phrases that seem to flow effortlessly from ideas somewhere deep within the mind's ear, are vocalized as they play, and many seem hardly able to function without their musical declamations coming forward (Campbell, 1998).

What is the nature of the songs that children sing? A half century ago, Constantin Brailoiu (1954) found quarter- and eighth-note durations in children's songs from Europe and parts of Africa and Asia. John Blacking (1967) observed the children of the South African Venda as singing songs that were at times rhythmically complex and with pitch content that was far beyond the adult perception of their music as "merely tritonic". He noted that the songs of Venda children were typically incidental to some social event, including chores in the home or field, or songs associated with games. In opposition to standard pedagogical approaches to the teaching of songs to children, Blacking emphasized that there was no gradual progression by children of song-learning from simple to complex, but that they sang what they deemed interesting or of import to their circumstances; seven-tone songs might very well precede the performance by Venda children of four-tone songs. Beyond Blacking's Venda children, or Brailoiu's children of (mostly) eastern Europe, Bruno Nettl examined a wide array of collections of children's songs and published analyses of them. His conclusion was that there might be certain universal properties in children's music—including short forms, restricted scales, and repetitive rhythms (Nettl, 1990). As for the topics of their songs, children include a wide gamut of topics: modes of transportation (bicycles, cars, trains, and planes), pets and other animals, food, games and sports, family members, friends, and "love-interests" (imagined boyfriends and girlfriends, complete with predictions of marriage). There is a recent surge of interest by educators, ethnomusicologists, and folklorists to puzzle out the content and meaning of the songs children sing, and their findings will add to an understanding of the nature of their music.

A description of children's songs is associated with local contexts, however, such that both musical and textual components depend upon the music of children's environments—the songs they have heard sung to them in the nursery, the songs of their mothers, fathers, and siblings, their extended families, their neighbours, and the members of the religious and cultural communities to which they belong. The content of their songs, the musical components of their original expressions (these "musical utterances"), the singing styles and vocal timbres they develop, are influenced by the music that surrounds them—hardly a surprise! Nor is it surprising to realize that in this age of mediated images, the aural images of the mediated music that emanates from TV, films, CDs, and the internet may be as powerful an influence as the music that comes "live" to them from the people they know. (While Peter and Iona Opie [1985] predicted that singing games were in their "final flowering" prior to their abandonment by children to TV and other technological attractions, the songs of urban and suburban children seem to be alive and well, continuing and regenerating themselves in newly expressive ways). Children still sing musical utterances comprising pentachords and pentatons, but their music also reflects the syncopated rhythms, polyrhythmic complexes, modal melodies, varied tunings, and the glottals, rasps, and tremolos that match the music they have heard. They will come to know their mother-tongue music through infancy and earliest childhood, and by the time they arrive to school at age 4, 5, and 6, children will have naturally developed a musical identity based upon the sonic components of their home and community.

Teachers receive children fresh from their homes, singing as their parents would have sung to them, perhaps, but with an even greater likelihood that they are singing in the styles they would have heard through TV and assorted other media. The songs and styles of *Barney & Friends*, *Sesame Street*, *Mr. Rogers*, cartoon channels and animated films collect into a repertoire which children living in many places in the world acquire as young as toddler age. This music in effect comprises much of the contemporary folk heritage of children, these orally transmitted melodies and rhythms which children learn "by heart." The "Disney-fication" of children's musical lives is an active process by which children listen repeatedly to the contagious melodies on videotape and in their bedside CD player which feature pop voices on film tracks. They know and may well emulate the sound of Simba, Mulan, Pocahontas, Tarzan, and The Prince of Egypt (Campbell and Lew, 2000). Whether the songs of these films and shows may be meant for entertaining young viewers, enhancing the drama, teaching a task, or communicating social information, they are integral to the films and may comprise as much as 90% of the duration of children's TV shows. They provide children with vocal models; *Barney & Friends* feature children's voices performing vocal pieces suited for children in preschool or elementary age, while others (such as *Sesame Street*) feature the adult male voice more than any other model. Of interest is the fact that *Barney & Friends*, more than any other show, airs songs with vocal pitch ranges of less than an octave (which is commensurate with research on preschooler's vocal ranges), with a typical pitch range of c^1 to b^1 or c^2 , maximizing the likelihood of sing-along behaviour by children (McGuire, 2001). "Disnified" and "Barnified," children of school age have strong concepts of the music they prefer, and much of it is set for them by the media moguls. Little of the music they have acquired falls into categories we might refer to as traditional North American heritage songs: traditional ballads and folk songs of Anglo-Americans, Celtic Canadians, African Americans, and French Canadians, for example. Further, the vocal repertoire of the world's musics is under-represented by the media, if not neglected altogether. It may be worse considering the penchant of producers for arranging music to coalesce with what they believe is a more palatable children's musical style.

Songlines and Star-Singers

While we know something of the musical enculturation of children in their early years, we raise quite regularly within educational circles this question: Who can children musically become through formal instruction? If we accept that children are born with the capacity for musical reception and expression, and with the musical potential for singing, moving, and

creating that is untapped and waiting to be realized, that they are all ears and open in their youngest years to music that is expressive and intriguing to them, then the cause is clear. As teachers, we set our sights and standards into high (but realistic) gear, striving to offer children the means for knowing music with a capital "M", *Music*, in its multiple manifestations (or as many as we can muster!) (Campbell, in press). We aspire to make the most of children's musicianship, designing instruction to grow their knowledge and skills. We aim to develop their most intimate means of musical expression: their singing voice. The fulfillment of these goals are flavoured by the expansive repertoire of the world's music from which songs may be selected for children's listening and participatory pleasure. Conveniently, the schools in which children are enrolled have woven into their missions some expression of themselves as agents of cultural democracy (for this more than mere fashion but a political mandate to do so). Such a mission translates as the design of curricular matter across subjects in ways that reflect democratic principles—including a fair representation of the culturally diverse times in which we live. Music, as well as language arts, maths, social studies, and the sciences is equipped to fully embrace these ideals of democracy and cultural diversity through its conceptual framework and relevant instructional strategies. Beyond the songs of homes and play-yards, beyond Barney and other made-for-children mediated music, all the rest of the music is there for young people to know through exposure, experience, and education. Thus, school is an apt place for raising up children musically, and for doing so in ways that blow out the musical myopia, the narrowly channelled repertoire, the single-track sense of what the ear can receive and the voice can produce, and the minimalist expectations for who the children can musically become. A place called school is ripe for bringing on the songlines and the star-singers.

Vocal instruction in school music programs is well-situated for addressing a broad array of the world's musical expressions. All the world sings, and the gift of speech and song is one of the characteristics that separates the realm of humans from the domain of animals. (While some have argued that birds, whales, chimpanzees, and Thai elephants sing, I remain unconvinced that despite the remarkable sound quality of these animals, they do not make the grade as "singers.") The songs and singing styles of real-world singers from every place on the planet are there, but have all too seldom made their way into the formal lessons which teachers design and deliver for school children. Some of these real-world singers may be known entities, and may be recognized by children even in the primary grades. Other singers and their styles require knowledgeable teachers who will select them out, perceive the value of featuring them in their curricular programs, and accept that a blend of instructional activities is vital for bringing young people in touch with the human phenomenon of singing in its rich variation. A palette of practical strategies awaits teachers for use in the infusion of the vocal music into an educational plan for children, with particular attention to focussed and guided listening experiences, vocal experimentation, units of directed study, all of which leads to participatory and performance experiences. For those charged with teaching schoolchildren as young as five years or well along into their middle childhood and on the brink of their earliest adolescence (the years spanning grades kindergarten through sixth grade in North American elementary schools), there are key approaches to opening the ears and minds of children to the rich variety of human voices to know. Before the shut-down phase of adolescence and its narrowing of preferences and beliefs by young listeners, and the attention given by teachers on specific musical genres for specialized secondary school ensembles, the period of children's development through childhood is the prime time for providing instructional experience with a diversity of songs, singers, and singing styles.

"Songlines" and "star-singers" to which the title refers are terms that require operational definitions. Bruce Chatwin's (1988) concept, so eloquently defined in his study of the song tradition of the Aboriginal Australians in *Songlines*, is relevant although not precisely matched to our use here. Chatwin had described song in aboriginal culture as recounting the ancestors and their deeds, reflecting the landscape, and drawing listeners to the ongoing process of creation known as Dreamtime; this last is part of the aboriginal creation myth which tells of the mythic beings coming into the world through the song. The important songs leave "tracks" or "songlines," which are seen as physical markers in the

landscape as well as heard as musical markers in the song. Extending the purity and power of this meaning, but with all due reverence to it as it is originally intended, I suggest that songs are vessels which carry the meanings and values of the singer and his or her collective culture to the listeners. With experiences in song as thoughtful listeners and participant-performers, we are brought into ways of thought, feeling, and behaviour that may differ from our own, or which may verify, or embellish, challenge, or add new perspectives on the phenomenon of the human voice. Songs frequently attain for singers and listeners alike a level of intimacy and ultimate expression not reached in any other way, and which may form the core of who people are. These are the songlines which connect people to people, performers to young listeners, participants, and aspiring performers. It is through this songline connection that music then becomes the true glue between people and cultures, and the potential of singing styles and vocal timbres for transporting children through music education practices into the worlds of cultural others can be achieved. For curricular programs based in principles of cultural diversity, this music serves as windows to cultures.

By "star-singers," I mean the notable singers who have emerged from their own local contexts and traditions into international recognition within the realm of "world" or "world pop" music. With singing as their livelihood, they are indeed star-phenomena in their respective cultures, and are revered at home as well as internationally. Star-singers are people like Um Kultumm, Sheila Chandra, Victor Jara, Baaba Maal, and Opetai'a Fo'ai. Their sound has been blended and fused, and has become globalized and made accessible to listeners far afield from their first cultures through commercial means. They are musical entities worthy of note and curricular inclusion. Their songs and singing styles function as songlines for our young people, linking them musically with an array of singing cultures. Star-singers sing the folk music of a technological age, and their music can be known orally and without the necessity of notation. The music of star-singers is resonant with their society, and our children deserve to know them. Our "little stars," each and every child we teach, grow brighter through the experiences with the songs of experienced singers—whomever and wherever they may be.

Probing the potential of music-educational pursuits for children, we might raise these questions: What then do we do with the musical children from their entry to school on through their six or seven years in primary and intermediate grades, to facilitate their developing musicianship (as well as their cultural understanding)? How do we draw them into an effective vocal training which offers them selected sound-bytes of the musical world for them to know? How do we help them to make the connection between who they musically are, who they musically can become, and what musical choices are there for them to understand and even emulate? How do we lead them to the threshold of ever more rigorous training that they may be privileged to know in secondary school vocal/choral programs? I suggest that we who teach children must develop children's musicianship through a "basal" repertoire of songs and singing skills that can offer them the means for exploration and experimentation, as well as to provide them with an array of "what's out there" in the world to know through exploration, experimentation, and who knows—even the more seriously technical study of music. As singers, we know the repertoire of our own training best, and we toiled to learn the techniques for understanding and performing it. Yet over time and every day, we receive opportunities to expand from the familiar repertoire to the unusual, the distant, the new-to-us music that we might share with children. We grow into a grasp of the musical babble of the world's people, and we turn to draw the children toward these expressions that stretch from the songs of the Afghani people to the musical traditions of Zimbabwe. A sampling of some of this beautiful babble can be had in the classroom even as it is a presence in our cross-cultural and internationalized communities, and even as it is a set of choices in the world music bins of our favourite record stores.

Teaching the Singing Cultures

As the case is clear for the presence of song and song study in the lives of children, it seems fitting to consider specific illustrations of voices, genres, repertoire and to explore

some of the instructional avenues for filling our courses and programs. Suggestions ranging from focussed, goal-directed listening experiences to vocal experimentation and exploration are ahead for consideration. In an attempt to progress more pointedly to an understanding of "songline" as a concept of songs as reflections of particular contexts of place and time, it is fitting and necessary to go beyond the identification of a song title and artist all the way to a sense of a song's cultural origin and reasons why it is valued by the people whose music it is. We will close in on two musical cultures, their star-singers and favoured forms, in order to contemplate diversity within a named musical culture as well as to give consideration of the need to launch into larger units for studying musical cultures. Teachers' hats at the ready, we seek the ways and means of teaching singing cultures to children.

A script for teaching children of singing cultures might begin like this: "The voice is an amazing instrument. Like snowflakes, no two voices are identical. Like a fingerprint, each person's voice is unique. Its capabilities depend both upon physical make-up and cultural expectations." This is not imaginary, either; these phrases are found in a music textbook (Campbell, in press). When children hear singing voices, they may do what all of us do: They identify them and categorize them by gender (male or female), by age (child or adult), by texture (solo or group). They judge the timbral quality and the singing style, and they state their preferences and make their value judgments. They know what is "beautiful" to them in the sound of a voice (or voices), and they may be surprised, confused, attracted, disgusted, or intrigued to experience what others call "beautiful." Children deserve occasions to sample vocal qualities, concepts, and techniques as they are featured in the world's repertoire, and thus the following constitute exemplar material for these occasions.

A selection of "Vocal Concepts to Sample" are framed by pedagogical questions that lead to listening in Table 1. Song titles, performers, and/or cultures are suggested for sample listening experiences.

Table 1: Vocal Concepts to Sample

Concept:	Gender
Question:	Do you hear a male or female singer?
Sample:	Shumba/Thomas Mapfumo (Zimbabwe), Isternem/M. Sebastian (Hungary)
Concept:	Solo vs. group
Question:	Raise your hand when you hear more than one singer.
Sample:	Tihore Mai/Moana and the Moahunters (Maori/New Zealand), Vonjeo/Rajery (Madagascar)
Concept:	"The beautiful"
Question:	What do people value as "beautiful music" (in Haiti, Pakistan)? How do their views compare with your views of "beautiful"? What do you think might make the music "beautiful" to them?
Sample:	Lina/Beethoven Obas (Haiti), Allah Hoo/Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan (Pakistan)
Concept:	Special effects (glottals and overtones)
Question:	What are some of the amazing and inspiring vocal techniques that singers practice to performance perfection?
Sample:	Glottal: Co Hang Xom (Vietnam), Overtone: Kargiraa-Style Song/Kongar Onder (Tuva)

Some vocal concepts are embedded in singing styles and vocal techniques that are learned best when taken beyond listening into the realm of experimentation and exploration, as in the case of examples of vocal concepts, challenges, and sample listening selections in Table 2.

Table 2: Vocal Concepts for Experimentation and Exploration

Concept:	Breath Control
Challenge:	How long can you sing a note or phrase? (Time how long you can sing on one breath.)
Sample:	Mongolian Long Song (Mongolia)
Concept:	Breath Energy (and Nasality)
Challenge:	What is your energy at the start of a sung phrase? At the close of a sung phrase? Can you sing from high to low on a single syllable? Can you sing through closed teeth? (Try singing while clenching a pencil with your teeth.)
Sample:	Round Dance (White Eagle Singers, Colorado)
Concept:	Vocal Ornamentation (Yundah/Sealwoman)
Challenge:	Can you sing a plain melody? Can you sing an ornamented variation of it? (Try singing the plain and ornamented melodies, and then make up your own ornamented version.)
Sample:	Yundah/Mary McLoughlin (Ireland)

Alongside a cross-cultural listening and exploratory sampling, getting beyond the single-shot exposure seems a significant move for teachers. Rather than to hear the Bulgarian Women’s Chorus as the only sound-byte from that Balkan nation, or to have only the sound of a one-minute Ravi-Shankar sitar snippet to represent that country’s array of musical expressions, it seems fair and responsible for teachers to probe a little deeper, extend a little further in bringing children in touch with multiple musical dimensions of people from a time and place. Thus, we do well to consider closing in on a culture, as in the examples of singing styles and vocal timbres in India and Bulgaria in Table 3.

Table 3: Closing in on Cultures

Closing in On Culture: Accent on India
Examples taken from George Ruckert’s *The Music of North India* (2003)

1. Lata Manegeshkar is the owner of the clear and child-like voice that is heard in the Indian genre called *filmi*, Indian film music. Hers is the sound that soars above the traffic of crowded roads in Kolkuta, the sound of absolute determination in creating an atmosphere of liting and tearful film nostalgia in the tumult of Kolkuta street life. Listen for the use of synthesized chimes and strings in simple two-part harmony, playing in an eight-beat rhythm. This style of orchestration is common in film music of this era, and is somewhat reminiscent of the musical films of Hollywood in the 1930s. [Lata Manegeshkar (filmi)]
2. The famous singers, Aminuddin and Moinuddin Dagar, known as the Dagar Brothers, brought fame to this oldest form of classical vocal music from North India. They trade phrases, exposing the raga, then wrapping it into a slow rhythm and then a faster one, and finally into a composition in tala that is based on a fixed text. [Dagar Brothers (dhrupad)]

3. The tarana is a vocal genre that utilizes syllables, some of them which are featured in the dance, or in instrumental music, including drumming. A tarana is often sung as a concluding item of a raga concert. The famous light-classical singer, Asha Bohle, is known for her taranas. [Asha Bohle (tarana)]

4. One very popular light-classical singer is Anup Jalota, who is loved for his renditions of devotional songs called bhajan. His resonant baritone is frequently accompanied by harmonium, guitar, cymbals, and tabla. [Anup Jalota (bhajan)]

Closing in On Culture: Accent on Bulgaria

Examples taken from Timothy Rice's *Music of Bulgaria* (2003)

1. South of the capitol city of Sofia, Bulgaria is the region of the Pirin Mountains at the country's southwestern border with Macedonia. This region, also called "Shop" (pronounced "shope") is known for its two-part singing. The second part is usually a drone on the tonic pitch, which combines with the melody to produce a moderate dissonance. Shop singers sing in their "outdoor voices," in strong chest voices of considerable nasality, often interjecting the melodies with high "yips" that are strategically placed at phrase endings. ["Denitse Divojko"(Shop song)]

2. In the autumn and winter, after the crops were harvested and processed for winter storage, Bulgarian girls would traditionally gather with female friends and relatives in their homes to make clothing, sing songs, and socialize. These events, called *sedyanki* ("sittings") transformed spinning, weaving, knitting, sewing, and embroidering into pleasant social occasions. *Sedenkarski pesni* are some of the most melodious songs in the Bulgarian repertoire, also sound with "outdoor voices" in a style called *ne glas*. [Ganka na Reka Peryashe (Sofia sedenkarski pesni)]

3. While village music lived on in Bulgaria even as it was industrialized after World War II, communist ideology and modernization was reflected in Bulgarian music. Besides a ban on religious music, there was the belief that rural music was an expression of the common man (the proletariat) which could also be floored with "modern" Western European ideas about harmony, phrasing, and even meter. The well-known classical composer, Filip Kutev, was charged with organizing a "State Ensemble of Folk Song and Dance" modeled on similar companies in the Soviet Union. One of Kutev's best known pieces of "arranged folk music" is *Polegnala e Tudora* (Tudora lay down). He began with a traditional song tune in four measure in a meter of 11, added a second melody of four measures to lengthen the song form, and included a new text composed by his wife, Maria Kuteva. Kutev then arranged the melody in three parts, and specified that singers sing lightly yet with a tinge of the throaty vocal quality and a few grace notes of ornamentation that are standard traditional vocal practice in Bulgaria. [Polegnala e Tudora (arranged folk music)]

4. At the fall of the communist regime in 1989, professional folk ensembles shut down for lack of government support, and village music no longer was heard as people moved further afield from agricultural and factory work. Instead, *chalga* (popfolk) is now on the rise, which mixes Rom, Serbian, Turkish, Greek, Romanian, and Macedonian popular styles. Chalga now accounts for more than 80% of the music market for cassettes and compact disks. [Tsvetelina (Chalga Song)]

Musical Traditions and Curricular Transitions

One Chinese proverb is frequently quoted in educational circles, that "We hear and we forget, we see and we remember, we do and we understand." While even our youngest children should be led to "do" music by singing (and playing) a wide repertoire, I am also suggesting that their musical education include intensive listening experiences to carry them long distances to their transformations of thought and feeling. Listening that is attentive to musical detail, that is engaging by means of drawing listeners to active participation, and

that is enactive, allowing young singers to learn a song (or a full repertoire) through oral/aural means—these are methods we must continue to develop in classes for children (Campbell, in press). The proverb amended, we might consider that “we hear and we can understand” the music, the music makers, their artistic selves, their human hopes, fears, and dreams. Songs are songlines when they link singers to singers, connecting those who listen to those who give voice to their lives in the far-flung corners in the world. Songs, singing styles, and the vocal timbres and techniques of star-singers are the musical signposts, the aural signals that mark the places and times in which singers sing. These songs hold the capacity for conveying to children the meanings and values of individual singers as well as of their musical “collectives,” and they can function in moving our “little stars” to the more brightly shining young musicians they can become. Star-singers—from Thomas Mapfumo to Lata Manegeshkar—offer rich sound possibilities for children, all of them with the pop-kernels of dynamic rhythms and the technological power to entice and intrigue them, and to move them emotionally. The combination of universal elements of pop music with the specificity of local traditions holds the promise of drawing listeners to the familiar while also bringing them a taste of distinctive cultural expressions.

As children are led by their receptive teachers into the musical babble of singing cultures far from their first “family” music, and as they progress from mere exposure to more extended study and experimentation, they come to know music more fully. Some will choose to emulate the qualities of the singing styles they learn in school in the performances that are ahead of them in secondary school and in settings beyond school. A few may integrate these qualities into their creative works as composers and improvisers, merging the music of their enculturation with the music of their education and training. All of them have the potential to develop as intelligent listeners and performers with a greater appreciation of the expressive vocal possibilities that are there in the world to know.

For those who hold numbers dear to them as a reflection of truth, the final word on the transfer of musical learning to cultural understanding is yet to be determined in statistical terms. Yet I am among those who would cast their votes on the belief that the opening of children’s musical ears leads to their enlightened world view, and their tolerance and their graceful acceptance of those with other ways of thought and action. The results of our efforts as teachers of song is on the faces and in the behaviours and expressed attitudes of our young people. In the world we know today, is there any aim more pressing or more meaningful than an enlightened world view? For me, making the most of the world’s voices seems more than just desirable: it is inarguably essential to the growth of children as thinking musicians and thoughtful citizens of the world.

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