

Music Development

by Chris Barton, MM, MT-BC

THE Listening Room
www.BionicEar.com



BIRTH TO 6 MONTHS Within days of birth, babies are able to discriminate frequencies, or pitch. They prefer soothing music that is sung to them in a high-pitched voice. (There is a reason lullabies have been around since the beginning of time...they work!) Around three months of age, babies begin to “coo” and “sing” when they hear music. These sounds are purposeful and in response to the music itself.

6 MONTHS TO 1 YEAR At this stage, babies are able to recognize when one or two pitches of a familiar melody are changed, but as long as the melodic contour is preserved, they will recognize it. Some of these melodies are stored in long term memory. Infants respond to music by moving repetitively, although not in synchrony to the music. They can process differences in rhythm and match pitches around 55% the time. Most of their singing consists of descending intervals. Singing to babies can help regulate affect and communicate emotional information.

1 YEAR TO 18 MONTHS Babies are now attempting to match their movements to the music and their motions have expanded to include rocking, rolling and marching. Frequently, a child will spontaneously dance to music. They focus intently, almost to the point of being mesmerized, to music they hear. The vocal range is expanding and there is much more “singing” in response to music.

18 MONTHS TO 36 MONTHS

Toddlers love to make up their own songs while they play. These often include little snippets of familiar words and melodies, but more often are a running narrative of their actions. Song lyrics are learned before the rhythm or melody. The “ma-ma” interval is practiced repetitively.

Many children in the 36 month old group can match pitches and imitate familiar songs, although contour is still more accurate than pitch.

The most frequent vocal range starts on the D above middle C and goes up five pitches to A.

Reference: Music, Therapy and Early childhood: A Developmental Approach.
Elizabeth Schwartz (2008) Barcelona Publishers.



at this age