
PRESIDENT'S PAGE

Kathy Perconti – NYSSMA® President



MUSIC FOR LIFE – THE EARLY YEARS

Lessons to and from our youngest learners

My own creative journey with early childhood music deepened when I became a parent. As my babies grew, music naturally became part of our daily lives. Songs seemed to come easily in those early years, and before long I was writing them down and eventually recording them. Many of those songs later became part of my Mommy & Me® and Movin' to the Music® classes and albums. Some were playful and inspired by musical styles I loved, like the 1950s-indebted doo-wop ballad for babies that I wrote, complete with simple harmonies and a gentle sway. And one piece used simple gestures that show love — patting a shoulder, hugging, or giving a kiss — helping children connect music with expressions of care and affection.

As toddlers, their reactions to music were fascinating to watch. Sometimes they would move and dance instinctively to a beat. Other times they would simply sit and listen quietly, taking everything in. Each child responded in his or her own way, reminding me early on that musical engagement doesn't always look the same.

Many of my songs grew out of everyday routines. Like many parents, I discovered that music could transform ordinary moments into joyful experiences. There was a song for getting dressed, another for bath time, and even one for baking cookies together. These songs helped create rhythm and structure in our day while also building warm family memories.

I made a point to expose my children to many different genres of music: classical, folk songs, jazz, musical theatre, popular music, even opera, operetta, and the opposite end of the spectrum...rock! Our home was filled with a wide range of sounds. My husband often played 1970s rock in the car, and to this day my eldest still loves that music because of those rides together. My daughter surprised us when she was just three years old by singing the theme from the *Queen of the Night* aria from Mozart's

The Magic Flute. Both of my children also developed a deep appreciation for the wit and charm of Gilbert and Sullivan.

What struck me most during those early years — and later, in my classes — was how individual each child's learning style could be. Even among infants and toddlers, some children were active movers while others were careful observers. Some sang along right away while others listened for weeks before joining in. Parents would often tell me that even though their child appeared quiet during class, they would sing the songs or act them

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out later at home. Those experiences reinforced something I have come to believe strongly as both a parent and a music educator: learning is happening even when it looks quiet.

What early musical experiences teach us as educators

Working with very young children offers powerful reminders about how people learn music and how they learn in general. First, every child learns differently. Some children process music physically through movement. Others respond through listening and observation. Many jump in immediately, while plenty need time to feel comfortable before participating. Recognizing and honoring these differences helps us become more responsive and patient educators.

Second, listening is participation. In music education, we often celebrate the visible actions — singing, playing, moving — but careful listening is equally important. Many young children absorb musical

patterns long before they attempt to reproduce them. That quiet listening is actually an essential stage of musical development.

Third, movement is musical understanding. Young children often express rhythm and phrasing through their bodies before they can verbalize or perform it with precision. Swaying, bouncing, clapping, and dancing are natural ways that children internalize beat, tempo, and musical flow.

Finally, repetition builds mastery. Young children love repetition and for good reason. Hearing and experiencing the same song over and over allows them to internalize patterns, build confidence, and eventually take ownership of the music themselves.

These early observations shaped my teaching philosophy in profound ways. They reminded me that music learning is not always linear or immediate, but it is always meaningful.

Music as the beginning of a lifelong journey

As NYSSMA® music educators, we often meet students later in their musical journey: when they enter our band rooms, orchestra rehearsals, or chorus classrooms. But the truth is that many of the foundations for musical understanding may have begun long before that moment. They may have started with a lullaby, a playful movement song, or a simple melody shared between parent and child.

When we support music education at all levels — from early childhood through high school and beyond — we are continuing a journey that began in the earliest stages of life. We are helping students develop not only musical skills, but also emotional expression, confidence and connection.

Music may begin as a quiet melody shared between parent and child, but it has the power to grow into something much larger: a lifelong source of creativity, belonging, and joy.

That is truly **Music for Life.** ||