

TimeOut
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Kids

Music

Easy listening



Music

Classical may be good for growing brains—but what music do babies enjoy? By **Eileen Clarke**

Today, children's stores are loaded with CDs and toys that claim to make babies smarter through music. Hard as it may be to believe, the edutainment trend all began with a 1993 University of California at Irvine study that tested not infants but college students. Yes, the subjects did better on a spatial-reasoning test immediately after listening to Mozart, but the benefits were temporary. More recent studies—conducted with actual babies!—determined that they can remember a piece of classical music (in this case, by Ravel) after a two-week delay, and that preemies show better oxygen intake while listening to instrumental sounds. The findings failed to prove that the little ones had become more

intelligent, but they hinted at something just as important: Infants actually appear to *enjoy* listening to music.

"Certainly, you can alter a baby's mood with music—I don't think there's any question about that," says Gary Marcus, director of the NYU Center for Child Language. "The debate is if there's

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any long-term consequence. But I think that playing music for your baby is a good thing in general!"

So which genres do babies prefer? Audrey Kaplan, founder of Broadway Babies, which offers kiddie classes in everything from show tunes to rock & roll, believes that parents should expose their kids—even newborns—to the music they themselves love.

"Everyone feels that we should sing 'Itsy Bitsy Spider' or 'The Wheels on the Bus,' but you get a little tired of those after a while," Kaplan says her mother used to greet each day with a rousing rendition of "Good Morning" from *Singin' in the Rain*.

Sometimes it's easier to determine what music babies *don't* like. Popular kids' singer Laurie Berkner learned that lesson the hard way four years ago, when her then-infant daughter, Lucy, first heard an exuberant Louis Prima tune. "Her eyes went round, and she just looked like—not exactly like when you stop breathing but when you suck in air," Berkner says. "She got really scared, and we had to turn it off!"

One genre that has soothed babies for centuries is, of course, the old-fashioned lullaby. Dan Storper, president of Putumayo Records, created the label's "Dreamland" series of albums, featuring comforting African, Celtic and Asian music, in 2003.

Parents have told him that their tots especially enjoy hearing the different female vocalists.

"The process of allowing a child to gradually drift off oftentimes begins with a song sung by a woman," says Storper, the father of a three-year-old boy, "because it's usually the mother who puts the child to sleep, not just in the U.S. but around the world."

Naturally, there are one or two vocalists that a baby loves above all others. "When a parent sings to a child, that's the ultimate musical experience," observes kiddie-rock luminary Dan Zanes. The former Del Fuegos frontman spent a lot of time considering which song his daughter Anna, now 14, would hear first. He settled on "Little Nut Tree," from Jamaican songsters the Melodians. A lovely choice; but the real revelation came later: "It never once occurred to me that I could sing her first song!"

Get to know our favorite musical artists on timeoutkids.com