



Music Play with Zach!

presented by Zach Zaitlin Piano Studio

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Parent/caregiver orientation info

Thank you for enrolling your child in *Music Play with Zach!* I'm honored and excited to be able to share music with your child.

First, let me introduce myself. My name is Zach Zaitlin, and I have worked as a passionate and committed music educator since 2008, when I opened Zach Zaitlin Piano Studio. I graduated from Swarthmore College with a BA in Music in 2006 and I am a member of the Music Teachers National Association and Pennsylvania Music Teachers Association, as well as the Gordon Institute for Music Learning. In addition to running my private teaching practice, I have worked as a piano instructor at Swarthmore College, and I have served as Associate Director of Vocal Ensembles at Friends' Central School since 2017. I have also taught classroom music and Spanish language to students in Pre-K through Grade 8 at Friends School of Portland (Maine), and I work professionally as a vocalist and pianist, composing and performing classical and pop/rock music.



Music Play with Zach is different in some ways from your “typical kids music class” -- different by design! While it is fun, it is not “just” fun; while entertaining, it is not “just” entertaining. It is fun and entertaining with purpose. This document is designed to explain why and how *Music Play* is special, and how parents and caregivers can best support their kids' music learning during class sessions and at home over the week.

Why am I offering Music Play to the community?

- I believe that understanding music brings joy, peace, a sense of meaning, connection to others, and an ability to express oneself creatively to people, which in turn creates a better world. (Sounds lofty, I know, but I really believe it!). Everyone is born with a certain aptitude for music, not just those who play at Carnegie Hall, and my goal as a teacher is to help as many individuals as I can to build on that innate aptitude and receive the immense benefits of a musically rich life. Through much research, trial and error, and learning from other teachers over the past 15 years, I believe that offering *Music Play* is the best way to get kids started on this beautiful journey.
- Extensive research conducted over the last several decades by Dr. Edwin E. Gordon and others has revolutionized our understanding of how we learn when we learn music. It shows that music is very much like a language, and that children, ideally, learn music in a similar way to how they learn their native language. Just as we know that if we want a child to be bilingual, we need them to start learning that second language NOW (or,

ideally, last year!), children from birth to age 5 have a singular, once-in-a-lifetime capacity for absorbing and building understanding of the language of music. If they are given appropriate opportunities to engage with a rich variety of music during that time frame, it will optimize their capacity to understand and enjoy music in this deeper way for the rest of their lives, regardless of whether they go on to study a musical instrument formally. While “typical” early childhood music offerings may certainly be enjoyable and fun, they generally are not giving kids what they need to grow and flourish musically in this concrete, research-supported way.

What is Music Play anyway?

- *Music Play with Zach* is a research-based, fun-fueled immersion in a rich musical milieu of diverse tonalities, meters, styles, patterns, and games. It serves as a perfect primer/stepping stone to more formal music lessons and/or to prime kids for a lifetime of joyful musical understanding and enjoyment. My Music Play classes are built from an early childhood music curriculum of the same name used by committed early childhood music educators around the world. Every aspect of the class is built around the goal of helping to build kids’ joyful understanding of music through play.
- It was developed by many teachers based on decades of real-world work with young children (much of which was done right here in Philadelphia by Dr. Edwin E. Gordon during his time at Temple University, as it happens), whose collective insights are known as Music Learning Theory (MLT). MLT gives us a set of principles for sequential music learning which will develop each child’s ability to *audiate*. Audiation is to music what thinking is to language. When children develop the ability to audiate, they can engage with and achieve in music in ways that are not possible otherwise; developing audiation skills is a “missing link” in most “traditional” approaches to teaching music.
- It is designed specifically for kids from birth to age 5, and is adjusted/individualized to fit the age and development of each child as the class progresses. Every activity is based on giving children what they need developmentally to build a rich music listening vocabulary and to audiate, so that they can grow to think and express themselves musically in an intuitive way, much like they do with their native language.
- Music Play is fun! Although it is purposeful and research-based, Music Play engages kids in all sorts of playful activities -- indeed, it is only through play-based fun that young children learn effectively. And the exhilaration that comes to students when music starts to “click” for them and they start to build a sense of “belonging” with music is the greatest fun of all!

What does a typical Music Play class look like?

- **Children will:**
 - **Hear a rich variety of music** in different tonalities (for example, major, minor, dorian, lydian, etc.), meters (duple, triple, and others), forms, and styles. Just as they do with language, young children are primed to absorb new sounds and build new connections and understandings from them in ways that adults are not. If kids just hear familiar songs, or music like they already frequently hear on the radio, their music vocabulary will be greatly impoverished. I sing songs that most

parents are unable to sing to their kids and that you won't find in your "typical early childhood music class", so that kids can learn to sing and understand more than just "Twinkle Twinkle" and "Let It Go". Imagine if we only spoke and read to kids language in the vein of "See Jane run". Their understanding of English and their ability to think and speak fluently and meaningfully would be severely limited. Unfortunately, many children receive an analogous experience with music during early childhood, hearing primarily songs with very similar sounds and a very limited expressive range. Such experiences can certainly be fun in their way, and it can seem cool and entertaining to parents for their kids to interact with familiar, classic pop/rock music, but music classes in this style, for all their sincere good intentions, regrettably deprive kids of the musically enriching experience that young children are uniquely primed for; and sadly, missing out on this experience can not be made up for down the road due to the nature of cognitive development as it relates to music learning – just as with learning language, the years from birth to age 5 are a singular period in children's ability to fully develop their innate musical aptitude. Music, again, is learned in the same way we learn language, and Music Play is a true, purposeful immersion in this beautiful language!

- **Engage in all sorts of movement.** This helps build an intuitive understanding of how music flows, and how elements such as rhythm, meter, harmony, and musical form interact.
- **Play with props** like scarves, ribbons, balls, parachutes, puppets, percussion instruments, and more. These props are meant to enhance and inform kids' awareness of their movements and to develop coordination of big and small muscle movements over time, which are critical for later study of an instrument.
- **Sing along to songs and chants, and echo musical patterns, when they are ready.** In Music Play, **kids are always invited to respond in these ways as they become familiar with and confident in how to do them, but they are never forced to respond in any particular way. There is no "wrong" way of responding.** Parents and caretakers are sometimes asked to echo and respond to teacher's patterns in order to serve as a model for kids. Depending on their age and where they are in their musical development, kids will at first typically (1) make spontaneous sounds in response to my music; then (2) make sounds related to the music; then (3) be ready to more directly echo my patterns. This is all part of the language-like music learning process which progresses from (1) absorbing the sounds of the language, to (2) playful, improvisatory babble, to (3) finally being able to form the sound of words accurately, which reflects an ability to think the language accurately (again, *audiation* is to music what thinking is to language). Tonal and rhythm patterns are the "words" of music. Kids in Music Play gradually build the ability to sing in tune and develop a sense of a steady beat, which will serve them greatly if they end up studying an instrument later in life.

- **Make up new music of their own.** Kids are invited to respond to my musical patterns with new/different patterns of their own once they are ready, which opens up exciting new horizons of musical understanding and engagement.
- **Not be 100% attentive and engaged 100% of the time.** And this is OK. As stated previously, there is no “wrong” way for kids to respond to the activities we do in Music Play, so long as they are not being unsafe or disruptive to the class as a whole. Some kids need to take little “brain breaks” where they just listen. Often kids will pay more attention to each other than to me, imitating each other’s movements and reactions to the music rather than mine. Even if kids appear to be not fully engaged, they are still experiencing invaluable acculturation to the music in the environment thanks to the unique developmental stage of early childhood.
- **Engage in imaginative play.** Creating and acting out stories along to songs and chants helps to engage kids’ imagination and creativity, and to absorb the sounds and syntax of the music more deeply.
- **Keep the beat!** Again, children are not forced to respond or to participate in any particular way. Many children need time to simply listen and absorb the new musical sounds at first before purposefully responding or engaging; each child moves at his or her own pace for this. But when they are ready, kids will be invited to feel and keep the beat, sometimes vocally, sometimes on their bodies, and sometimes with percussion instruments, as we sing and chant.

A few more thoughts

It’s important to note that young *children think, learn, and experience music in quite different ways from their caretakers; kids are not just little adults!* Musical sounds that might seem odd or foreign to an adult might sound perfectly natural to a youngster whose ears are more “open” to a more diverse palette of musical sounds; what may seem repetitive to an adult may be just the right amount of repetition a child needs to grasp a song and feel confident participating in an activity (to extend the language metaphor, imagine how many times a child needs to hear the word “apple” before remembering what that word represents, and then think how many more times he or she must hear that word in context before being able to speak it properly); while an adult might find a performance of a familiar pop-rock song with accompanying instruments entertaining, a child may find a performance of an unfamiliar folk tune or a nursery rhyme simply sung by an unaccompanied voice truly fascinating. Indeed, research and experience also show that young children engage perhaps most deeply with the simple sound of the human voice, and that they are able to “digest” musical elements (melody, rhythm, meter, form, etc.) more fully when music is presented in this deeply human, personal way.

How can parents/caretakers support their children in *Music Play with Zach?*

- First and foremost, please remember, again, that **there is no “wrong” way for kids to respond** to the activities or to the musical patterns I present in the class, as long as they are not being unsafe or overly disruptive. We do not force children to sing, chant, or

move to the beat in specific ways before they are ready. We trust the process and let kids experience the music freely.

- **Have fun!** Caretakers being engaged in movement activities, echoing my patterns when I request it, and being spontaneous and creative in their participation will serve as a wonderful model for the kids. You will see that I try to move my body in smooth, flowing movements much of the time, which is important for building kids' sense of rhythm and musical flow; caretakers moving in smooth flowing ways, either on their own or when they have a child in their lap, can be very helpful to instilling this sense in students.
- **Listen to a rich variety of music at home.** There are of course many wonderful sources of less commonly heard music we can expose kids to that will expand their musical vocabulary -- classical music, jazz, music from non-Western cultures, etc. -- but one great option is to purchase the *Music Play* CD or digital album, from which many of the songs and chants we use in class are drawn. It can be found [at this link](#) or by searching for "music play" on [giamusic.com](#). I also plan to share a recording of me performing the songs/chants used in our session of Music Play with parents that they can play throughout the week.
 - Oh, and also, **sing and chant to your kids!** Whatever you feel comfortable singing and whenever you can. It really makes a difference. This class is almost just as much about building comfort and ownership around music for parents as it is for children!

Any other questions?

I'm here to make this as joyful and beneficial of an experience as possible for your child. If I can answer any other questions or be of assistance in other ways, please don't hesitate to reach out. Thanks, again, for the opportunity to work with you and your child!

