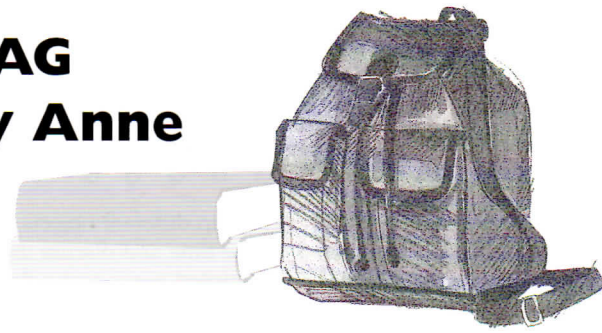


BOOKBAG

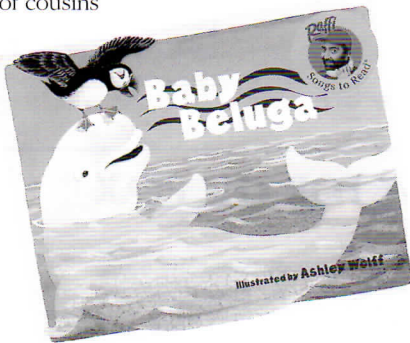
By Mary Anne Duggan



Sing Me a Songbook

My husband Sean learned to play the bagpipes when I was pregnant with our first child, Taylor. While I stretched out on the couch reading every pregnancy and baby book ever published, he hovered over my belly eking out notes to "Amazing Grace" and "God Save the Queen" for our little one's listening pleasure. Now, 10 years later, she lives for music and wants to be a singer.

I doubt it was the bagpipes alone that sparked her interest in music. It might have been the way Sean put her to bed each night to the tunes from a scratchy Beach Boys record. Maybe it was the drum set Taylor's Uncle Eric gave her for her second birthday. (We just recently began speaking with him again.) And she does have two sort-of cousins



who were in a popular band in the '80s. (Anyone remember the Bangles? My daughter is probably their biggest, and only remaining, fan.)

Studies show that all children are born with musical ability. At two months, infants can match the pitch of a song sung by their mothers and at four months they can match rhythm. As early as eight months, infants can recognize when a melody changes by even one note. We are wired for song but that predisposition can close off by age 11 if not nurtured. *Amusia*, a loss of musical ability, occurs when neuron circuits dealing with sensory discrimination, such as identifying pitch or rhythm, are not used.

The motivation to expose children to music has been strengthened by recent reports on how music and achievement seem to be related. Experts in cognitive development believe music imprints itself on the brain in various ways, affecting spatial development—the ability to see relationships in objects, which is highly useful in math and science—and in language development. And

music's impact on emotional development is beyond measure.

Songbooks provide one tool for bringing music into the home. While my husband merrily baggiped, I panicked because I couldn't remember any lullaby lyrics to sing to our newborn. (Remember, this was our first child.) I was fortunate to know two boys on whom I could practice my mothering skills. Robbie and Michael were preschoolers who took great delight in teaching me all the words to "Hush, Little Baby" one afternoon and I am forever in their debt.

For melody-challenged new parents who don't have a Robbie or Michael around, the Metropolitan Museum of Art offers the songbook *Lullabies*, which provides the lyrics to classic lullabies (including "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" and "The Sandman") and snippets of information on each song's history and origin. Museum artwork included with each lullaby makes this book a feast for the eyes as well as the ears.

Passing down songs is a cultural phenomenon. I remember a night I spent in Scotland listening to a roomful of people belting out songs. I ached to join in.

Because knowing a culture's songs is one way of belonging, books like Jerry Silverman's *Children's Songs* are a treasure. *Children's Songs* calls itself a book of traditional Black music and offers background information on each historical song.

Diez Deditos: Ten Little Fingers and Other Play Rhymes and Action Songs from Latin America, by Jose-Luis Orozco and illustrated by Elisa Kleven, is a bilingual presentation of songs set to vivid illustrations. Hand and body motions are diagramed, making the songs easier for non-Spanish-speaking singers to learn.

Children do hit a point where singing is no longer considered "cool." When that time comes, reach for *A Creepy Crawly Song Book* by Hiawyn Oram, Carl Davis and Satoshi Kitamura. Little toughies will love lines like:

*A can of wriggling, wiggling worms
Stood by a babbling brook;
The talk was all of who'd be next
Upon the fisherman's hook.*

Songs like "Flea Circus" and "The Black Widow's Waltz" will entertain even the most reluctant singer.

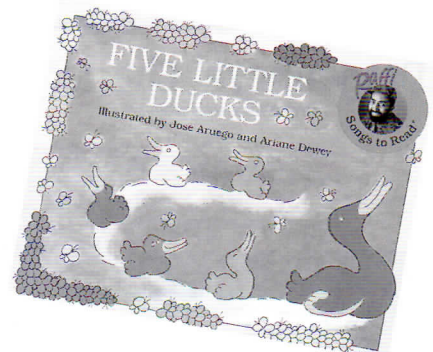
Children's singer Raffi deserves credit for helping many children learn to read. Some of his most beloved songs, like "Baby Beluga"

and "Shake My Sillies Out," have been made into picture books for the young pre-reader. Books of familiar songs help children connect words they already know to the words they see on the page.

Other songs Raffi has made into picture books include *Down By the Bay*, *Everything Grows*, *Five Little Ducks*, *Like Me and You*, *Wheels on the Bus* and *One Light, One Sun*.

Even Cat Stevens and Louis Armstrong are in the business—indirectly—of teaching reading. *Morning Has Broken*, by Eleanor Farjeon and illustrated by Tim Ladwig, takes the words to Stevens' hit song of the '70s and relates the words to a child's world. Baby boomer parents will fondly remember this gentle tune as they pass it on to another generation.

George David Weiss and Bob Thiele bring us *What a Wonderful World* from the famous song sung by Louis Armstrong. Ashley



Bryan's illustrations show a truly wonderful, multi-cultural world. The song continues to touch the souls of new generations and appeals to children of all ages.

Music can calm the cranky and relax the feisty. It brings feelings to the surface and feeds our souls. It spurs conversation and bonds us together. A good children's songbook brings that gift into our hearts and homes.



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