

Silent Ear Training

A silent ear is the ear which listens to the imagination. It is the ear which can hear a melody or harmony that only exists in the mind. It is like the ability to read silently; one looks at the page and reads the words but no sound is produced to anyone else.

It is very important to develop this “silent ear” for several reasons. Number one being that it is the way the subconscious communicates to the conscious part of the brain. Number two, using this silent ear to create music stimulates the subconscious to a much higher level because it requires much greater concentration than regular improvisation does.

Preparation:

Game One:

Play a note on the piano. Ask the children to close their eyes and raise their hands when they can no longer hear it. When all the hands are raised repeat the game and ask them to listen harder. When all the hands are up, tell them that you can still hear it. Have them try to hear it, then try to sing it. After they have done this, explain that though the note was actually gone it went someplace else. It went into their inner ear, or inside their heads. Repeat the listening again and this time when the note has disappeared, have them try to sing it.

Game Two:

Play a note until it is completely gone. Have the children sing it. Have them try to sing it silently in their heads. Play some different notes while they concentrate on the first one. Have them try to sing the original note again out loud. (Suggestion: Start this game using only black keys, after a few weeks try using only white keys.)

Note:

It takes a while for children to be able to do this. Do not be disappointed if the pitches do not match. Just practicing the exercise is developing their silent ear ability.

Creative Silent Ear Games:

1. Choose any piece from the tape. Have the children sit quietly and try to imagine a melody silently.
2. Repeat the above, but then ask if anyone thought of anything. If no one did (a strong possibility) then have each child come up and play a solo to the chosen piece while the others continue to try to imagine one. After this repeat the silent creative exercise without anyone playing. Again ask if any one thought of a melody. If yes, have those children come up and try to play what they thought of.

Note:

It takes a while for children to be able to do this. They are often uncomfortable trying to play what they thought of because they are afraid of forgetting it or being unable to reproduce it. Be encouraging but don't force. Explain that you don't expect them to remember it exactly, nor do you or anyone else know what they imagined. Therefore, nobody is judging them and “there's no such thing as a mistake.” Eventually all the children should be encouraged to play even if they didn't imagine anything. Explain to those who do not imagine anything, that one has to hear and create a lot of music first before the silent ear will work.

Hint: A good first choice is “What's the Answer to My Question?” because of the repeating bass line.