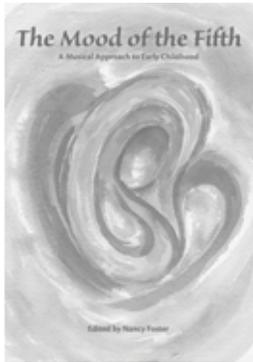


The Mood of the Fifth: A Musical Approach to Early Childhood edited by Nancy Foster (WECAN, 2013)



This collection of articles is well up to the standard of previous WECAN publications and fills a gap that needed filling. It is helpful to hear about the mood of the fifth from many different people. It is a deep topic and approaching it from many different angles gradually builds an understanding. A compilation like this is ideal.

The subtitle says it all. It is about “a musical approach to childhood” because “the mood of the fifth is not limited to musical experience as such but characterises the entire atmosphere that should prevail around young children so that they are immersed in the qualities of this musical mood” (p. 20). It has a therapeutic role that is increasingly necessary as the modern world grows less and less friendly towards young children. Mood-of-the-fifth music, as Jennifer Floyd Aulie writes in the first article, “seems to reach

out and enfold the children in a protective sheath which has a quality of stillness and peace, although the children themselves may be active within it” (p.2).

The mood of the fifth enfolds the children, but for adults, as Nancy Foster writes of her own first meeting with it in the introduction, it can be an experience outside our comfort zone. The first of the book’s three sections is intended to help us with that. Seven authors, (including me) explain, each in her own way, what the mood of the fifth is. Without some musical expertise or knowledge, a reader might get lost in any one of these articles, but read them all, and even if you don’t understand some of the technicalities, the mood, the all-important mood of the fifth, will start to grow in you. It is subtle, and that is why it is so helpful to have this spectrum of approaches. As Eleanor Winship writes, “It takes a quiet, meditative approach to begin to enter the mystery of the child’s world. Mood-of-the-fifth songs, in their quiet and subtle ways, open a door into this world” (p.8).

The second section gives us “deeper insights.” Dyanne Harshman refers to Rudolf Steiner’s lecture series, *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, with its insights into the evolution of human consciousness through music. In a way, Steiner says,

we are music. This culminates in the quote, occurring frequently in this book, that the young child “dwells in moods of fifths.”

Lisa Gromicko returns to dream consciousness again—how the child has to “coexist between heaven and earth” and goes on to explain how mood of the fifth supports this, a theme which others return to. She discusses briefly the A432 tuning and makes an interesting citation of Rudolf Steiner’s connection between the child’s musical education and the development of courage in later life. “Proper introduction to the musical element is fundamental for a human being to overcome any hindrance that impedes, later in life, a sound development of a will permeated with courage.”

In her article, “The Mystery of the Mood of the Fifth,” Andrea Lyman explains why we use the mood of the fifth, centring on the “sun tone” A, as a refinement of the pentatonic scale. She makes the important point that it is a mood of soul, not a scale. This is emphasised by Sheila Phelps Johns’s wonderful statement that, “If love is a verb, then surely music is an adverb! Music is actually a way of living. We can speak musically, think musically and move musically” (p.69). We are given an overview of the mood of the fifth within the whole Waldorf music curriculum by Christoph-Andreas Lindenberg before the last author in this section, Jana Hawley, gives a corresponding overview of human musical evolution and emphasises the balanced nature of the interval of the fifth.

The final section of the book goes behind the technical picture. Now that we have had a chance to grasp this “mood of soul,” we look more generally at the

musical experience and musical needs of the young child through the themes of “singing, sounding, and listening.” Carol Kelly writes about the need for the child to experience pure cosmic music. “For the young child, still at one with his environment and lacking self-consciousness, music should be played or sung with an awareness of its spiritual origins” (p.105). Sheila Phelps Johns writes about the need to protect and heal hearing in early childhood and beyond, distinguishing the physical activity of hearing and the soul activity of listening. The lyre holds its significant place because it is “one of the most valuable tools that can be used with children or adults.” (p.110). I found a striking statement by Karen Lonsky in her article about the importance of singing: “Today, most people seldom or never sing” (p.114). This reminds us of the importance of working with parents and reinforces the theme that “little children still have one foot in heaven and one on earth” (p.115). Following contributions by other authors including Nancy Foster, Estelle Bryer and Sally Schweizer, Micheal Deason-Barrow rounds off the whole book with his deep musical knowledge. I was most struck by his appeal for voices of “awe and wonder” and for his remark that we hear better when we smile!

I shall be re-reading this book myself to re-enliven the mood of the fifth in me, and recommending it to students and the practitioners that I meet. I hope that this marvelous collection of articles will find a place on every kindergarten bookshelf for the grown-ups.

—Jill Taplin

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