



## Elevating education

From babies making music to day-school advocacy, a look at Jewish education in Boston. **Second section**

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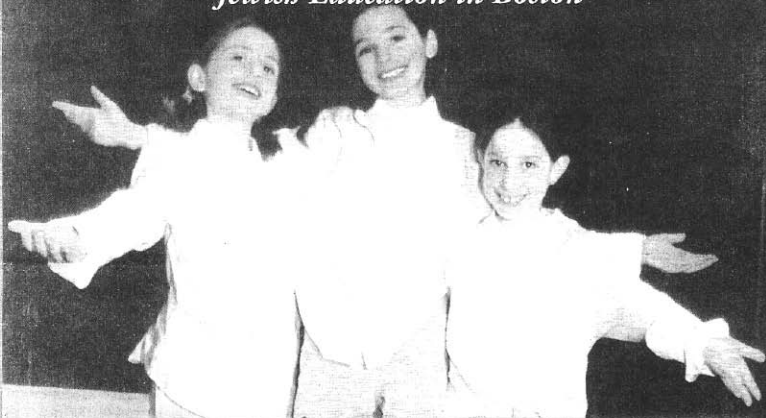
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## Reaching for a higher ground

*Jewish Education in Boston*



## Learning music at an early age

Early childhood music classes stimulate creativity in babies

BY JULIA PRIEST

SPECIAL TO THE ADVOCATE

**I**T IS SAID that whoever sings, prays twice. Music activities from birth through early childhood are thought to promote development of mathematical and spatial intelligence, teach consistency and perseverance, encourage solitary endeavors and teamwork and enhance creativity.

Parents can help their children participate joyously in song and dance, and there is no need to wait until the children are of pre-school age. On the contrary, it is beneficial for babies when their parents engage them in rich, exciting music from birth — and even before.

The Jewish mystics have suggested that in the



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Keeping the rhythm keeps this baby smiling at Music Together of Newton.



To explore music with your child, look for a class that is relaxed and playful

## Babies benefit from music, rhythm and dance

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womb, a baby knows the whole Torah. As usual, modern science is just catching up with ancient wisdom, confirming that babies are incredibly aware in utero.

By about halfway through pregnancy, the fetus hears not only the intrauterine sounds, but also lots of environmental sounds. Many mothers report that their newborn babies' attention is positively riveted by one specific song that was sung or played consistently during pregnancy.

Parents through the ages have found that singing and rocking are effective ways to soothe, engage, relax or energize a baby. Research confirms that babies come hard-wired to pay close attention to melody, rhythm, movement and the faces of those they love.

Parents, make a note of this: Anything you want to share with your child — good habits, Jewish knowledge or the warmth of your love — is communicated most easily and powerfully through playful songs and rhymes.

It is no coincidence that young children in *cheder*, as well as older youths learning *Talmud*, have always chanted their lessons to rhythmic, melodic motifs for their mnemonic value. For even the most disaffected Jews, singing along with the refrain "Dayenu" stimulates memories of family seders. Music is like a superhighway to the brain's centers of memory and emotion.

Science has recently shown another benefit of singing: The more passionately you sing, the

more immune proteins your body produces. Sing and dance with your child, and the whole family stays healthy.

For your children's sake, and your own, make sure you participate in Simchat Torah this October. Let your children see you dancing with a Torah, and then hold your children in your loving arms while you dance joyously. When you do this, they will know deep in their hearts

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**"Let your children see you dancing with a Torah, and then hold your children in your loving arms while you dance joyously. When you do this, they will know deep in their hearts that they have a divine spark."**

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that they have a divine spark.

**A**T AN EARLY childhood music class, parents should be able to relax and let their child roam safely. In fact, many children learn best by embodying the moving qualities of the music they hear. So look for a class that honors your child's activity level.

A high-quality early childhood music and movement experience can enlighten parents, teachers, and clergy about what

to expect from a well-planned, developmentally appropriate Shabbat for Tots. Also, if you are in a two-working-parent family, a Sunday morning family music class can be a great way to extend your informal socializing with other Jewish parents of similar-aged children.

Many weekday early childhood music classes take place in the classrooms of synagogue religious schools. Besides bringing in revenue for the institution, these classes can benefit a synagogue other ways: Unaffiliated families may find this a palatable way to begin their association with a congregation, perhaps enrolling the children in the preschool and eventually joining the congregation.

As we get ready for the New Year, remember that music and education go together like apples and honey. Music activities from birth and throughout early childhood promote the development of intellect, artistry and character.

It is important to find a music and movement class that is relaxed, playful, and packed with information for parents. Most important of all, the CD that comes with the class should appeal to you, the parent. Your child will learn to love what you love, both in music and in spiritual life.

*Julia Priest is the director of Music Together of Newton, an early childhood music-and-movement program with classes at several MetroWest locations, including Congregation Mishkan Tefila in Newton. She is the music director at Congregation Klal Yisrael*