

Listen Up!

by Elisabeth Swim



When it comes to the benefits of music, most people think first of fine motor skills, cultivating ability, and maybe building attention span. Few recognize the tremendous benefits music has on listening, and just how important it is to learn *how to listen!*

Listening is the very basis for making music. Orchestra and band members listen to each other to create musical and harmonious performances. Sounds they make in the moment influence soloists' artistic decisions as they play.

Listening like a musician a lot easier than most people imagine it to be. Most people believe that in order to talk like a musician about music, they have to have an emotional opinion of it, or to make a value judgement on the skill of the musicians. This could not be further from the truth.

Active listening, as taught by Maestro Robert Franz, can have a positive impact on your child's ability to understand and follow

verbal instructions, on their attention span, social skills, patience and overall wellbeing.

Maestro Franz, Associate Conductor at Houston Symphony Orchestra, shared his active listening strategies at an arts educator conference I attended with my colleagues from Theatre Under the Stars. It has since become an important part of my method, for its cognitive and emotional benefits.

Read on to learn how I use it to calm students down during the frequent thunderstorms that are part of life on the Gulf Coast.

Are the Sounds You Hear ...

- ☐ High or Low?
- ☐ One Sound or Many?
- ☐ Same or Different?
- ☐ Loud or Quiet?
- ☐ Long or Short?
- ☐ Quick or Slow?

Listening for the physical qualities of sound, instead of associating sounds with emotions, helps us to become more skilled listeners. Maestro Robert Franz summarizes music in seven qualities, which we can hear through active listening: sound quality or timbre, rhythm, pitch (high vs. low), melody, form, tempo or speed, and dynamics (loud vs. soft). They can be summarized as follows:

SOUND

Type of Sound

Volume

BEAT

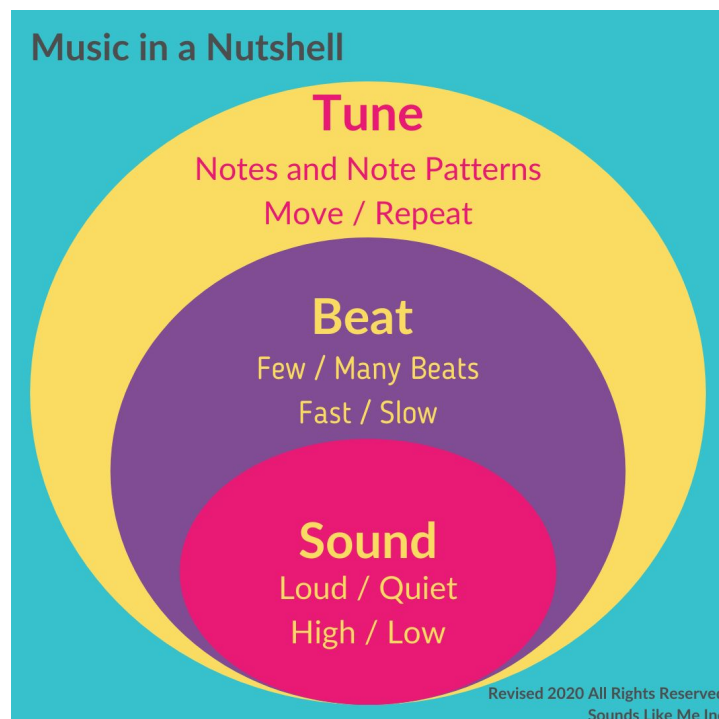
Pattern

Speed

TUNE

Structure

Shape



Try active listening the next time you listen to music, are stopped at a railroad crossing, or in a thunderstorm. It's a great tool for road trips! Ask the questions of yourself or of your family, and do your best not to judge the answers that come. In fact, for maximum benefit, simply reflect the answers back. Let's say you ask whether someone hears high sounds or low sounds. They say they hear high sounds, and you in your ear hear low sounds. Simply say out loud, "you hear high sounds."

I use active listening during lessons when thunderstorms pass through Houston's dynamic weather corridor. If a thunder clap booms, I ask my student, "what do you hear?" They usually name the thunder. I might ask, "do/did you hear one sound or many sounds?" They will answer, then I might ask whether they heard high or low sounds. By the time we have gone through these three questions any tension they may have had from being startled has dissipated.

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