A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR:
I went into teaching for the same reason that so many people are called to the profession. I believe in kids, in their amazing potential and that the future lies with them. By becoming a teacher, I hoped to make a difference in children’s lives and, in so doing, make my own modest contribution to a better world for us all. The ten years I spent in the classroom were richly rewarding and only strengthened these beliefs.

Since the founding of Little Kids Rock, the media has often noted that I developed the pedagogy that guides our teachers while working as a first-grade, ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher. This is true. However, a more informative statement would be that I developed this new methodology precisely because I was an ESL teacher.

In the following article I explain how my formal training as an ESL teacher and the informal musical training I receive as a youth outside of the public school system lead me to the creation of a new, hybrid methodology that I call “Music As A Second Language.” As with any pedagogy, “Music As A Second Language” is a tool for your teaching tool-belt, a spice for your instructional skillet. Please season your classes with it to suit your taste. My only hope is that you will find it useful as a means of bringing the transformational gift of music into your students’ lives.

With my first ever guitar class at our first ever concert back in 1996.
Little Kids Rock approaches music as if it were a language, a second language. Why a second language? Because no one is born into a family where music is the primary language.

Like spoken language, music can express the full range of human emotions and does so by using its own distinct grammar, meter and vocabulary. Like language, it has a both a ‘spoken’ and a written form.

There is certainly nothing new about likening music to a language. Poets, writers and authors have been doing so for some time now...

“Music is the universal language of mankind.”
~Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

“Music is the language of the spirit. It opens the secret of life bringing peace, abolishing strife.”
~Kahlil Gibran

“Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and cannot remain silent.”
~Victor Hugo

“Music is well said to be the speech of angels.”
~Thomas Carlyle

Victor Wooten at a Little Kids Rock School
Likening music to language is more than just an artistic flourish. The renowned and brilliant music educator, Dr. Shinichi Suzuki had a language-based epiphany as he lamented the elitist nature of music education in his native Japan and how it prevented so many children from becoming music makers.

Suzuki marveled at the fact that virtually every child in Japan mastered the complex and challenging Japanese language by the tender age of five or six. He considered this commonplace occurrence a seminal cognitive accomplishment. If they could do this, he reasoned, why then couldn’t they master the language of music since it was likely even easier to do than learning to speak their native language? He believed this to be true for children the world over. If they could master the their native language or mother tongue, they could certainly master the language of music.

Speaking at a festival in 1958, Dr. Suzuki succinctly summarized his feelings about the connection between language and music and how it impacted his methodology which he referred to as “Talent Education.” He said that he had:

“...realized that all children in the world show their splendid capacities by speaking and understanding their mother language, thus displaying the original power of the human mind. Is it not probable that this mother language method holds the key to human development? Talent Education has applied this method to the teaching of music: children, taken without previous aptitude or intelligence test of any kind, have almost without exception made great progress. This is not to say that everyone can reach the same level of achievement. However, each individual can certainly achieve the equivalent of his language proficiently in other fields.”

Suzuki was moved by the connection between language and music and was convinced that people’s ability to master the complexities of speech was proof positive that all people had an innately musical nature. He employed some language-oriented techniques in his methodology (playing by ear, imitation) but did not take the analogy as far as we believe it can be taken.

“ART EXISTS FOR THE HUMAN SPECIES. I THINK THAT ALL OF THE PEOPLE WHO LOVE ART, THOSE WHO TEACH ART... ALL OF YOU SHOULD BURN WITH THE OBLIGATION TO SAVE THE WORLD.”

– Shinichi Suzuki
TAKING “MUSIC AS A LANGUAGE” FURTHER...
To explore how learning music might be akin to learning language it is worth asking a simple question: “How is it that we all learn our native language in the first place?” Happily, linguists have studied this extensively and have a clear picture of how it all happens.

HOW WE ACQUIRE LANGUAGE
Do you remember learning to talk as an infant? Probably not. That is because the process of speaking happens naturally and subconsciously for us. Here are the predictable stages that we all go through on the road to speaking:

1) Listening or “Pre-Production” (birth - 8 mos.)
We all begin life as a quivering, raw and inexperienced bundle of nerves. We can make noise to be sure (see figure A at right) and we do so at great volume at times. However, none of these primal wails or random body noises (ever burped a baby?) constitutes a true building block of language. At this point in our development we have only one linguistic skill...we can listen.

Infants spend their time listening to the language going on all around them and begin absorbing its sounds all the while. We typically listen for six to eight months to all the chatter going on around us. Infants begin to speak by simply listening to the people around them.

2) Speech Approximation (8 months - 2 yrs.)
We leave the listening stage when we begin trying to imitate the sounds of the language that we hear all around us. Parents delight as their babies start to babble and to use “baby talk.” This babbling is an approximation of true speech. What sound like “nonsensical” syllables are actually sounds derived from the language that the baby is trying to speak. As babies babble, adults babble back, completing the approximation of a conversation (and making the adults look pretty silly at the same time)!
3) Speech Emergence (2-3 years)
Many parents can remember the exact day and time that marked their own child’s first word. Why? Because it is such an exciting event! We know intuitively that this marks a new stage for the child and also we know where the whole thing is headed.

Upon hearing that earth-shattering utterance (whether it be ‘mama’ or ‘dada’ or ‘ball’ or ‘baby’), parents are likely to shout, “Eureka! She/he is talking!” That sounds a lot better than shouting, “She/he just entered the ‘Speech emergence’ stage of language acquisition!” However, that is precisely what happens when children start using single words.

After a while the single-words are strung together in multiple word strings like, “Mama, milk” or “Me go on.” At this point the parents are likely to say “She/he is speaking in sentences!” That sounds better than saying, “Wow!! Sally just crossed the threshold into a new stage of language acquisition know as ‘Intermediate Fluency’!”

4) Intermediate Fluency (2.5 - 4 years)
During this stage of language development, children begin stringing words together in increasingly sophisticated ways and use language to communicate an expanding range of ideas, emotions and needs.

Despite the fact that the child’s speech may be replete with grammatical errors, adults generally focus on the meaning of the child’s speech, recognize them for their communicative value and are likely to offer much direct correction of speech errors. For example, look at the highly unlikely dialog at right (figure D).

Why does the dialog at right feel so “off”? Why do we feel uncomfortable for the child and perhaps feel annoyed by the adult? We understand what the child means and that is the purpose of language: communication. This fictitious adult is belaboring points that are meaningless to the kid. Can’t she just give the kid a break and give her some milk?
5) Fluency (3-5 years)
During this stage of language development, children have developed what is commonly referred to as “native-like” proficiency. Their speech may still be a little rough around the edges and their vocabulary may be more limited than an adult native speaker’s but the vast majority of grammatical rules and constructions have been internalized and the child is fully fluent.

It is important to note that the journey toward acquiring a first language lasts between three to five years and that the entire process is completely unconscious.

6) Reading and Writing (3-5 years)
The conscious “learning” of a native language begins as children are introduced to reading and writing. This happens for most children at the age of five or six. At this point they have mastered the spoken language and are ready to learn the much more abstract written components, and some years after that they begin to learn grammar. It is important to note that reading and writing are introduced only AFTER a child has achieved fluency in their native tongue.

“MUSIC MUST NOT BE APPROACHED FROM ITS INTELLECTUAL, RATIONAL SIDE, NOR SHOULD IT BE CONVEYED TO THE CHILD AS A SYSTEM OF ALGEBRAIC SYMBOLS, OR AS THE SECRET WRITING OF A LANGUAGE WITH WHICH HE HAS NO CONNECTION.”

-ZOLTÁN KODÁLY IN 1929
SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING AND “MUSIC AS A SECOND LANGUAGE”...

We have covered how people start speaking their first language. However, music isn’t anyone’s primary language so we need to now turn our attention to how people start speaking a second language.

I spent ten years working as a first and second grade teacher in some rough and tumble, low-income districts in California. I was trained as a bilingual school teacher. My students were native Spanish speakers and my job was to teach them to read and write in Spanish while at the same time helping them transition into English classes.

As a part of my training to teach non-English speakers, I studied the work of renowned linguist and educational researcher, Stephen Krashen, most notably his “Theory of Second Language Acquisition.” As a bilingual person myself, I was blown away by his theories! They had a profound impact on my teaching and were the pedagogical foundation of my successes teaching early elementary bilingual classes.

Krashen’s ideas also inspired me to teach music ... in an entirely new way. To understand this we have to understand Krashen’s theories.

Krashen’s ideas also inspired me to teach music in an entirely new way. To understand this, we have to understand Krashen’s theories.

A “KRASH” COURSE ON KRASHEN: THEORY OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Allow me to paraphrase Krashen’s five big ideas about second language acquisition.

1. Acquisition vs. Learning

There are two, separate ways of for people to become bilingual. The first and most effective is the “acquired system” which is a natural, subconscious process similar to the way people pick up their primary language. It relies upon meaningful usage of the new language and natural communication. Speakers focus not on the “correctness” of their speech, but on the communicative act.
The second way of processing a second language is the “learned system”. This relies on direct instruction and is a formal, conscious process. This results in academic knowledge ‘about’ the language, for example understanding specific grammar rules. According to Krashen, the ‘learned’ system is far less important and effective than the ‘acquired system’.

2 The Monitor Hypothesis
The “Learned System,” is the one that consciously grapples with grammar and rules. It does so by means of what Krashen refers to as a “Monitor.” While a second-language learner attempts to speak or even before opening their mouth, he/she uses their Monitor to internally scan for errors, and uses the Learned System to make corrections.

Your Monitor is sort of like an internal language cop that gives you a pass or a ticket depending upon your use of grammar. If you have ever tried to speak in a second language and had a thought like, “The second person plural of the verb ‘ir’ is ‘van’ but what would the command form of that be?” then you have had a run in with your own Monitor.

According to Krashen, the role of the monitor should be minor, being used only to correct deviations from ‘normal’ speech and to give speech a more ‘polished’ appearance. Self-correction occurs when the learner uses the Monitor to correct a sentence after it is uttered. Such self-monitoring and self-correction are the only functions of conscious language learning. Only the acquired system is able to produce spontaneous speech. The learned system is used to check what is being spoken. In other words, you can’t rely on your internal Language Cop or Monitor to enable you to speak a second language.

3 The Natural Order Hypothesis
The acquisition of grammar follows a natural and predictable order. For a given language, certain grammatical rules tend to be acquired early while others late. This order is not independent of the learners’ age. Krashen however points out that the
implication of the natural order hypothesis is not that a language program syllabus should be based on the order found in the studies. In fact, he rejects grammatical sequencing as a means of language acquisition.

4 Input Hypothesis
According to Krashen, people acquire language when they receive “comprehensible input” or messages that they can understand. Put simply, if messages in a second language aren’t consistently understandable to the learner, they cannot acquire a new language. Messages are understandable to second language learners when they are just one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. The input should be easy enough that they can understand it, but just beyond their level of competence. This is often referred to in ESL circles as “input + 1.”

5 Affective Filter Hypothesis.
Krashen claims that learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition.

A student’s debilitating anxiety, low motivation and low self-esteem can and often do combine to form a ‘mental block’ that prevents successful second-language acquisition. Krashen calls this mental block the “affective filter.”

I call the “affective filter” every music teacher’s worst enemy...but more on that later (page 12).

Krashen’s insights and theories form the cornerstone of much English as a Second Language (ESL) programming for immigrant children in the US today. School districts in cities like Los Angeles, New York, Dallas and others provide extensive ESL offerings for the very significant portion of their students who are non-native English learners. Teachers who have been trained to teach ESL in these communities and others like them learn Krashen’s theories and their implications on language instruction.
MY ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE CLASSES
Back in 1996, I was deeply immersed in “teaching” English as a Second Language. I use quotation marks around the word ‘teaching’ because I had been trained in Krashen’s theories of Second Language Acquisition and my teaching was deeply informed by his ideas.

In my first-grade classroom there was no tedious study of grammar, no drills to elicit speech, no conjugation of irregular verbs and the direct “teaching” of English was a rarity. There was constant and plentiful exposure to comprehensible input in my classroom. There was a boatload of realia, real world objects such piñatas, toys, coins, tools, etc., that successful second-language teachers use to illustrate and explore everyday living. Along with all the basics, culturally relevant and interesting topics were at the heart of our curriculum and our myriad of conversations.

Here is what I mean by relevant conversations. In my classroom a student might say something like:

“My mam worg Buger Kin”
(misspelling included to emphasize pronunciation)

Translated into standard English this would read:

“My mom works at Burger King.”

What a rich topic of conversation! “What is your mom’s name?” “Which Burger King does she work at, the one nearby or one further away?” “Do you eat there sometimes? Does she like it?”

Other students would pursue these conversations with linguistic abandon, pointing, gesticulating, miming, and using English in ways that might give the folks over at Webster’s Dictionary or Strunk & White a major coronary.
“I Buger Kin me!”
“I like, I like!”
“Me papá too, he go!”
“Me mom she not go. She have baby house. She have another.”

Before you knew it, the kids and I could be fully engaged in conversations about employment, the neighborhood, their families and the like: all from that simple sentence, “My mam worg Buger Kin.” And all thanks to Krashen’s “Acquired System” of language learning.

If I had wanted to focus on the “learned system” of language acquisition with my six-year olds (which would have been very a sadistic thing to do) I would have treated “My mam worg Buger Kin” not as a conversational treasure trove but as a problematic jumble, a tangle of errors and mispronunciations in desperate need of correction. Where would I begin with the “learned system”? My responses might look a little like these:

**A LEARNED SYSTEM RESPONSE TO “BUGER KIN:”**

“First of all, the word “mom” is pronounced (mäm) and the word ‘work’ ends with a “k” sound. More importantly, ‘work’ is the infinitive verb form and the student needs the second person singular form of the verb which is “works,” as in, “My mom works”. It is ‘Burger’ not ‘Buger’ and it’s ‘King’ not ‘Kin.’ Also, your sentence is missing a preposition after the word “works”. Does your mom work at, for, by or with Burger King?”

Wow. That would be six “corrections” or “interventions” for a sentence that has only five words. What kid learning English for the first time would want to speak next in class after a series of rebukes like these? Also, who would be able to even remember what we were all talking about in the first place? Conversation over!
Krashen once said:

“If the student isn’t motivated, if self-esteem is low, if anxiety is high, if the student is on the defensive, if the student thinks the language class is a place where his weaknesses will be revealed, he may understand the input but it won’t penetrate. It won’t reach those parts of the brain that facilitate language acquisition.”

In the “Learned System Response to “Burger Kin” example above, we would certainly create this kind of negative environment for the student. No self-respecting second language teacher who embraced Krashen’s framework would teach like this because it would raise their students’ Affective Filters. Directly correcting errors too early-on in the process of language acquisition is a serious no-no as the Burger King example illustrates.

If we scrutinize the footnotes in the “Learned System Response to “Burger Kin” paragraph above, we will see that it violates all the basic precepts of second language acquisition theory by emphasizing the conscious, direct teaching of grammatical rules and structures instead of allowing for free communication and the gradual, unconscious acquisition of language skills in the natural context of conversational exchange.

But what does all of this have to do with music?

**MUSIC AS A SECOND LANGUAGE:
MY GUITAR CLASS AND MY “EUREKA!” MOMENTS**

To become an “English as a Second Language” teacher I took all of the required college level coursework, completed my fieldwork and took all the state tests you might expect would be needed for a specialty degree. My training was rigorous, focused, structured and very formal.

My training as a guitar player was anything but!

I grew up playing the guitar in high-school the way most people do: with the help of friends, by reading guitar rags, by trying to copy the sounds coming from my favorite records (yes, records...I’m older), by
learning the names of curious shapes on the guitar fretboard known to musical cognoscenti by the name of “chords” and from lessons from long-haired guitar teachers in music stores. These lessons were highly infrequent and generally consisted of the teacher showing me how to play my favorite songs. I say, “showing me” because it was a physical demonstration of each tune, not a written transmission of the music.

Over time, I became more and more proficient on the guitar. By the time I began teaching my first-grade ESL classes, I had become a competent guitar “noodler” and was playing in rock bands and jazz combos by night. I adored music making and found it to be one of the most fulfilling parts of my life. My other great love was teaching kids. It is a passion that all committed teachers feel and share.

Little Kids Rock was founded when my love for teaching children and my formal schooling in Second Language Learning combined unexpectedly with my love for playing which was born outside of a school setting and was decidedly informal.

It all started one day after school in 1996 when I watched a documentary film called, “Gypsy Guitar and the Legacy of Django Reinhardt.” Django Reinhardt was a French gypsy guitar legend who is considered to be one of the seminal geniuses of the instrument and one who famously never learned to read or write music. In fact, he never really learned to read or write in his native French.

Django is a folk hero to French gypsies and the film featured very young children emulating him. I was amazed at the level of skill these self-taught youngsters displayed. A guitarist myself, I believed my own first-grade students possessed their own untapped musical abilities. I resolved to teach my first-grade students how to play guitar. I called some musician friends to see if they had old beat-up instruments they could donate, and an early incarnation of Little Kids Rock was born.
My school had a vocal music teacher who came in once a week, but he only spent about 20 minutes with the kids and they would spend the time “singing songs like ‘Polly Wolly Doodle’.” My students responded even to this limited program simply because children are naturally inclined to engage with music. But I knew this approach did not take advantage of my students’ deeper interest in music and their capacity to learn more sophisticated material.

**FIRST DAY OF GUITAR CLASS, FIRST FRUSTRATION:**
After I decided to teach my first-graders to play guitar, I went to the music store to try and find a method book and curriculum that I could use as a basis for my teaching. I was sorely disappointed by what I found. The books all focused on note reading and on theory. The repertoire consisted of tunes like “She’ll Be Coming Around The Mountain” or even worse: inane musical etudes with titles like “The Old Green Turtle” or “Let’s Play on the E String!”

_Yuck._

On the first day of our new guitar class, I asked my students to tell me the names of all their favorite songs and all their favorite musicians. Their responses came swiftly and enthusiastically: “Selena! Ricky Martin! Bidi Bidi Bom Bom! Maria Maria! The Backstreet Boys!”

_Now, I had our repertoire so all I needed was a method. I decided that I’d just teach my students the way I had been taught._

But exactly how had I been taught? Upon reflection my own musical education seemed so haphazard and random. It felt like a gradual, unconscious process. It was more like musical osmosis than straightforward “learning.” I’d pick up a new chord here and there, a new song, a new rhythm, a new technique. “Well,” I reasoned, “that seemed to work for me so we can try that.”
I started by teaching the kids a few, simple chords which I called “shapes” since that was how I had thought of them when I first started. I immediately tied the “shapes” back to songs that they knew and loved. I knew that changing chords would be hard at first so I came up with simple ways of removing or minimizing that obstacle. I would divide the room into chord groups. During our first week of class we played whole songs that way: one chord at a time, round-robin style.

THE KIDS WERE TRANSFIXED.
SUDDENLY THEY WERE MAKING THE MUSIC THAT MOVED THEM.

I used almost no musical lingo. Instead of teaching kids note values, I would clap and stomp and wave my arms. Instead of talking about what a chords were, we would just play them. Instead of learning about melody, we simply sang ones we already knew.

As always happens, some kids progressed more quickly than the others. This proved only to be an asset to the group as a whole. Their increasing proficiency lifted and supported their peers. The kids who played with the greatest facility kept their eyes on me while we played. The other kids kept their eyes on those more advanced kids. It was a virtuous cycle.

If you could only have heard those earliest classes... what a messy, well-meaning mash up of sound it was! Some kids would play a chord one fret above where it should be played. Others would strum extraneous strings. Still others would strum but few of their fretted notes rang out. “Mistakes” were everywhere. But so were the smiles!

I felt intuitively that correcting kids in front of their peers would raise their anxiety levels. Because we would always play as a large group, it was very easy for me to walk around the room and discretely move a kid’s finger up or down a fret, point to a place on

"COUNTRY MUSIC IS JUST THREE CHORDS AND THE TRUTH"
- HARLAN HOWARD
the fretboard they should be heading to or encourage someone to curve their wrist more.

Any corrective cues I used were almost always non-verbal. Hand signals, slight adjustments of positioning and touching strings that needed to be deadened: simple interventions like these would go largely unnoticed by all save the student they were intended for. That’s how I wanted it. I never went for 100% perfect from the kids: far from it. My corrections were aimed at small, incremental steps forward.

The kids progressed and their repertoires and proficiency grew. We gave concerts for the rest of the school and the parents and kids loved it. The kids and I were having a ball and the environment in the classes was motivating yet easy and relaxed.

A student named Sergio Betancourth came up to me with his mother. I could tell that he wanted to tell me something but was feeling a little bashful. With some gentle prodding from his mom he finally said, “Mr. Wish, I wrote a song. Would you like to hear it?”

“Of course!” I said, not knowing quite what to expect. He sat down and played me a catchy tune that sounded like something the Rolling Stones might have written. It was called “Little Dinosaur” and by the time he was through performing it, I was floored.

“You wrote that?” I asked. “It’s amazing!”

I was mightily impressed by Sergio’s song, and we spent time recording it and getting the rest of the class involved in learning it and performing it. However, I didn’t have much time to marvel over Sergio’s singular brilliance because many of my other students began ‘writing’ their own, original songs too. I used quotation marks because there was no actual musical notation involved.

**THEN, ONE DAY AFTER CLASS,**

**SOMETHING AMAZING HAPPENED.**
They’d come to class with lyrics and melodies in their heads and chord progressions and rhythmic figures in their fingers. We would sit around in class and exchange excited ideas about arrangements. “I will do this,” one student would say, showing a riff or phrase, “while you do something else at the same time,” inferring a bass line or some other part.

I was floored! These little guys were composing music and improvising but I had never shown them how. I had never asked them to write or to improvise. It just happened. But why?

It hit me like a ton of bricks. I was teaching music to my kids in the same way I was teaching them English as a Second Language. In fact, I was teaching Music as a Second Language. The evidence for this was everywhere. Everything about my quirky little program suddenly made sense when looked at through this lens.

**LOOKED AT THROUGH THIS LENS:**

Why did I teach kids to “play” music first and not to read it? Because we learn to speak our native language before we learn to read or write it. The same approach is best applied to the acquisition of a second language. Playing music while unencumbered by the conscious knowledge of rules and theory is the equivalent of speaking. Think of Krashen’s Monitor hypothesis (pg 8). The student who is acutely aware of the names of the notes they are playing, the written version of what they are rendering and the theory guiding it may be likened to the struggling foreign language student who uses the conscious study of grammar as their gateway to speaking.

Why did I allow for, embrace and even encourage sloppy approximations of the music the kids attempted to play? Because music, like language, is best learned in conversation with others who have already achieved some level of fluency and in such a way as allows for uncorrected “mistake making.” I knew that too much direct correction too early in the process of speaking makes a learner feel self-conscious and judged and is sure to raise their affective filter. (pg. 17)
Why did I show kids how to play chords but not how to understand the theory behind them, the degrees of the parent scale, the harmony at work within the notes, the basic musical “grammar” at play? Because, as thinkers such as Krashen and Noam Chomsky note, grammar is not intended to be learned but rather to be acquired unconsciously through usage. The notion of comprehensible input is very much at work when we dole out the least possible amount of info with the greatest possible utility to a learner (pg. 9).

These linguistic insights along with others had all unconsciously informed the way I was teaching my guitar class. I only became consciously aware of what I was doing when the need to train other teachers became a pressing personal need.

Although I had started my guitar class solely for my first-grade students, many other students in the school wished to participate in my class. I opened section after section both before and after school but ultimately the demand outstripped my schedule and I was forced to look to my peers, other musical, committed public school teachers, for help.

I began training other schoolteachers as a means of serving the children that I could not personally reach myself. The trainings forced me to consciously understand and explain the pedagogical underpinnings of my work in a manner that would be useful to other teachers. It also enabled me to share the curriculum I had developed with other educators.

The experiment of training other teachers worked! Soon there were other classes like mine, run by different teachers in different locals. The story of Little Kids Rock is essentially the story of how the Music as a Second Language pedagogy has been propagated across the country and how that has impacted teachers and students alike in their experience of public school music programs.
CONCLUSION:
Like spoken language, music expresses the full range of human emotions and does so by using its own distinct grammar, meter, cadence and phonemes. It has both a spoken and written form. Music, like language, must be learned from others who have already achieved some level of fluency. Finally, both language and music are primarily vehicles for human communication.

Infants learn to speak by listening to the people around them. They begin copying the sounds they hear and in a few years time they are able to communicate. A typical three-year-old child knows how to say hundreds of nouns and verbs but is unable to read anything. Children are usually not formally introduced to written language until they reach the age of five. At this point they have mastered the spoken language and are ready for the much more abstract written component.

Visualize what it would look like if we reversed this process and began teaching children to read and write as a means of learning to speak. We would have to “teach” the child to speak through an abstract symbol system known as the alphabet. We would have to teach a child how to recognize the letters “m” and “a” before they could say and use the word “mama.” Flash cards and grammar drills would have to take the place of natural conversation. Speaking and listening would take a backseat to direct, linguistic instruction. Would that feel strange to you, teaching an infant or very young child to speak through the use of reading and writing?

And yet this is exactly how music is taught to children in much of the West today. Music education often takes an opposite course. When students arrive at school, they usually have not had the opportunity to play with real musical instruments. Instead of first teaching children to produce music on instruments through imitation and approximation, students are immediately taught how to read music BEFORE they can play.
Consider the following table. It juxtaposes the trajectory of a public school student’s language and music instruction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGES OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION</th>
<th>STAGES OF “MUSIC ACQUISITION”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Listening Stage</strong></td>
<td><strong>1. Listening Stage</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0 To 6 Months)</td>
<td>(0 To 5 Years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is in listening mode only. Sound production is limited to crying, sneezing etc.</td>
<td>Notice how much longer many children can spend without “making noise” on musical instruments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Approximation</strong></td>
<td><strong>2. Approximation</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6 months – 2.5 years)</td>
<td>(5 – 9 years)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children start to use “baby talk” and individual words. Point where parents often say, “She/he is talking!”</td>
<td>Music is taught in a cursory manner. Focus is often on singing and clapping out basic rhythms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.5– 5 years)</td>
<td>(9 years – High school or later)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child is stringing words together &amp; increasingly uses language to get needs met. Parents hear utterances like “Mama... milk... now” &amp; may say “He/she is speaking in sentences!”</td>
<td>Formal instrumental instruction begins with technique and reading being taught simultaneously. Emphasis is placed upon playing through reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Fluency</strong></td>
<td><strong>4. Fluency</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3-5 years old)</td>
<td>(High school or later)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child has achieved “native-like” proficiency in their mother- tongue.</td>
<td>Child is proficient on their instrument and can express themselves musically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Reading &amp; Writing</strong></td>
<td><strong>5. Reading &amp; Writing</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6 years and up)</td>
<td>(High school or later, or never)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child begins to read and put own thoughts into writing.</td>
<td>Child begins to read and put own thoughts into writing.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Notice how much longer it can take a student to acquire the requisite skills necessary for a level of fluency and self-expression on an instrument.

This comparison has implications for how we feel music can be taught. Insofar as it is possible, music instruction should emulate language instruction. Speech is not best learned as a series of discreet skills mastered out of context. Nor is it learned by mastering the alphabet and decoding words. Rather, it is acquired in a meaningful, context-rich environment and with the invaluable assistance of other “speakers.”

The Music as A Second Language approach to music instruction is, at first, deliberately non-notational. By emphasizing performance and composition over reading and writing, students acquire musical skills in a natural way and often times at accelerated pace. This creates a context rich in musical experience for young learners. This is well facilitated in an environment that encourages and allows for Approximation (pg. 4) and that keeps students’ Affective Filters low (pg. 9).

Learning to play exclusively through the use of written music and the explanation of theory is akin to using the Learned System of Language acquisition (pg. 7). However, the research in second-language learning indicates that most people will not successfully acquire a second language using the Learned System. This is one of the reasons why so many people who study a foreign language in school for many years graduate unable to really speak the new language.

I believe that music education in our schools and in private lessons as well can suffer from similar failures. Many students will study music for years and still graduate unable to really play. Attrition becomes a problem as well as students may feel uninspired or dejected by their lack of progress. They may simply elect not to pursue music classes. This is caused, at least in part, by the Learned System that is at work in some more traditional programs.

In no way do I seek to denigrate or belittle notation-based instruction because its value is self-evident and irrefutable. I simply hold that the teaching of reading
and writing in music is better taught in a sequence that resembles the sequencing of the teaching of reading and writing that we experience in our native language.

Ideally a child has the opportunity to “speak” or “play” music for a few years before they are introduced to the written system. Once a child can play and feels competent on their instrument they will have established a base from which reading music will have a much more meaningful context.

MUSIC AS A LANGUAGE vs. MUSIC AS MATH

Spoken language has been with us for much longer than written language. Writing, the use of abstract symbols as a means of preserving language and making possible its precise transport through time and space, has only been with us for the past 5,000 years. Written music is newer still.

Written language is not language itself. It is a code for the pronunciation of language. The simple act of reading words will not give you an understanding of their meaning, of their utility. You must come to the task of reading with some degree of linguistic fluency or else reading becomes mere code-breaking. Ask anyone who has learned to read German so that they could sing opera or learned to read Hebrew so that they could have bar or bat mitzvah. Unless they speak those languages, they cannot understand the meaning of what they are reading. Even if their pronunciation is flawless, if you speak to them in German or Hebrew they will be entirely lost.

I call this “The Music As Math” approach to teaching music. Here, music is treated as an abstract code that must be cracked by the learner. It can and does produce virtuosic code-breakers, people who can take a complex, written piece and render it with great emotion and beauty. However, anyone who has spent time with folks who have learned using the “Music As Math” approach exclusively will know that many of the players it produces are completely unaware of the underlying language of music that is at work.

"THE WORLD’S MOST FAMOUS AND POPULAR LANGUAGE IS MUSIC."

- PSY
Ask a person taught using The Music As Math approach what chord progressions are used in a piece, what scales are employed, what key a soloist would play in and they too are completely lost. They cannot improvise, cannot compose and cannot explain what they are playing. In the most extreme cases, if you remove the sheet music from the stand in front of the musician, you literally remove the person’s ability to play anything.

But The Music As Math approach has much more dire consequences than simply limiting the learner’s understanding of what they are playing or whether or not they can compose, improvise etc. The Music As Math approach ensures that large numbers of people will never learn to play music at all. Think of the legions of people who have taken music lessons in school or privately and not “stuck with it” but either quit or left the lessons entirely unable to play. This is an almost archetypical outcome for many learners.

I believe that this unintended yet harmful fallout from The Music As Math Approach derives as follows. In basic mathematics, each question has one right answer and an infinite number of wrong answers. Seven times seven is forty-nine. Period. No room for interpretation here. Learning music in an environment that reduces it to math removes the learner’s ability to Approximate (pg. 9) and will certainly help raise their Affective Filters.

Remember the “Burger King” example from page 11? Remember how many “corrections” we were able to insert into a conversational sentence? Well, what if I said that before you could touch a note on the piano you needed to know:

1) How to read the treble clef  
2) How to read the bass clef  
3) How to tell the difference between a sharp and a flat  
4) How to tell the value of a note (8th, 16th etc.)  
5) How to tell what key you are in  
6) How to use correct fingering
Can you see how this environment might raise a learner’s anxiety level or Affective Filter? I believe that one of the main reasons that people who ARE exposed to music leave it or deem themselves to be “non-musical,” “talentless” or “tone deaf” is simply because they are intimidated by the methodology they are exposed to and they become unable to process the information and learn. This is exactly why Krashen feels that learner’s get blocked when they are exposed to a second-language; their Affective Filters kick into gear and they shut down.

Here I will paraphrase Krashen who once during a talk asked his audience to picture the perfect second-language classroom. In this imaginary classroom, he said, if you can’t understand what the teacher is saying, it is their fault, not yours. In this class there is no judgement, little “correction” and much meaningful conversation and the conversation consists of Comprehensible Input.

IF WE WISH TO TEACH CHILDREN TO “SPEAK” THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC, THE PROCESS OF MAKING MUSIC HAS TO BE EMPHASIZED OVER AND ABOVE THE ACT OF RECITING MUSIC.

We as teachers are extremely powerful role models in this regard. If we denigrate or belittle our own musicality (or our own creativity in general) we model an unhealthy attitude that kids will pick up on. Anxiety is a sure by-product of this. If however, we are comfortable with our own creative selves, the children learn from this as well. A comfortable teacher makes for a comfortable class.

MUSIC EDUCATION: STANDING ON ITS OWN TWO FEET
The research regarding the value of music education is ample and conclusive. Children who receive music classes evidence positive growth in a number of areas. Their mathematical and scientific thought processes are enhanced and a general psychosocial gain is experienced. However, focusing on these well-documented
facts might lead you to believe that music education was akin to oat bran: dull but good for you. We at Little Kids Rock know a secret that is often left out of conversations about the value of music education...

PLAYING MUSIC IS FUN!
Just like conversation is fun! This critical fact is much maligned by shortsighted budget cutters and ill-advised policy makers who confuse “fun” with “frivolous.” This has had dire consequences indeed for music programs nationally. Today, a shrinking number of kids in our public schools receive any form of arts education. People who support music education are constantly coming up against the notion that an academic pursuit that is fun must be of little real value to the students.

The “If-it’s-fun-it’s-frivolous” school of thought has had historical parallels in other areas of academia as well. Ellen Goodman of the Detroit Free Press wrote about the impact that Dr. Seuss had on reading programs nationally. “[Forty] years ago, Dr. Suess... turned out The Cat in The Hat, a little volume of absurdity that worked like a karate chop on the weary world of Dick, Jane and Spot.” Today the idea that reading should be fun for children is widely accepted. We’d like to see that same wisdom inform people’s take on music education as well.

TODAY THE IDEA THAT READING SHOULD BE FUN FOR CHILDREN IS WIDELY ACCEPTED. WE’D LIKE TO SEE THAT SAME WISDOM INFORM PEOPLE’S TAKE ON MUSIC EDUCATION AS WELL.
LAUGHING SO HARD WE CRY
As bilingual teachers, my peers and I would frequently marvel at how ineffective Foreign Language programs are in our public schools. Here is a popular joke we used to tell that shines a light on the abysmal outcomes of our nation’s foreign language programs:

What do you call someone who speaks two languages?
Bilingual.

What do you call someone who speaks three languages?
Trilingual.

What do you call someone who speaks just one?
An American?

After all, isn’t the kid who takes four years of French or Spanish in high school but graduates barely being able to ask for the bathroom almost an archetype?’
Music programs can have similarly disappointing outcomes. Isn’t the adult who studied violin or piano for five years but can’t play also a too-familiar archetype? This brings me to...

Why does this second joke resonate so strongly? Judgmental, rules- and theory-oriented music classes are a cultural norm for us. We can relate to the shaming of the adult guitarist and how his feelings of inferiority and insecurity, which may have blossomed in his childhood music class, continue to dog him in his adulthood.
MODERN BAND
THE ORIGINS OF THE TERM “MODERN BAND”

The term “Modern Band” was coined by Little Kids Rock a number of years ago as a means of framing part of the national dialog around music education. It’s worth understanding how and why this happened.

Little Kids Rock began in 2002 as a small, after school program in a handful of public schools in the San Francisco Bay Area. All of the original Little Kids Rock teachers were general education teachers who volunteered their time to offer enrichment classes to their students at the end of the day. This was due to the fact that the district lacked funding for enough music teachers to adequately serve all students and Little Kids Rock was born in part...
to address this specific shortfall.

By 2007, the program had grown to serve nearly 20,000 students in a dozen cities. The profile of the average Little Kids Rock teacher had also changed significantly. Over half of all teachers were now full-time music teachers. The profile of the average Little Kids Rock teacher had also changed significantly: over half of them were now full-time music teachers. They were running their Little Kids Rock classes during regular school hours, offering them alongside existing music classes such as Jazz Band, Orchestra.

As we evaluated our reach during regular school hours we were surprised (and delighted) to learn that in schools with Little Kids Rock programming, between 15-33% of the students at those schools were participating in the program. This led to an epiphany of sorts.

Little Kids Rock had become much more than just an “extra” add on to a district’s music program. It was capable of serving as many kids as other, established, genre-focused music classes. For example, we could look at a district and see that their Little Kids Rock programming was reaching as many children as their Jazz or Marching Bands.

These insights led our founder, David Wish, to write an article on the subject in 2009. It was entitled, “Rock Their Worlds: On the Need for a Fifth Stream of Music” and in it Wish frames the state of U.S. public school music programs in a new and novel way:

“Traditionally, public school instrumental music programs have consisted of four distinct categories or ‘streams.’ These streams are Orchestra, Jazz Band, Marching Band and Chorus. At schools with robust music programs, all four of these streams may exist harmoniously under a single roof. Other schools may have any combination of these offerings.

The teaching of these streams emphasizes prescribed canons and focus on the learning and playing of genre-based music through note reading. Recitation of music composed by others is normative.

The most recent stream of music education to entrench itself in the US public school system is Jazz Band which rolled out on a national level in the nineteen-seventies. Forward thinking educators of the day saw that music education was in need of a refresh. This happened at a time when the commercial appeal of jazz music
was waning but recognition of its importance as a cultural treasure was growing.

However, as it was initially being integrated into schools, the newness and novelty of teaching Jazz to kids led its proponents to call it by the less threatening (though more confusing) name of ‘Stage band.’ Forty years have passed and jazz is no longer perceived as a threat.”

The article goes on to propose the broad adoption of a “fifth steam” of music education by the US public school system. It does so on the grounds of both modernizing curriculum and expanding access to music education while strengthening children’s connection to school in general:

“...IN THE SIXTY YEARS SINCE JAZZ WAS AT THE TOP OF THE US CHARTS, AN AWFUL LOT HAS HAPPENED IN THE BROADER WORLD OF MUSIC...”

The concept of a fifth stream of music education is so new that, like Jazz Band before it (aka ‘stage band’) it lacks a definitive name. I have take the liberty of naming it, for the time being, ‘Modern Band.’ Modern Band can and does bridge the unnecessary chasm existing between the music that our children experience in schools and the music they experience in their communities....

Focusing on the music that is familiar to our students in their schools allows them to see themselves reflected in the curriculum. By validating and leveraging their cultural capital, we can forge stronger bonds between traditionally marginalized students and the schools that serve them.

It is further noted that the benefits of the new stream of music education that Wish advocates for does not solely benefit students:

“Increasingly, music educators themselves feel the strain between their own experiences of music in the world and music as they have been trained to teach it. Such is the impact that popular music has had on our culture for more than half a century.

Newly minted (and not so newly minted) music teachers are also the products of the same cultural shift that has transformed the face of music. Simply stated, they are part of one of the rock ‘n’
It was true that Little Kids Rock had started as an after-school program that established beachhead music programs at many schools with no music programs whatsoever. We accomplished this by training general education teachers who could play and who were passionate about music to teach Little Kids Rock classes after school.

However the brisk demand from music teachers and the size and scope of their Little Kids Rock programs was very substantial. For example, the average general education teacher at a school with no music program was serving 15-30 kids in an after school setting while our average full-time music teacher was serving between 120-200.

We started referring to our programs as “Modern Band” classes.

**MODERN BAND DEFINED:**
Modern Band is simply a genre-based, instrumental music program like Jazz Band, Marching Band or Orchestral Programs. What lends continuity to all of these categories of music education is their focus on a prescribed canon or repertoire as well as their use of a standard compliment of musical instruments associated with the respective genres. Modern Band focuses on the commercially relevant music of the past fifty years.

A Jazz Band may focus on the music of Duke Ellington or Count Basie and will likely use trumpets, saxophones, trombones and a rhythm section. Orchestral Programs may focus on Beethoven or Mozart and will likely use violins, violas, cellos, wind instruments and the like. A Modern Band focuses on the commercially relevant music of the past fifty years and uses guitar, bass, drum set, keyboard, voice and computers to do so.

The repertoire of each of these types of music programs is complex and can be a little overwhelming at first. For example, jazz fans will likely feel that Louis Armstrong and Ornette Coleman are stylistically worlds apart and yet we accepted that their music is best addressed in a Jazz Band environment. Likewise, the music of Johann Sebastian Bach and Albert Schnittke feel similarly disparate. And how about the music of Chuck Berry, Lady Gaga and Metallica?
Popular music presents us with a dizzying and still-growing array of styles to consider. Rock, disco, reggae, heavy metal, rhythm and blues, hip hop, punk, country, reggaeton, pop and electronica are some of the names on the list of styles and many of these can be divided into sub genres! What does all this mean for music education?

Here I we echo the words of famed piano man Billy Joel when he astutely pointed to the answer in a clever lyric from his classic tune, “Still Rock ‘n’ Roll To Me”:

“Whether it’s hot funk, cool punk, even if it’s old junk it’s still rock and roll to me.”

Joel is saying that, despite the surface differences between these genres, they are all built on the same musical foundations. Though a Taylor Swift fan and a Metallica Fan might passionately argue that the music of these artists has nothing whatsoever in common, there is compelling evidence to the contrary.

The musical DNA of these subgenres is very close. Most pop songs:

- Are in 4/4 or 3/4 time
- Stick to a single key
- Use three to six chords at most
- Feature a melody from a major or minor scale,
- Use diatonic chords (few altered or extended chords)
- Use a handful of standard song forms (eg. AABA, AA, ABAB, AABC)
- Are written by “untrained” musicians

The table on the facing page is an excellent illustration of many similarities that lend cohesion and credibility to the notion of a Modern Band “canon.” You will see that a half-century of popular tunes are listed in chronological order from the music of today all the way back to the 1950’s.

At first blush, there are SO many different styles of music here that it is hard to see how they might all be addressed in a single stream of music education. Doo whop, disco, country rock, punk and the like can’t possibly have that much in common…can they? Yes, they can! ☺

Notice that the last column of the table shows which chords are used in the composition (transposed to the key of “C”). The same four chords are the basic building blocks of all these tunes in all of these styles. So teaching these four chords can unlock a vast repertoire and other musical vistas for us as educators and for our students as learners.
### What Do the Following Songs Have in Common?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Modern Band Genres</th>
<th>Chords in C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Guetta</td>
<td>&quot;Titanium&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Pop Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady Gaga</td>
<td>&quot;Dirrty&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Pop, Pop punk</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun</td>
<td>&quot;We Are Young&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Pop Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia Keys</td>
<td>&quot;Girl on Fire&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Pop Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Bieber</td>
<td>&quot;Beauty and the Beat&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Pop, Pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Monsters and Men</td>
<td>&quot;Little Talks&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Pop Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink</td>
<td>&quot;Try&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Pop Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eminem featuring Rihanna</td>
<td>&quot;Love the Way You Lie&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Hip hop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>&quot;Someone Like You&quot;</td>
<td>2010's</td>
<td>Pop, Soul</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train</td>
<td>&quot;Hey Soul Sister&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Pop rock, Folk rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akon</td>
<td>&quot;Beautiful&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Rap</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3OH!3</td>
<td>&quot;Don't Trust Me&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Pop, Rap, Dance-pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady Gaga</td>
<td>&quot;Paparazzi&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Pop rock, Electronic dance</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyoncé</td>
<td>&quot;If I Were A Boy&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Pop, Folk rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Offspring</td>
<td>&quot;You're Gonna Go Far, Kid&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Punk</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lady Gaga</td>
<td>&quot;Poker Face&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Synthpop, Dance-pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGMT</td>
<td>&quot;Kids&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Indie pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fray</td>
<td>&quot;You Found Me&quot;</td>
<td>2000's</td>
<td>Pop, Alternative rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighthouse Family</td>
<td>&quot;High&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Soul, Pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Imbruglia</td>
<td>&quot;Torn&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Pop rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle Eye Cherry</td>
<td>&quot;Save Tonight&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Smashing Pumpkins</td>
<td>&quot;Bullet With Butterfly Wings&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Alternative rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aqua</td>
<td>&quot;Barbie Girl&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Bubblegum pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blink-182</td>
<td>&quot;Dammits!&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Pop punk</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spice Girls</td>
<td>&quot;2 Become 1&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrea Bocelli</td>
<td>&quot;Time To Say Goodbye&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Operatic pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Day</td>
<td>&quot;When I Come Around&quot;</td>
<td>1990's</td>
<td>Pop Punk</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Supply</td>
<td>&quot;All Out of Love&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>Rock, Rock Ballad</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard Marx</td>
<td>&quot;Right Here Waiting&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>Rock, Rock Ballad</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy Joel</td>
<td>&quot;We Didn't Start the Fire&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>&quot;Man in the Mirror&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>R&amp;B, Pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U2</td>
<td>&quot;With Or Without You&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>Electronic pop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a-ha</td>
<td>&quot;Take On Me&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>Synthpop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alphaville</td>
<td>&quot;Forever Young&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>New Wave, Synthpop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toto</td>
<td>&quot;Africa&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journey</td>
<td>&quot;Don't Stop Believin'&quot;</td>
<td>1980's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raspberries</td>
<td>&quot;I Wanna Be With You&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Pop, Rock, Reggae</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led Zeppelin</td>
<td>&quot;D'yer Mak'er&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barry Manilow</td>
<td>&quot;Mandy&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Rock, Rock Ballad</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elton John</td>
<td>&quot;Crocodile Rock&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Pop rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>&quot;Love Hurts&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Village People</td>
<td>&quot;YMCA&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Disco</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob Marley</td>
<td>&quot;No Woman No Cry&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Reggae</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beatles</td>
<td>&quot;Let It Be&quot;</td>
<td>1970's</td>
<td>Rock, Rock ballad</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dion</td>
<td>&quot;Runaround Sue&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben E. King</td>
<td>&quot;Stand By Me&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Rock, Rock Ballad</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chubby Checker</td>
<td>&quot;Let's Twist Again&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doris Troy</td>
<td>&quot;Just One Look&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beatles</td>
<td>&quot;Octopus' Garden&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gene Chandler</td>
<td>&quot;Duke of Earl&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Beach Boys</td>
<td>&quot;Surfer Girl&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Surf Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Drifters</td>
<td>&quot;This Magic Moment&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rolling Stones</td>
<td>&quot;Tell Me&quot;</td>
<td>1960's</td>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crew Cuts</td>
<td>&quot;Sh Boom&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Penguins</td>
<td>&quot;Earth Angel&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd Duncan</td>
<td>&quot;Unchained Melody&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Rock, Rock Ballad</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frankie Lymon &amp; The Teenagers</td>
<td>&quot;Why Do Fools Fall In Love&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Rock, Rock Ballad</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Rays</td>
<td>&quot;Silhouettes&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Monotones</td>
<td>&quot;Book of Love&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chordettes</td>
<td>&quot;Lollipop&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ricky Nelson</td>
<td>&quot;Poor Little Fool&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dion &amp; the Belmonts</td>
<td>&quot;A Teenager In Love&quot;</td>
<td>1950's</td>
<td>Doo-wop</td>
<td>C, A, F, G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Although not all of these songs were composed in the key of “C”, looking at them this way, arranged by decade, with a genre ascribed and with the basic chords that form the song, much can be gleaned. We can see all of the following:

1) That many diverse pop sub-genres rely on the same, simple harmonic structure
2) That many of the basic underpinnings of popular music have remained fairly consistent for the past 50 years.
3) That four chords make for a very potent musical tool kit.
4) That we should teach kids four chords as quickly as possible!

This is not to say that these diverse styles are identical and indistinguishable. To be sure there are many affectations, adornments, rhythms and the like that help differentiate disco from heavy metal or rock from country. However, grouping all these styles under the header of Modern Band makes sense as these disparate sub-genres have much I common and can all easily be explored and taught in the same setting.

**HOW IS MODERN BAND DIFFERENT, BESIDES THE EMPHASIS ON NEWER GENRES OF MUSIC?**

Existing categories of music education such as Marching Band and Orchestra each have pedagogical underpinnings and teaching techniques. These stem from both the cultural practices of each category’s progenitors as well as the specific demands of the genres they embrace. Orchestral Programs, for example, teach students the discipline and rigor necessary for large ensembles performing elaborate pieces with many precise parts. Jazz Band (ideally) teaches improvisation as this is a central part of what constitutes jazz music.

What special benefits, skills or values can Modern Band confer to our children, our selves and our schools?

**#1: Modern Band Is Student-Centered**

Reduced funding for music programs is often blamed for keeping children from participating in music programs. This is undeniable. However, lack of funding is not the only obstacle that holds our kids back. Music education has not sufficiently kept pace with the broad cultural and technological developments of the past fifty years, thus making music education less accessible to a broad swath of today’s youth, especially youth in marginalized communities.
Music dominates youth culture and kids often define themselves by the music they listen to. Music is something around which they can socially engage and communicate with peers. Students seeking that cultural identity and relevance are not finding it in many existing programs.

Modern Band programming takes a student-centered approach. It leverages students’ cultural capital. This can forge stronger bonds between traditionally marginalized students and the schools that serve them. Because the repertoire is drawn from popular culture, it can change with the times and is thus more responsive to student's preferences.

**#2 Modern Band Increases Access by Integrating Beginners More Easily**

Traditional music education programs have been likened to a train leaving a station. When the train leaves the station, some children are on the train, others are not. The children left behind will have a difficult time boarding that train in the future should they choose to do so. As the saying goes, “The train has left the station.”

For example say that a 9th grade child decides that they would like to join an Orchestral Program. If that Orchestral Program started preparing children in the 5th grade, it will be very difficult to integrate the new student who will now be four years “behind” and will lack the skills needed to participate in the orchestra, most notably the ability to read parts. The same can be true for Marching Band or Jazz Band “Johnny- or Janey-come-latelies.” This is due to the sequential presentation of materials in these programs and to the more rigid programming necessitated by this approach.

If these more traditional programs may be likened to a train that leaves a particular station leaving certain passengers behind, then Modern Band might be likened to a carousel whose points of entry are more varied and fluid. Children who have not participated in instrumental music programs in the past can be integrated more easily into Modern Band Programs.

To understand why this is the case it is important to look at how people come to learn popular music outside of the school context, in the real world. The work of Lucy Green, the renowned Professor of Music Education at the University of London, tells us much on this topic.

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**The Result (of Little Kids Rock)**

Has been a collaboration that has allowed a small community to form of guitarists on every level where everyone contributes. No one is ever left behind. Eventually, the songs will follow. Kids, of all sizes, rock!

– TED BLOCK, HS FOR HEALTH PROFESSIONS & HUMAN SERVICES; MANHATTAN, NYC
Green’s research notes that outside of schools, pop music is learned in settings that are largely informal. Barriers to playing such as note reading, music theory and, to a lesser degree, technique, are not present at the beginning of a learner’s journey. The result is that the novice is engaged in music making activities almost immediately. Green also notes that the students who learn in this way have an uneven and incomplete understanding of music. Nevertheless, they play music.

The methodology behind Modern Band programming draws upon what Green calls “informal learning techniques.” This brings an inherent flexibility that allows the teacher to create everything from a small rock band to a large ensemble and to do so for children at vastly different points in their own musical development. This adaptive approach is not solely dependent on one type of model. Therefore, Modern Band allows the teacher to craft ensembles that are well suited to the needs of their students.

#3 Modern Band Fosters Authorship
Popular musicians frequently compose or “write” their own music. A well-run Modern Band program teaches children to do the same. This empowers them to use music for its primary, inherent purpose: namely as a communicative tool. Modern Band integrates composition and improvisation at the beginning of children’s educations as a means of ensuring that they experience the confidence building and self-esteem raising benefits that come with authorship.

Authorship is an area that is curiously absent in music education programs in the US today and this is a strange anomaly. Why an anomaly? Picture a well-run school that fully embraces children’s creativity. What would you expect to see adorning the walls? Paintings. Poetry. Drawings. Stories. Sculptures. And who would have produced these works of art? The students of course! Now, picture a school with an excellent music program that reaches most of the student body. Visualize the repertoire. Do original, student compositions factor in? Currently, all other fields of arts education afford authorship opportunities to young children: music education is often the sole exception.

#4: Modern Band Sustains Outside of School
The instruments and styles used in Modern Band are broadly used outside of the public school system and therefore op-
opportunities for a child to continue playing after their schooling abound. If we examine the experience of people engaged in Modern Band-like settings outside of the schools, we see that the activities that they engage in foster lifelong enjoyment of music-making.

This is not always the case for kids who study music in school. For example, students who participate in Marching band may not find as many opportunities to play music in their communities outside of the school environment.

#5: Modern Band is Flexible and Regionally Adaptable

Modern Bands take on many forms and rely on musical genres that are dynamic and changing. As a result, teachers enjoy great flexibility and portability in their music classes. Imagine a marching band missing a low brass section? The pieces of this type of ensemble are a puzzle and without that one piece, the picture cannot be completed.

The inherent flexibility of Modern Band programming allows the teacher to create everything from a small rock band to a large ensemble. This adaptive approach is not solely dependent on one type of model. Therefore, Modern Band allows the teacher to craft an ensemble that is best suited to the needs of their students.

Furthermore, in a community where students are immersed in Country Rock, or another where Reggaeton is popular a teacher can tap into these genres using the same basic techniques. This means that a Modern Band Program in Atlanta, where Hip Hop is in vogue, may well look different in terms of repertoire than a program in Dallas where Rock en Español and Mariachi are popular with children.

Benefit #6: A Lay-Person’s Pedagogy

Drawing liberally from the teaching practices and learning dispositions of the rock ‘n’ roll laity, a Modern Band approach is replicated in public schools and yet maintains the core value of the “pop approach” to music making. Think of the long-haired guitar teacher at the back of the music store or the older sister in a band or the Beatles or Nirvana or the legions and legions of people who play, learn and/or teach contemporary music. How do they pass on the knowledge? They use a simple, direct, hands on approach to teaching, one that eschews the abstract for the concrete and one whose highest
virtues include immediate engagement and “customer satisfaction.”
It is important to note that the Modern Band repertoire is mostly taught by non-traditional teachers using non-traditional methodologies. It also learned almost entirely outside of the public school system. We are missing a tremendous opportunity to connect with a large percentage of our students. Again, Modern Band aligns a portion of public school music programs with the genres and methodologies that drive the broader word of music that exists outside of our schools.

THE BIRTH OF THE MODERN BAND MOVEMENT:
By 2009, District leaders in cities like New York, Tampa, Los Angeles, Tampa and Chicago had partnered with Little Kids Rock to facilitate successful, large-scale Little Kids Rock programming in their schools. Around this time, our organization began working with these partner districts to consider the adoption of Modern Band as a district-wide program designed to take an equal seat alongside of other existing music programs.

“I remember being in Tampa speaking with Melanie Faulkner, the Supervisor of Elementary Music at School District of Hillsborough County back in 2008,” says David Wish. “She was really the first music department leader who helped me to see the obvious.” Faulkner, pleased with the growth of Little Kids Rock in her school district, the nation’s eighth most populous, observed that Little Kids Rock was creating a large-scale, alternative music program throughout her schools.

“Melanie explained how she wanted to vertically articulate the program so that children in elementary, middle and high school could participate. For me, this was a tipping point,” says Wish. “It reframed my thinking about how far we could take our work. I named this new category of music program “Modern Band” and I brought the idea of a vertically articulated, Modern Band music programs to our other district leaders. Their enthusiasm and readiness for the was instant and the movement began just that simply.”

THE MODERN BAND MOVEMENT TODAY AND THE ROAD AHEAD:
Modern Band is a term coined by Little Kids Rock to give currency to the idea that music education needs a scaleable, replicable way to stay current. We risk losing a significant swath of students if we don’t do this. Like our forebears before us who ushered Jazz band into our schools, Little Kids Rock is working with districts
to bring pop music into the schools.

Modern Band is now a new and growing movement, a movement to expand children’s access to music in our schools and to bring our nation’s rich popular music into our schools as an option for our students. As of 2013, “Modern Band” classes have become an official component of music programs in many of the nation’s largest public school districts. This has been the result of the partnerships that Little Kids Rock has forged with forward-thinking music education leadership in key markets. The New York Department of Education, the Los Angeles Unified School District and Chicago Public Schools each offer Modern Band programs at many of their elementary, middle and high school sites.

Some of these Modern Band Programs have grown quite large. In Hillsborough Public Schools, over 36% of sites feature Modern Band programming and approximately 30% of the student body at those schools participate in and benefit from the offerings. Not to be outdone, the public school systems in New York City and in Los Angeles are scaling up rapidly and hope to reach 20% of their students, district wide, by the year 2018.

There are now over one thousand public schools in the US that offer Modern Band programming to their students. This number is equal more or less to the number of public schools that feature Little Kids Rock programming. This makes sense since our organization has been partnering with public-school teachers for over a decade to restore and revitalize music education in our public schools.

Yet the two things, Little Kids Rock and Modern Band are not exactly synonymous.

Little Kids Rock is a mission-driven, nonprofit organization that transforms children’s lives by restoring and revitalizing music education in our nation’s public schools. Modern Band is a term invented by Little Kids Rock to help reframe the national dialog around music education in general.

The Modern Band movement has been very grass roots up to this point. The next leaders of the Modern Band Movement must come from the world of higher education. Teacher education programs are preparing tomorrow’s music teachers must begin offering Modern Band-oriented courses to their students. At the time of this writing, there is not a single music education course designed to prepare new school teachers how to run a program
that focuses on the commercially relevant music of the past fifty years with a special emphasis upon the music of today.

This will not remain the case for much longer. Little Kids Rock is deeply involved in partnerships with teacher education programs at progressive colleges who are similarly committed to training their next generation of public school music teachers on how to run Modern Band music programs.

Little Kids Rock is a grassroots organization whose program has been built one teacher, one school and one district at a time. We have become a teacher-conceived, teacher-led educational movement, one that won’t rest until every public school student has the opportunity to unlock their inner music-maker.

We are now propagating the central tenants of our movement into schools of higher education to complete the “Modern Band” ecosystem and ensure that children across the country can enjoy its many benefits. An important part of the next phase of our movement will similarly be built one school of music education partner at a time.