

Chapter Thirteen: Happy Hearts Music: Orff and Other Melodies



Music played an important part in the home and school lives of Happy Hearts students. Several classroom teachers interwove music into their curriculum. Over the years, Happy Hearts students sang in choirs and performed in school programs. Many students developed a knowledge and appreciation of music by listening to the popular songs of the day.

Some people believed that special needs students and Ash/Craft workers couldn't fully appreciate music much less perform it. Happy Hearts students and teacher Michael DeMarino proved them wrong!



Sing, Sing a Song



The combined Advanced Classes perform "Sing A Song," by the Carpenters at a Happy Hearts spring music program.

*Sing, sing a song,
Sing out loud, sing out strong,
Sing of good things, not bad,
Sing out happy, not sad,
Sing, sing a song,
Make it simple, to last your whole life long,
Don't worry that it's not good enough,
For anyone else to hear,
Just sing, sing a song.*

As often happens, the musical journeys of Michael DeMarino and the Happy Hearts Orff players began with simple songs, songs like "Sing A Song" by the Carpenters and "Camptown Races" by Stephen Foster, simple elemental songs. The story of the Orff Band and other music at Happy Hearts School holds more complicated twists and turns, but rests on a simple truth: music is for everyone who wants to explore it, including special needs children. It can be combined with

movement, dance, speech, and play. “Special needs children learn music and perform and the process can be fun and still be music education,” Mike firmly believes.

According to Carl Orff, a German composer, conductor and educator, this elemental music is recorded in everyone, but only some choose to hear it as life throws discords and distractions.

Carl Orff expressed the concept of elemental music when he wrote that his method of teaching music involved building on the natural speech and body rhythms innate in everyone. He believed that elemental music could be created, learned, and understood and performed without extensive musical training. He wrote that elemental music “is never music alone but unifies with movement, dance and speech. It is music that one makes oneself, in which one can take part not as a listener but as a participant...Elemental music is near the earth, natural and physical within the range of everyone to learn it and experience it and suitable for the child.”

Mike DeMarino embraced Orff’s musical philosophy and he experienced Orff’s elemental music by listening to his musical soul and earning a B.S. in Music Education at Edinboro University in Pennsylvania, focusing on the K12 certification. He expected to teach music in the public schools, but then he listened to Happy Hearts principal Jim Conroy advocate the possibilities of tapping into the music in the souls of special needs children. Jim Conroy convinced Mike DeMarino to teach music to the children at Happy Hearts.

In January 1974, Mike began his musical curriculum at Happy Hearts School, including all children and adults from pre-school through the Ash/Craft adult workshop. He conducted music classes two to three times per week and taught the children singing, moving, and playing Orff instruments. They could practice their music and hone their talents by participating in choir and band.

The music curriculum also featured planned musical shows. Mike and his colleagues and students presented the music shows which were open to the public, three times a year- at Halloween, Christmas, and to celebrate spring. The musical shows included all classes and adults until the adults moved to a new independent work shop, when the focus shifted to preschool and school age children.



The choir performs "America" at a Happy Hearts School program.



The players pose with their new shirts from Sonor Percussion in the music room.

Happy Halloween...



Merry Christmas...



Melvin Mann, a soft-spoken student, shines as the Happy Hearts Christmas tree during a Happy Hearts Christmas program.



The Advanced Girls lead the Pre-School Class singing "Up on the Housetop."



The choir sings "White Christmas."

Besides putting his Orff musical principles into practice and helping his students find and release their singing voices, Mike's music classes and musicals gave parents the joy that many on the other side of the "special needs" label take for granted. Happy Hearts parents, grandparents, other relatives and friends could attend concerts and search for that one special smile above the choir robe or the special set of dimpled knees under the custom-made costume and like any other proud parent, smile and wave when they found them.

"He gave our family the gift of concerts and excited kids participating in them while equally excited families watched," one parent said.

"He coaxed music from our child that we never knew existed," another commented.



Saluting Spring!

Andy Fields performs "The Rainbow Connection", one of his favorite songs, during a spring concert.



The Primary Classes sing, "Mr. Golden Sun Please Shine Down on Me," in a Happy Hearts spring concert.

Through the years Mike completed additional course work to earn a MSPR certificate from the state of Ohio. From 1974 until the 1990s, his activities in the Ohio Music Educators Association and the Orff Schulwerk Association enabled him to complete special training and consultation in music education through seminars and conferences. He and his students were invited to perform in Cleveland where he met some of the composers and teachers of the music he used in the classroom.

Let the world, Sing Along....

Sing, sing a song,

Let the world, sing along,

Sing of love that could be, sing for you and for me,

Sing, sing a song,

Make it simple, to last your whole life long,

Don't worry that it's not good enough.

For anyone else to hear,

Just sing, sing a song.

The entire world didn't sing along with the Happy Hearts choirs and the Orff Band players, but their voices and band penetrated far beyond the boundaries of Ashtabula County, with more and more people enjoying their music.

By 1975, Mike had decided to start a band for his students, but discovered that donated instruments, mostly brass and woodwinds weren't suitable for them to play. Through funding, donations, and instrument trades, Mike and his supporters acquired more suitable Orff instruments like xylophones, marimbas, glockenspiels, metallophones, designed to resonate and produce a sound when players hit them with mallets. Drums and recorders are also used in the Orff method of making music.

Mike candidly admits that it took some attitude adjustment on his part to become accustomed to the atonal concept of Orff music when his background and training had focused on the tonal. Most music that is written in the western classical tradition is organized around a tonal center which means that it has a set harmonic and ordered patterns. A generic definition of atonal music is music that appears to lack a clearly defined tonal center. Sometimes Orff music features threads of theme and clusters of sound but it doesn't have a clearly defined traditional format like tonal music. "Once I adjusted my attitude, I discovered that the Orff method gave me freedom of interpretation and the freedom to create music outside of the traditional box," he said.

Using his creative freedom, Mike composed music, including the Happy Hearts Alma Mater which is sung at every graduation, and he founded the Orff Band. Working through the inevitable sour notes and crashing chords, Mike and his pupils created their distinctive musical signature. Soon the Happy Hearts Orff Band was performing for local, state, and eventually national audiences. The Orff Band was featured in a national magazine, *The Sample Case*, featuring the latest advances in performance techniques for mentally retarded players.

From its Happy Hearts home base, the Orff Band performed at school music programs, local schools and at the YMCA for community service groups. It played at the County Home, the Ashtabula Towers for senior citizens, and at the local mall. Eventually, the choir was taken away from the program, but the band was allowed to continue. The Orff Band concerts grew in popularity and the band performed in the community as well as the school.

In 1980, the band was invited to play at the “Cherry Blossom Festival” in Washington D.C., but it couldn’t accept because of the expense involved. It was also invited to perform at the Mentor Pavilion and Recreation Center and did present its Orff demonstration and show there.

Under Mike’s guidance the music program at Happy Hearts received critical acclaim and in 1984, Ohio States Art Consultant Doris Pfleufer evaluated the program as being a model program in Ohio.

In 1985, the Ohio Music Educators Association nominated the Orff Band to perform at the national “Very Special Arts Festival” which was held in Washington D.C. The band flew to Washington D.C. and stayed at the Gallaudet University for the deaf. The band then played a concert on National Public Radio at the Kennedy Center.

In 1986, the band opened the Professional Association for Retardation convention at the Ohio center in Columbus, playing and conducting a participation demonstration.



A circle dance with audience participation at the PAR Conference at Ohio Center in Columbus, Ohio.



Tammy Shaw relaxes in between shows at the PAR Conference in Ohio Center.

In 1986, the Orff Band traveled on a one-week tour, "The Liberty Eastern Seaboard Performance Tour." They toured and performed in Boston, New York City, Philadelphia and at the Lincoln Memorial and on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington D.C.

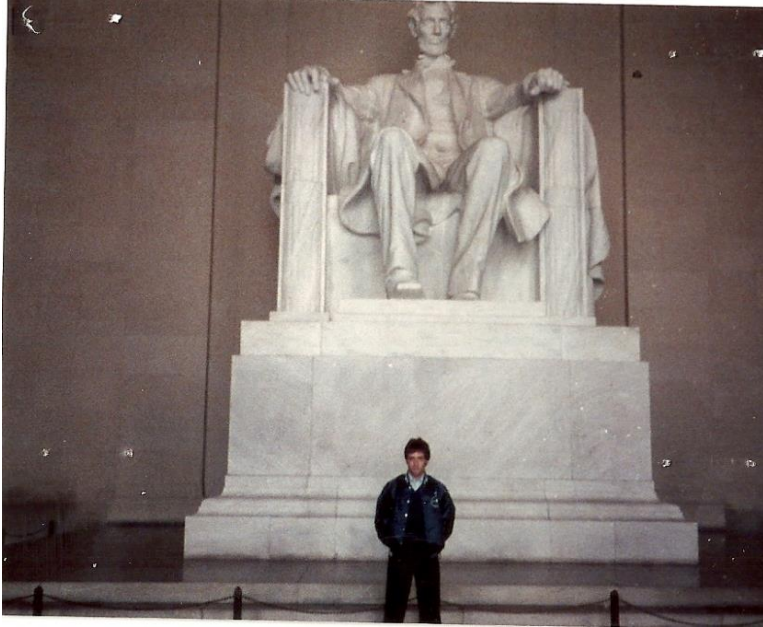


Visiting the Statue of Liberty in New York City.



The Orff Players play at Faneuil Hall in Boston with their tour bus in the background.





Jerry Kangas stands in front of Abe Lincoln at the Lincoln Memorial.



*The Orff Players
perform on the steps of
the United States
Capitol Building in
Washington, D.C.*

Certificate of Award
Salute to Liberty

Eastern Seaboard Performance Program

National Independence Day
Festival and Parade



Official Event

This Certificate has been presented to

*Jeff Flayers of
Happy Hearts School*
Ashtabula, Ohio

By the Official National Independence Day
Festival and Parade, of Washington, D.C.

National Independence
Festival and Parade



Official Event



In commemoration of our founding fathers and mothers who struggled to secure
Independence and Liberty. Who established a Constitution for "We The People"
for "A More Perfect Union".

This Award is presented for your outstanding receipt and participation
in the Nation's Historic Salute to Liberty Program.

Presented This 16th day of October, 1956

Herwith C. Madson
International Director

Washington, D.C.

Paul W. Perry
Executive Director

Grace Notes



July 18, 1974

Mike DeMarino leads a group of Lincoln students singing "Jingle Bells and other music numbers presented during the students' "Christmas Gift" program. Students from all classes performed numbers for the audience of family and friends.





Washington Bound. These members of the Happy Hearts School Orff Players will be representing the State of Ohio at the National Very Special Arts Festival in Washington D.C., May 23 to 26. They are (seated left to right) Jennifer McMahan, Tammy Shaw, Gabrielle Sumner. (Standing left to right) Mike DeMarino music teacher, Hannu Roivas, Audrey Thomas, Jerry Kangas, Lee Shultz and Ray Richmond. April 9, 1984.

Ready to Perform. The Orff Players of Happy Hearts School will perform at the religious service Friday at Ashtabula Kent State University, kicking off next weekend's Blessing of the Fleet at Ashtabula Harbor. Shown are from left, Tamara Shaw and Andy Fields. Standing from left are Jeff Schultz, Dick West, Carl Arnold, Jerry Kangas, Director Mike DeMarino, Judy Kohowski, Ray Richmond, John Hurley and Audrey Thomas. May 28, 1986,



Merry Music Makers. Students at Happy Hearts School in Mike De Marino's music class will present a program entitled "Of Christmas Past," 9:30 a.m.

Wednesday at the school. The show will feature material from previous shows and is open to the public. All classes are participating and the school band also will perform. Pictured during a rehearsal are Benjamin Sullivan, Mary Almasy, Bruce Carpenter, Mike Emory, Jane Thomas, Carrie Stowe and in front to play Santa Claus is Ricarda Reynolds. December 12, 1988. Photo by Jim Matthews of the Ashtabula Star Beacon.

The Salute to Liberty and eastern travels ended, but student enthusiasm and participation and a dedicated music teacher kept the music going round and round in programs and the Orff Band for the first half of the 1990s. In March 1992, the Ashtabula Star Beacon reported that the Orff Players from Happy Hearts School entertained residents of Con-Lea Nursing Home in Geneva on March 2. The Band has performed at the White House, for the Governor of Ohio, and in Boston, New York and Philadelphia.

Michael DeMarino, Happy Hearts music teacher, directed the band. Band members included Rob DeCaro, Matt Mucci, Mary Almasy, Carrie Stowe, Ken Farley, Willie Dudas, Tony Butler, Jeff Schultz, Benjamin Sullivan, Andy Fields, Keith Henton, and Army Kuligowski. The story pointed out that the Orff Band performed for area organizations and stated that Mike DeMarino could be contacted at Happy Hearts School for information about scheduling performances.

For some musicians performing is an unenjoyable, but necessary evil accompanied by stage fright at worst and endured at best, while others crescendo in the limelight. Mike understood the necessity of public performance, public relations, and placing his band in the public eye. "It's sort of a public final exam where the students demonstrate how much they have learned. And they have fun while they're doing it. For me, it's a way of giving back to the community," he said.

The Association for Retarded Citizens for Ashtabula County also understood the benefits of exposing people to its mission while enjoying music and the Council emotionally and financially supported the Orff Band, providing funds for transportation to events and performances.

Despite the happy student performers and positive local, state, and national acclaim, the Happy Heart's Music program closed in 1996. As Mike described it, "The program came to a close when the school changed to regular classes."

The closing of his program did not end Mike's Association with Happy Hearts School. The Association for Retarded Citizens for Ashtabula County had named him Teacher of the Year in 1987. Joan Thompson, 1987 President of the Association for Retarded Citizens of Ohio summed up his impact on his students and community when she said, "Mike is a dedicated person not only in teaching music, but as friends of his students. We feel for all his accomplishments with our special children we want to honor him with this award and thank him for his dedication and love for the children."

Mike continued his career at Happy Hearts as a classroom teacher, and then as principal. Mike was the music teacher at Happy Hearts for 22 years, a classroom teacher for six and one-half years, and the principal for eight years. He retired in 2012, after 36 ½ years of service at Happy Hearts. Like Glenn Holland in the 1995 movie, "Mr. Holland's Opus," Mike DeMarino retired with a symphony of students literally and figuratively applying the music he taught them in their daily lives.

Mike DeMarino taught his students that they, too, could heard music in their hearts and souls. He helped them listen to their own music, and he enabled them to "sing a song" and let the world would sing along.



La, la, la, la, la, La la, la, la, la

La la la la la la la.

Sing a song!

More Grace Notes



Merry Musicians will perform for family and friends when the Happy Hearts classes present their Spring Music Program 9:30 a.m. Wednesday in the school cafeteria. All Happy Hearts classes will perform as well as the Orff Players and choir. Music director, Michael DeMarino invited the public. Shown are four members of the Orff Players (left to right) Hanau Roivas, Tammy Shaw, Jerry Kangas, and Jenny McMahan. Photo by Dawn Sturm.



Band members. Members of the Happy Hearts School band, the Orff Players, will be performing Friday in Cleveland at the 17th National Orff Conference. The conference is sponsored by the Orff-Schulwerk Association, which is comprised of music teachers who practice and perform music and methods of the German composer Carl Orff. The band, which has more than 10 members, includes (seated to right) Jerry Kangas; Cheryl Blair; Tim Starkey. Standing left to right, Ray Richmond and John Hurley. Photo by Sterling.



"Stars and Stripes," a Bicentennial musical program will be presented Friday at 1 p.m. at Happy Hearts School.

Members of the girls dance group practice their routine. (From left) Mary Frances Licate; Martha Herman; Michael DeMarino, Happy Hearts Music Director; Mabel Herman; and Bonnie Kray.

The program will feature novelty songs; barbershop boys; the Orff Players, girls dance group; and the school choir. The preschoolers, directed by Mrs. Marta Triozzi and Mrs. Shirley Howland will perform a song in motion entitled "Stars and Stripes Forever." The program is open to the public.

The Happy Hearts Choir sings “Deck the Halls.”



and “Silent Night.”



*Barb Scott and children
prepare to board and sing
about the "Yellow
Submarine", a Beatle's song.*

The Happy Hearts Coyote Band





Holiday Music. Mike DeMarino, music teacher at Happy Hearts and students are practicing hard for their Christmas program on Wednesday, December 14 at 9:30 a.m. Students from left to right are Carrie Stowe; Elias Vazquez; Rebecca Fortier; Benjamin Sullivan; and Mary Almasy.

Happy Hearts Sings Merry Christmas

December 3, 1988

The Happy Hearts School will present a holiday music program on Wednesday, December 14 in the school gym at 9:30 a.m. The students under the director of music teacher Mike DeMarino, will present a variety of songs from 10 previous Christmas programs.

The program is titled "Of Christmas Past," and is free of charge and open to the public. Beginning the program is the school band, the Orff Players, who will present, "Deck the Halls," "Chatter with the Angels," and "Hear that Train."

The preschool will follow with their renditions of "Christmas Time Is Here," and "Up on the House Top."

The Transitional Class will present "Must Be Santa," and "The Christmas Whale."

The primary grades will vocalize three selections, "Rudolph," "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," and "My Little Red Wagon."

The Advanced Students will present "Christmas Boxes," "Frosty the Snowman," and "Holly Jolly Christmas."

Rounding off the program will be The Work Study Group who will sing "It's Christmas Pretty Baby," "Pablo the Reindeer," "Jingle Bells", and "White Christmas."

Special Stories- Making Music in Heaven

Alison Anne Cowan graduated from Happy Hearts School and worked at Ash/Craft Industries until she retired in 1998. She participated in the musical, Rock Nativity, for several years and knew all of the words and music to the shows that her father and brother participated in as well. She died on February 5, 2005.

Sheila Ann Salvato graduated from Happy Hearts School in May 1990 and worked at Ash/Craft Industries for a time. A gifted musician, she played with her mother and aunt for six years and later with the Magic Buttons from Cleveland for nine years. While playing the Magic Buttons Sheila made three recordings and traveled to the Caribbean two times. She was a Bronze Life Time Member of the Cleveland Polka Hall of Fame. She died September 8, 2012.



Fairport Polkateers were among those honored at a recent awards dinner held at the St. Clair Slovenian Home in Cleveland. Pictured (front from left) are Fran Sajn of Concord; Pauline Meaney and Sheila Salvato of Ashtabula; Ann Barbish of Euclid; Jim Savasiano of Mentor. (Back row) Pat Salvato of Ashtabula; Warren Fabian of Willoughby Hills; Ron Loncar and Mary Shume of Euclid. They received a plaque, proclamations from Governor George Voinovich and others.

Christina Anne Pearson graduated from Happy Hearts in 1993 and worked briefly at Ash/Craft Industries. Her love of country music motivated her to travel to Nashville as well as meet John Schneider of the Dukes of Hazzard several times. She died on September 28, 2008.

Heavenly Music

Let heaven make its own music

Why did you have to solo travel there?

When angel choirs

Sing background acapella?

We need you here

Your peaceful humming,

Your soul singing notes of pure joy like morning birdsong

You toss into weary lives.

We can't see your choir but your voice

Soars in the songs

Your instruments (not necessarily a harp) play

Merging you with the melodies of our everyday lives,

Sometimes we beg you to stop

Wanting to be tone deaf to sorrow and loss,

But you keeping playing grace notes of love

Until we sing along.