

PREFERENCES FOR “A CAPPELLA” AND ACCOMPANIED SONGS: A STUDY WITH INFANT LISTENERS

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Background

Recent research has demonstrated that infants are sophisticated listeners, who exhibit some clear auditory preferences. Preverbal infants are not only drawn to human voices, but are also very attentive to parental speech and songs that are directed to them. When it comes to music, consonant and high-pitched versions of songs are said to be among infants' preferred musical selections. These findings are in synchrony with the materials commonly used in early childhood music education programs. Notwithstanding, to date little is known about infants' preferences for musical texture.

Aims

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether 8-month-old infants held preferences for two versions of a children's song: “a cappella” and accompanied.

Method

The participants were 31 normal and healthy infants (17 girls, 14 boys) with a mean age of 8 months. Infants were tested individually on the Headturn Preference Procedure (HPP), as described by Kemler-Nelson et al, (1995). Test stimuli consisted of 8 different excerpts of a

Chinese song sung by a female child and collected by ethnomusicologist Francis Corpataux (see Ilari & Majlis, 2002). Among these excerpts, 4 were in “a cappella” version and the remaining 4 included the vocal melody with a complex accompaniment. Each excerpt was presented twice to each infant, totalling 16 excerpts in the entire test series.

Results

Infants showed a preference above chance levels for the “a cappella” over the accompanied version of the song.

Conclusions

Our results indicate that infants have clear preferences for and can discriminate between simple and complex musical textures during the first year of life. Implications for music education will be discussed during the conference.