

LULLABIES OF TWO LANDS

TIV

I remember being surprised by the first Tiv lullabies I recorded in the 1960s: the lyrics seemed incongruous and unsettling and the process of "singing a lullaby" was quite physical! At some point I asked a woman with a babe in arms to sing me a lullaby and she responded by singing a song about a bull crashing in the stable as she very gently and rhythmically "cuffed" the infant on the ear and bottom, back and forth, back and forth. She cupped her hand and firmly kept the beat going, ear to butt, ear to butt, and smiled as she sang about the crashing bull or went on to the next song about a lion roaring in the jungle. The baby was probably too young to understand the words and the intention seemed to be a message about "you are safe in my arms," whatever is going on in the world. I was more puzzled about the back and forth motion that covered the ear and then gently slapped the bottom.

Of course I've been thinking lately about how we are going to get a lot more -- 10 or 20 times more -- rhythms and grooves into the lives of infants. The Tiv way of doing lullabies might help.

And why not burp babies with a 6/8 patting on the back? Or with a 12/8 bell beat? Or with slow gentle samba agogo patterns?

ALANGAN

Based on a letter from Jonas Baes (1988) we know that "in the Alangan language the hammock and the lullabye are both referred to as ya-i-yan or yai-yan. I heard a little boy sing on the text 'ya e ya i yan, yan yae ya e yan' to some children riding on a rattan hammock. When I arrived at the Casillon Mangyan Settlement in Baco, Oriental Mindoro, all the mothers were putting their children to sleep so that the lullabies were heard in practically every home. Later, I noted how vital a hammock was in rendition of a lullabye. Several Alangan women who I requested to render lullabies during a gathering said that it is awkward to sing lullabies without the movement of a hammock. The word 'ag-yai-yan' means 'to sing' (a lullabye) as it means 'to swing.'"

To sing is to swing (the hammock back and forth) is to be born to groove.

Pat Campbell:

Listen to the lullabies of women to their babies in Francis Corpataux's Le Chant des Enfants du Monde, volume 3. They are sung by mothers and "mothers-in-waiting", grandmothers, sisters and aunts, solo or sometimes by all the women in the household joining together. Lullabies promise protection, and guarantee that the little ones will sleep and awaken in the knowledge that they are kept safe by their mothers and loving others. Across the world, in Indonesia, Argentina, Senegal, Thailand, Brazil, and India, and you-name-the-place, babies hear songful pleas to sleep easily and melodic assurances that happiness, peace, and love will hover near their cradles as they sleep. It seems the human thing to do, to babble, jabber gently, and coo to the little one, and to raise one's voice (this tone higher and that tone lower) into expressive melodic phrases that communicate love.

Caregivers have a way of slowing their tempo, pitching their phrases higher than their normal speaking voice, and using more rhythmic repetitive sounds in their communications with infants. They also tend to expand their pitch ranges in playful speech, while reducing their pitch range and making it more level or even falling when their intention is to soothe. Across cultures, it is not unusual for lullabies to use *la-la*, *loo-loo*, *doo-doo*, *lo-lo*, *nah-nah*, and other soft and non-explosive syllables in their lullabies and other interactions with little ones. As the melody spins along, so also does the adult's rhythmic happen, as they rock, sway, pat, stroke, and offer other soft slo-mo gestures to the baby.

- It's well worth listening to Le Chant des Enfants due Monde, volume 3, for the variety of lullabies contained within (Arion ARN 64298, France). They are melodies easily learned despite the range of languages, due to built-in melodic repetition and short phrases. Listen repeatedly, sing along, and learn them for later use with little ones.
- Sandra Trehub's review of musical structures in adult-to-infant communication makes for a concise introduction to cross-cultural similarities (Trehub, Sandra, 2000. Human processing predispositions and musical universals, In Nils L. Wallin, Bjorn Merker, and Steven Brown, ed., The Origins of Music, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 427-448.) See also Unyk, Anna, M., Sandra E. Trehub, and Laural J. Trainor, 1992, Lullabies and simplicity: A cross-cultural perspective. Psychology of Music 20, 15-28, and Trehub, S. E., Anna M. Unyk, and Laurel J. Trainor, 1993, Adults identify infant-directed music across cultures. Infant Behavior & Development 16, 193-211.
- What go-to-sleep songs do you recall from your earliest years? Sing them, share them, pass them on. Promote the living lullabies to lull the little ones, as all of the recordings in the world can never hope to provide the soothing way of live, real-time, in-person renderings of songs to sleep on.