

Irena Pivka, Brane Zorman: *Chatter*

an introduction for adults
during a listening session with a child

Psycho-energetic radio play *Chatter* is a musical tale, its theme is toddler's vocal creativity – different ways to create sounds together with animals, trees and small children. When toddlers begin learning their first syllables, they usually enjoy it very much; but not because they want to communicate (like adults), they have other tools for that since they mostly communicate on an energetic level from the day they're born; instead, while learning different syllables they actually enjoy the process of creating (with) their own voices and the music made in this process.

Chatter's poetic vantage point is its assumption that children may be able to understand the language of animals, and that animals understand the language of toddlers. Children and animals communicate at a level, inaccessible to adults. Practicing non-verbal, meaningless chatter children are able to enter this dialogue. Interpretation of syllables – chatter - is not about exchanging verbal information; it's more of an energetic sound exchange.

INSTRUCTIONS - MAKE IT A SHARED EXPERIENCE

Radio play *Chatter* is not meant for toddlers to listen to it by themselves; firstly, because they don't have the concentration needed to be able to listen for that long. Instead, it can encourage and strengthen the bond between an adult and a child - as a shared experience of an artistic piece. The key role is given to the adult who listens together with a toddler. The adult plays the role of a mediator or rather an animator.

We'll offer some suggestions but you can also include your own ideas.

You can listen to this radio play only once or multiple times, together with your toddler. In the latter case, you can use different ways to animate your child, for example, changing the way you listen to the play and how to create with your voice.

Get a quality mobile loudspeaker and a player (maybe a laptop with Bluetooth or something similar). You're supposed to listen to this radio play while walking in a park or sitting in a garden at home. Of course you can also listen to it inside the house but be active and change locations, find a space where you can pretend there's a tree or a meadow. Sounds of animals were recorded in early Summer but you can listen at any time. To animate your child more easily, prepare some objects, which can represent a bird and a frog as well as the location of the tree.

The radio play is divided in three parts.

Introductory part is there to guide you further into the story and help you prepare for the a-part of deconstructing the syllables, chattering. Listen attentively and observe the surroundings where you walk. The best way to do this is in a park or at home in a garden.

In the **second part** you'll be invited to find a spot under a tree. Look at the tree, sit under its treetop, look at the tree together with your child, give your child a leaf to hold in their hand, or a piece of roots, bark... Try to repeat words and syllables as they appear in the play and in doing so animate your child. The adult shows the child various objects, explains notions, distances.

A tree. T-ree.

A treetop. Tree-top.

A leaf, leaves rustle.

Lea-ves ru-stle.

A tree listens.

Listen to the bird, continue deconstructing words into syllables. While doing so, you can use an object that represents a bird, like a feather for example, or something similar. Do the same when you come to the part about a frog and imagine a pond, maybe use a blanket and an object that can represent a frog. You can also communicate using gestures.

A bird. A bird sings.
A bird jumps in the treetop.
Si-ngs. Si-ngs. Si-ngs
Chirrup, chi-rrup.
Chirrup, chi-rrup
Si-ngs, chi-rrup
A bird sings. A bird sings.

From the spot under a tree you can move to a more open space, maybe close to a meadow, maybe you just move a few meters further. You do this when you come to the part in the text where it says *Let's go on a hike*. Break words into syllables, motivate your child to engage in a dialogue so you chatter together, creating different sounds.

A child. A small child.
A meadow. Mea-dow
A child crawls in the meadow. Chi_ld.
A child chatters in the grass.
A child chat-ters.

In the **third part** you can freely chatter together with your toddler or just listen to the radio play in silence. The voice is singing syllables, which are the same syllables that were part of words in previous segments but now they've become musical elements. Singing intervals serve as the basis for fine-tuning and the significance of associating singing with child's repeating of individual syllables becomes that much more visible and real. Encourage your child to sing along but don't expect them to sing a particular song or pronounce a particular word. In this segment you're meant to let your imagination run free and just enjoy listening to your own voice singing.

Concluding part is devoted to listening - listen to the radio play and the sounds in your surroundings, be it the sound of a bird singing, rustling or the noise in the street and the humming of appliances in your home. Listen and when the story ends - try to name the sound(s) that you hear.

BACKGROUND

Before the two of us, authors of this radio play, began conceiving and working on this piece, we've read an extensive amount of research and listened to several high-quality and inspiring interviews, conducted by Igor Mihael Ravnik for the B-AIR project. We were intrigued by research showing that few months old babies begin to chatter in distinct ways, depending on the linguistic environment they're growing up in. For example, the chatter of French babies is different from Slovene or Chinese babies – the sound of words, the rhythm, etc. reflect the linguistic environment within which they develop.

As one can hear in interviews we mentioned, and we've seen ourselves listening to our daughter chatter, babies' chatter isn't primarily focused on communicating. Children communicate very clearly from the day they're born and they don't need words for that. Instead, babies simply enjoy chatter because they listen to their own voice, they create using their voice...

Tackling this subject, this radio play offers a helpful tool - a possibility of a shared musical creative process with animals. A particular branch within the research of musical creativity is studying musical creations of animals and people, called zoomusicology. There are several artists who engage in these

practices, with more and more scientist following their lead. But experiencing it first hand - the synchronicity of joint creation of animals and humans - either coincidentally or when framed as an artistic event, this connection becomes much more evident.

What's also interesting is the mythological and fairy tale-like background as part of the explanation why small children are able to comprehend the language of animals. In this view, human speech – as one's desire to communicate clearly – blends heavily with the desire to create music(ally) and the boundaries between the two become blurred.

The small boy we recorded for this play, was a little over one year old, growing up bilingually and was just beginning to articulate his first word. His parents who recorded the chatter, used the text of this play (in Slovene) to stimulate him. The toddler was repeating after them, at his own pace, while enjoying his own creation. These parents are also generally very encouraging when their toddler engages in musical creativity.

The baby-girl recorded in the introductory chatter and whose voice - here and there - intertwines with the voice of the toddler, was a few months old when she was recorded. However, the grown-up singer we hear in this piece is this same baby-girl, 17 years later. Singing and musical creations are very familiar to her.

We recorded the frog in Cerknica lake in 2021, as well as sounds of the lake; the singing of a nightingale was recorded at Ljubljana Marshes in 2022; the rustling of the wind was recorded at Bukovniško Lake; and all other sounds come from the sound archive of the the author of the musical composition.

CREDITS

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Interpreters

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