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Interpretative and didactic aspects of Music Kitchen, a radio play for babies

A spoon becomes baby's first musical instrument and your kitchen a concert stage.

The authors, Tajda Lipicer and Alenja Pivko Knežević, conceived a radio play for babies (6 to 18 months) and toddlers *Music Kitchen* as an acoustic recording with pertaining graphic notation. The acoustic recording is primarily focused on active listening and auditory perception of speech, acoustic and musical acts, while the graphic notation reveals limitless possibilities when participants engage in speech, musical and singing interpretations of the text. This essay demonstrates didactic approaches and aspects of listening to a particular radio work in addition to suggestions and ideas for the parent on how to explore various interpretations the text, or some of its parts, and independently compose and execute their own performance of speech and musical elements. *Music Kitchen's* acoustic recording is primarily focused on kitchen activities, staged as an acoustic reproduction. We mostly use our kitchen to prepare meals and eat food using cutlery. So in the foreground of this acoustic activity we have a spoon, a bowl and a fork as our main eating accessories when feeding a baby or a toddler.

Radio play's musical introduction begins with a pleasant combination of *pizzicata* string instruments, a vibraphone and acoustic imitation of running water to conjure up the atmosphere in a kitchen, and concludes with the clank of a spoon, one of radio play's main protagonists. Next is a segment with a female voice that transforms introductory acoustic atmosphere into musical background to complement acoustic and musical events and create an aesthetic musical compilation. In the introduction we hear a woman speaking and a spoon tapping on kitchen objects. These sounds produce reverberating chinks of lighter color in various pitches. Associative descriptions from the introductory acoustic atmosphere - *cold, curvy, smooth, shiny* – sound like a riddle and the toddler is enticed to try and guess the object that hides in this game of acoustics and speech, performed by a woman using her voice. Background music complements her voice while she pronounces specific words and imitates sounds, associated with explicit meanings of particular words, for example – the word *cold* with a quivering voice, *curvy* with a vocal *glissando*, *shiny* with a distinctly higher pitch – while the pronunciation of individual words gradually changes the tempo (accelerating). This segment consistently alludes to solving the riddle by repeating a distinct pronunciation of »žžžž« - in various lengths and tempos. Part One ends with playful pronunciation of associative meanings and solution to the riddle, i.e. the spoon. Part Two is a game using speech and the word 'spoon', switching between dividing its syllables and particular letters in a dialogue with cello's *tremolo*. The woman's voice is used for a declamation, associated with feeding a baby and counting the number of bites for the baby and the mother. Part Two ends with a prolonged ringing sound and vocalized 'a' that illustrates blowing on food, which is too hot. Introduction to Part Three begins with an acoustic image of blowing air, while activities using the spoon as a prop continue with the spoon falling into a very hot soup. The authors use sonorous words like *whoosh, whoosh, splush, splash* to audibly portray activities such as eating lunch or a meal. The combination of reverberating meaningless words with words like *eeny, miny*, and vocal interpretation as accelerating pronunciation is similar to children's counting rhymes and concludes with an acoustic element - the spoon plunged in the soup

and we hear »ooo«, illustrating surprise. This act is also the beginning of Part Four and serves to audibly illustrate spoon's unhappiness, adding a new element - acoustic depiction of soup (water sound effect). Pronouncing the words *fiery, flaming, burning, writhing, pinching, tickling, stinging* underlines spoon's unhappy feelings because it fell in the soup. The spoon is tiny and anxious, audibly depicted by slight echoing and distant water sound effect for the soup, as well as playful pronunciations of aforementioned words' meanings – using vocal *glissando* for 'writhing', cut-off syllables *portato* for 'pinching', lightly pitched and mischievous 'tickling', whispering for 'stinging', and in the background vocal and acoustic elements to illustrate blowing on a soup that's too hot. Part Four This concludes with this act.

In Part Five the action moves away from the spoon as the main protagonist. The focus is on introducing a new activity - eating the soup and baby's pleasure of enjoying the food, which is verbally and poetically articulated, and includes musical background conveyed as »mmm« that ends with singing a particular segment, repeating the text we heard in Part Three. We hear the woman singing, her voice is covering the span of minor sixth, first preceded by introductory jump of perfect fifth and then a half tonal sequence repetition, with piano and string instruments in the background. Transition to Part Six is marked by a segment that includes singing and repeatedly pronouncing »for« - part of the word 'fork' – this announces a new activity, which is eating the main dish using a fork. Vocal narration describes the position of the fork - *on the table, next to the plate, in the hand* – with cello *tremolo* and clanks of the fork (to suggest putting down cutlery on a plate) in the background. Sudden acoustic and vocal *glissando* illustrates a moment of surprise - the fork fell on the floor and we hear «ouch», a sound interjection expressing the feeling of pain. So the next activity is introduced - searching for the fork under, next to and above the table, which is performed by using vocal pronunciation and acoustic element of knocking, in addition to consistent speech acceleration and musical background, consisting of a piano, a vibraphone and knocking. In Part Seven the fork is back and feeding the baby various dishes continues; using sonorous words and enthusiastic pronunciation of »yum«, »yum«, or rejection using »eeuw« illustrates baby's pleasure by playing with words as sonorous expressions of enthusiasm and rejection. This part ends with a segment including a piano, a vibraphone and spoon tapping we heard in the introduction. In conclusion, decelerating water sound effect marks the end of our meal, the fork and the spoon jump into the sink, while the acoustic element of running water represents washing used cutlery after a meal. Radio play's concluding segment is the repetition of the main musical theme we heard in the introduction.

Radio play for babies and toddlers *Music Kitchen* is 10'33" long and tends to encourage either independent listening to the radio play as an acoustic example, or listening to this musical artwork in a specific setting where parent(s) and the baby (or toddler) can interact with each other. Baby's (or a toddler's) artistic experience is facilitated by authors' comprehensive approach incorporating speech, vocal, acoustic and musical elements. Wholesome experience of acoustic and musical elements, audibly illustrating kitchen activities during eating a meal, feels familiar to the child as it resembles particular acoustic environment they already know from everyday life. Rich and pleasant acoustic associations not only offer an aesthetic experience in the context of enjoying (in) art(work), but also take into consideration what is(n't) appropriate for baby's developing acoustic sensibility and cognition. Attractive acoustic and musical elements, text's dramatic and intense speech pronunciation, vocal interpretation of a woman inhabiting a higher frequency span, in addition to excellent speech articulation and vocal intonation, is an excellent combination for capturing baby's or toddler's attention. In spite the fact that narrative content is too advanced for baby's cognitive level, *Music Kitchen* is nevertheless ingeniously designed in terms of acoustics and speech - the baby is able to recognize different sounds and intuitively associate them with kitchen activities taking place during a meal. Toddlers on the other hand, might even enhance their sensitivity to speech, sound

and musical elements precisely because they can also understand the content as well as perceive acoustics and resonant but meaningless words. Playing with syllables and words interpreted by woman's voice, in combination with complementary acoustic and musical background of good quality, will arouse child's attention, enthusiasm and desire to imitate what they hear. Thinking about didactic approaches while listening to *Music Kitchen*, we can create different settings for a baby or a toddler – they can listen to the radio play independently or, for even better impact the listening could include mutual interaction between a parent and a baby or a toddler. In the latter case, the parent could for example make an enthusiastic speech introduction describing what they're going to listen to together before they actually start listening, and thereby entice the toddler to listen to the radio play. Another recommendation is to pay close attention to the child when they listen to it for the first time and make notes about child's specific reactions to speech, acoustic and musical elements. At the end the parent can present these observations to the child in a way that's appropriate, as well as keep making an effort for the child to stay interested and engaged by for example, putting more emphasis on those segments the child was able to follow so that they're encouraged to repeat them while following parent's lead. The parent can repeat certain segments not just during active listening while playing with the child, but also before or after a meal, or at any time they have appropriate props at hand, such as cutlery, bowls, spoons and forks. Yet another recommendation is to treat *Music Kitchen* as an artwork and listen to it multiple times, also because children love repetitions; this will entice deeper aesthetic experiences as well as encourage the development of listening sensibility, attention and memorizing. Multiple listening can include an introductory speech, prior arrangements for various settings as well as parent's comments of segments they already listened to; also for example, intermittent pausing while listening to the recording and the parent interpreting parts they already listened to, in addition to repeatedly encouraging the baby (or toddler) to try and produce appropriate vocal expressions. It is best if listening to a radio play takes place in a family environment, during the day when playing games with the child is usually on the agenda, or rather when the child is awake and ready for it. Authors also recommend the parent is present during this listening activity, and better yet if they listen together and have a close, bodily contact, for example the baby (or toddler) is sitting in parent's lap; that not only makes children feel safe but also comfortable enough to use their imagination and express their creative tendencies. It is necessary to set up a physical space the child finds comfortable before listening to these types of artworks, in addition to acoustically arranging it so that there are no distracting external sound stimuli. Lastly, it is highly advised to make sure the recording and the sound player device are of good quality and the volume is set to an appropriate level, i.e. it shouldn't be too loud.

Tajda Lipicer and Alenja Pivko Knežević created a radio phonic artwork that includes graphic notation and can serve as a source material for acoustic creations and improvisations while listening to the radio play. The graphic notation contains a legend explaining the symbols; this helps in encouraging a listener to explore the process of creating different sounds independently, that is without the acoustic source material from the radio play. In this variation the adult creates acoustic elements and acoustic environment on its own, finding inspiration in kitchen activities during for example, preparing food or eating. The authors suggest a whole range of kitchen utilities (a spoon, a fork, a bowl, a kitchen table, rice or dry beans), a rattle as a musical instrument and human voice (vocal *glissandos* going up and down, blowing air, using different pitches) that can be used for the purpose of playing, acoustic exploration and improvisation while setting up one's own acoustic-musical kitchen in the process. The text in combination with symbolic language from the graphic notation entices one to explore creative approaches in designing acoustic images, or acoustic and musical elements, which adult participants can use for improvising and sonorous kitchen activities while preparing and eating a meal. The adult should experiment and explore creative possibilities by

producing various sounds of different sound colors and using specific objects mentioned in the graphic notation's legend; they can also try and upgrade particular acoustic elements by designing interesting rhythmic and/or melodic samples as well as use different speeds (*tempo*) and dynamics in their performative execution. Human voice should be used in an ingenious and thought-out manner, for example for pronunciation one could employ a variety of vocals and pitches for phonemes or syllables and acoustic words; in addition to supporting better pronunciation of syllables and words, or singing in various registers (higher, lower), vocal colors (light, dark), whispering, different dynamics (quiet, loud, increasing, decreasing), tempos (slow, moderate, fast, accelerating, decelerating) as well as rhythmic and melodic samples. Graphic notation precisely defines the selection of acoustic instruments and how to execute it performance-wise in combination with textual content, while at the same time allowing plenty of room for adult's imagination when searching for new possibilities, such as including various other kitchen objects or vocal elements as well as exploring one's speech and singing capabilities in addition to improvising in an idiosyncratic and unique way. The acoustics of kitchen activities thus depends on how much parents are willing to improvise during their live performances, while deviating from the radio play can produce acoustically innovative and unique elements that are certain to arouse child's attention and keep it focused on acoustic elements and activities; moreover, this will enhance child's ability to hold attention and concentration and encourage them to freely explore their own vocal capabilities, acoustic nature of objects and movement actions. Very often parents hold back when exploring their own vocal and singing capabilities and improvising, but an artwork such as *Music Kitchen*, which also includes a sound recording for babies and toddlers, offers an important insight into adult's performative possibilities and children imitating them, with its graphic notation complementing independent exploration of acoustic instruments and musical improvisation in a familiar environment.

In baby's developing stages parents play a leading role, crucial for exploring creative processes and improvisation with acoustic elements. It is nevertheless advised that this creative process and improvisation, with or without acoustic source material, takes place in a kitchen environment. One possibility is the baby is watching the parent perform various acoustic activities in the kitchen while sitting in their lap during a meal, and another when the baby is sitting independently and observing parent's acoustic and musical improvisation as a musical performance taking place on a "kitchen stage". It is also highly recommended to place considerable emphasis on pronunciation while performing, for example in a situation where the baby is laying on a diaper changing table and the parent is leaning over the baby, pronouncing different words in a creative manner, such as using expressive vocal elements, speech and singing improvisations; this variation also allows for more eye contact and closest proximity, which creates an environment that feels safe. Additionally, the baby is able to observe how syllables and words are pronounced, they see mouth articulation, they can listen to parent's voice and look at adult's expressions of speech and singing. At first, the baby will only listen and observe what the parent is doing; very soon however, the baby will start responding and, in its own unique way, try to be included in parent's activity; the baby will express this by vocalizing and chatter, as an attempt to communicate while imitating the parent. Baby's reactions will be more intense and distinct if the parent is creative in their pronunciation and able to articulate and pronounce words clearly and distinctly. The results of parent's efforts to engage their baby in this way, will appear gradually and baby's movement and vocal reactions will become more intense, which will in turn stimulate their motor, speech and singing development, while on an emotional level these kinds of ingenious parent's performances are very enjoyable for the baby who will respond enthusiastically and demand that the parent repeats them.

In toddler's developmental phase, the role of the parent - in terms of execution, creation and improvisation of *Music Kitchen*'s source material and graphic notation - is just as crucial. At first, the toddler will observe the adult exploring various creative and performative approaches, but after a while, the toddler will start to imitate adult's activities; and later on upgrade their own engagement to the level of independently exploring acoustic and musical possibilities, using available props and their vocal for speech and sound production. It is highly recommended that parents encourage this or better yet, get involved in this acoustic and musical activity while also paying attention to toddler's creative tendencies in order to be able to better assess which ones their toddler needs more help with, to support their creative activity as much as possible, especially in moments of spontaneous creative production of similar or different acoustic and musical elements. These kinds of deviations from original acoustic and musical source material are extremely important and also completely natural in early childhood. Encouraging exploration, improvisation and creation with new acoustic and musical elements is closely associated with developmental characteristics most often detected in chatter or singing caprices. To avoid falling into the usual trap, which is a mold comprised of learning popular texts or singing songs, listening to a radio play is an excellent mechanism for encouraging and supporting child's typical needs of wanting to explore acoustic and musical world, as well as creating acoustic and musical samples using various props, objects and musical instruments in addition to speech and musical samples produced by their own voice. It is also advisable to be cautious when choosing objects to be used as props; they shouldn't be sharp, dangerous to use or cause bodily harm; but props can help support child's creativity in exploring how different sounds, their colors and pitches are produced. Interaction between the parent and the toddler during the process of creating acoustic and musical landscape should feel safe, it is a space where they can be close to each other and that will open up limitless possibilities in applying creative approaches. One other recommendation is that at a certain point, the adult starts to refrain from creating direct incentives for the toddler and let them explore and be creative on their own, while the adult pulls back to observe and chaperon. Moreover, observing should focus on figuring out, which props, acoustic and musical elements the toddler likes best so that next time when they replay these activities, the parent can create a setting that really entices the toddler by providing props, which the toddler likes, while later on even add new, additional props or exchange them for new ones.

Radio play *Music Kitchen* the authors Tajda Lipicer and Alenja Pivko Knežević created for babies and toddlers, includes two types of conceptual source material that stimulate the development of audible perception, sensibility and attention to sound - listening activity with the musical part in addition to exploring, creating and improvising with the graphic notation. Authors' knowledge of baby's musical and developmental features in terms of sensor and motor development, and of toddlers at the level of their pre-operative phase, significantly stimulates not only their musical but also their overall development by using appropriate vocal, acoustic and musical elements. The acoustic recording is an excellent vantage point for the parent, as the most pivotal adult figure in child's life, to embark on the path of exploring creative approaches while performing kitchen activities. Parent's performative role in creating an aesthetic artistic experience is an important mechanism for stimulating their child to explore acoustic elements as well as their own creative tendencies. One last recommendation is to listen to the radio play *Music Kitchen* in a family environment and engage in creative activities during listening; the source material is comprised of carefully chosen, acoustically and musically refined elements that support the needs detected while studying baby's or toddler's developmental features. Lastly, creating (more) radio works for babies and toddlers is important because it addresses the lack of similar radio and musical works in this field in Slovene language.