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Music for Prenatal and Postnatal Babies

Music is so universal can be related to almost everything in the world especially when it comes to the nursing field. Nursing is a field that relates to so many aspects of life as well and the two intertwine in many different ways. One way specifically is how music can be used for prenatal and postnatal babies in nursing as well as the effects on the mother. Music facilitates a bond between a mother and child as well as individually affecting the baby itself whether it is still in the womb or not. However, there are certain parameters to introducing a baby to music which should be followed in order to prevent harm. Music is a great way to stimulate a baby and keep everything calm and relaxed since this can be a stressful time in both the baby’s and the mother’s life. Certain types of music are generally used to create this effect. Claude Debussy’s The Girl with the Flaxen hair has certain elements in is that are frequently present in music used for prenatal and postnatal babies.

Claude Debussy was a Romantic composer from France. He was born in 1862 in Saint-Germain-en-laye, France and died in 1918 in Paris, France (“Claude Debussy”). The genres he focused on we orchestral, chamber, opera, and piano. Debussy studied at the Paris Conservatory at age 11 which was the leading music school in the entire world back then. While a student, Nadezhda von Meck discovered him and employed him as a music teacher. He worked and played duets with her children which allowed him to travel all around. This experience exposed Debussy to many Russian composers who became important influences on his work (Lockspeiser). Twelve years later, he left the school as an amazing well-developed composer who would result in having a major impact on late ninetieth and twentieth century music. “Debussy is considered the founder and leading exponent of musical Impressionism, and his adoption of non-traditional scales and tonal structures was paradigmatic for many composers who followed (“Claude Debussy”).”

In 1884, he won the Prix de Rome with his cantata L’enfant prodigue. This accomplishment helped him further his education in Rome for another two years. He was given a three year stay at the Villa Medici in Rome where he supposed to be exploring his creative mind (Lockspeiser). Until this time, Debussy had been influenced by Richard Wagner’s operas like many artists were of this time. Most people fortunate enough to receive this opportunity found it annoying and irritable. Debussy was one of these composers and fled the Villa to return to Paris. After this, Debussy distanced himself from this, so he could focus on creating his own voice. Some of his music reflects impressionist and symbolist painters and writers at this time (Lockspeiser).

The Girl with the Flaxen Hair was written between late 1909 and early 1910. Its first show was in June of 1910. This composition title was brought on from the poem *La fille aux cheveux de lin* by Leconte de Lisle published in 1852. The song was dedicated to Madame Vasnier. She was a red headed, married woman and a singer who Debussy become very fond of. He wrote many love songs about her one of which was The Girl with the Flaxen Hair (“F is for Flaxen and Fille”). The song is only about two and a half minutes long and is simple yet sweet. It has a slower tempo with a beautiful melody that sounds like longing and love. It is played with the piano all throughout as well. It has no lyrics which adds to the tone of the song. The listener does not have lyrics to sort of tell them how to feel. Without lyrics, the listen focuses only on the notes themselves and how they many one feel. With the rhythm, the tone color, and the absence of lyrics, Debussy creates a magical piece that can make almost anybody feel the inspiring love in this particular piece of music.

Listening to music while pregnant can help strengthen the bond between mother and child and assist with the development of the fetus and infant. The bond between a mother and child is sacred and music can help reinforce this. Music, especially the mother singing to the baby, is a way for the mother and baby to interact whether it is a fetus or an infant. It gives the baby a sense of safety and security with the mother. It even has a chemical component to it from passing happy endorphins from the mother through the placenta to the fetus (“The Benefits of Playing Music in the Womb”).

Studies have shown that along with music affecting the bond of the mother and child it also helps reduce postpartum depression. Postpartum depression affects about thirteen percent of new mothers. The symptoms of this can include fatigue, insomnia, anxiety about baby, and feelings of guilt. These symptoms can hinder the ability to bond with the baby and can affect the babies’ development if they are not receiving the emotional and physical care that they need (“Music and Motherhood explored how creative engagement”). A particular study was done to see the effects of psychosocial interventions on treating mothers with postpartum depression and decreasing the occurrence. The study examined the effects of singing and playing with mother and baby to see if either one helped the process of treating postpartum depression. The researchers had a group of women who went through the usual care of new mothers, a group who had the usual care plus creative play with infant, and a group who went through the usual care plus singing with infant. The study used over 2,000 women during pregnancy and over the course of a year after giving birth. The researchers tracked the overall wellbeing of the mother and the symptoms of postpartum depression (“Music and Motherhood explored how creative engagement”).

The results of this study showed that “mothers with moderate-severe symptoms of PND who took part in 10-week singing classes with their baby had a significantly faster improvement in symptoms than mothers having their usual care (“Music and Motherhood”).” There was no significant change between those in usual care and those who used creative play. Singing shows to be a great relaxation method and a bonding experience between a mother and child which helps relieve the symptoms of postpartum depression (“Music and Mootherhood”). The results illustrate how music specifically improved postpartum depression. It shows that not just any sort of bonding activity between mother and child assists with postpartum. Music has a certain healing nature to it that allows it to help people’s emotional wellbeing. This study is a great example of how music can be used for the healing process especially in nursing. The results illustrate that new mothers respond positively to music which can reflect on the emotional and physical care of the infant positively as well. Music can help heal the body mentally which can in turn help physically.

When listening to music while the baby is still inside the womb it is prenatal. There is a certain way to stimulate the fetus without overloading it with noise. The fetus does not develop ears until about week sixteen and week twenty-four is when the fetus can be very active when listening to music. At week sixteen, however, fetuses have been shown to turn and hear the music at that earlier stage. The womb is a fairly quiet place at about 50-60dB. A normal, regular conversation is about 60dB. When using music to stimulate a fetus, one should keep the volume to about 50dB. For reference, a whisper is about 30dB (“The Benefits of Playing Music in the Womb”). The common pregnancy pictures with headphones over the stomach is the exact opposite of how to expose the fetus to music. In order to correctly stimulate the fetus, one should be playing music out loud and at a lower volume to not drown out the baby and disrupt it. Loud music repetitively played during pregnancy has been shown to cause premature births and hearing deficiencies.

Music also affects the stress levels of both the mother and the fetus. Stress on the mother can cause many issues for the fetus including premature birth, anxiety, low birth weight and even miscarriage. This occurs because stress releases cortisol which travels in the mother’s bloodstream into the placenta which affects the fetus (Nocker-Ribaupierre 99). Stress can harm a grown adult body, so a fetus is extremely vulnerable to the harmful effects of stress. Music has a therapeutic affect that soothes the brain into relaxation for both the mother and the fetus. Music, especially if the mother likes the music being played, releases serotonin and endorphins putting the mother and the baby in a better mood (Nocker-Ribaupierre 99).

Nursing interventions regarding to music during pregnancy include a multitude of things. A nurse can educate patients on how to properly expose the fetus to music without overloading and teach the benefits of music therapy. Educating patients is one of the key components of nursing especially when it comes to pregnancy and infants. Education can be applied to everything within the nursing field no matter what part of nursing it may be. Miniscule disturbances and/or errors can dramatically affect the pregnancy and its outcomes. Learning the proper and safe way to stimulate the fetus is crucial. Nursing interventions are what can prevent harmful occurrences to not only the baby but the mother as well. A nurse can also help monitor stress on the mother and the baby to ensure that high amounts of stress are not occurring. As stated earlier, stress can have a major effect on the body and the fetus. Minimizing the amount of stress during pregnancy and after is something a nurse can help with. A plethora of ways to reduce stress can be used in nursing to help ease the stress. Of course, one of which would be music. Using music in a hospital, doctor’s office, or home health while performing tests and/or procedures can reduce the amount of stress and in turn help the fetus and its development. For example, when performing a transvaginal ultrasound of the fetus it can be uncomfortable and nerve racking. As a nurse, asking the patient if she would like music to help calm and ease the mind would be a great nursing intervention relating to music. Even through this may not be the type of music that is considered “baby music” it can still help ease the mother’s mind which in turn helps the fetus.

Certain types of songs seem to be the best to use for prenatal and postnatal babies. These all common themes to them that help soothe the baby. First, the music is never aggressive or banging music. This type would have the opposite effect on the baby. It seems to be that classical music without words are the most effective and calming. Classical music can sound like nature at times which adds to the calming effect on the body and the mind. “The structure and slow tunes relax the mind and, according to some studies, the heart (Spongy 10).” Mozart is an enormous contender for the best music to listen to while pregnant and after the baby is born. Experiments have used Mozart’s music and concluded that his music allowed the use of both right and left sides of the brain. This resulted in better learning abilities, improved memory, and better information processing. It is not only Mozart, however, that has the best type of music for prenatal and postnatal listening. Mozart has grown the be the name many people think of when talking about music with babies, but there are many other composers whose music is perfect for the same purpose. Other composers such as Beethoven, Bach, and Brahms can be used as well as long as the specific compositions fit an overall category (Spongy 11).

The overall common themes are that these compositions have little to none lyrics, focused on steady rhythms and melodies, and are mostly consonant throughout. Without lyrics, it allows the music to be more focused on the serenity of the notes and rhythms. Lyrics can be soothing; however, it can take away from the effect of the song itself. A steady rhythm is more pleasing to the ear and allows the listener to flow with the music without confusion. Consonance goes with this as well. Consonance is more relaxing and calmer than dissonance. It assists with the flow of the music and the tone that the music gives off. Dissonance is a more stressful, harsh sound which is not the outcome desired. Another piece of a composition that is best for babies is instruments that are overall relaxing if used with the other aspects above. For the most part, instruments that are deemed the best for assisting with fetal development are pianos and violins. These create the effect that is pertinent to relieve stress and wind down. The whole purpose of using music as a tool during and after pregnancy it to relax. This is achieved by listening to music that embodies all of the aspects above. The music should be pleasing to anyone who listens whether or not they like that particular type of music. It should still sound complete and satisfying to them and that is the goal when choosing music for babies.

These components of a composition are found throughout Claude Debussy’s The Girl with the Flaxen Hair. This song contains steady rhythms, no lyrics, consonance, and more. It may not be the most popular music to used with babies, however, it can definitely fit the category. This composition has a steady rhythm all throughout. It flows from beginning to end and allows the listener to flow with it. This rhythm also creates the feeling of the music. It is a slow tempo, but not a dragging sort of slow. It is slow to create the sense of longing in the composition and to help the listener feel something. The piano assists with this feeling as well which is another aspect of music that it suited for babies. It is in a pleasing key with not many abnormally high or low notes that can disrupt the feeling it gives off. It does get dramatic in the middle for a little bit, however, it stays on its path to satisfaction. The dramatic part does not revert to banging or clashing of sound, it simply enhances the tone of the composition. If it were to become a composition of loud, clashing sounds then it would not be the ideal song for prenatal and postnatal babies. It stays consonant throughout entire composition as well and beautifully creates a dramatic effect without hindering its streak of consonance.

This composition is a great addition to the already huge library of songs that can be used with babies. When educating or assisting a patient in nursing, this could be one of the songs or an example song to use to show the type of music babies benefit most from. Showing this song with others can educate new parents the best way to introduce their baby to music and stimulate them in the womb. Not only could it help the baby, but the nurse can emphasize that this music can assist the mother as well with the changes and stresses going on at this time in her life. The feeling this composition gives off is calming making it a great way to relax. Music like this can also soothe an infant into sleep, helping the new parents get some sleep as well. Music such as The Girl with the Flaxen Hair can positively affect many parents and their babies by keeping a tranquil environment even when it may seem impossible.

Being that this song is about love, it relates to the idea of mother and child even more not just on the nursing level. This song can signify the love between a mother and child before and after the baby has been born. Music helps the mother bond with the new baby and this composition adds to this by signifying the bond of love between two individuals. The bond does not start when the baby is born, it starts while the mother is carrying the new child. With all of the hormones being shared between the two, this composition illustrates the new-found love being created. Even though the song was meant to be about a muse of Claude Debussy, it can relate to this aspect of love as well.

As shown above, this composition is a perfect fit to use with prenatal and postnatal babies. It has all of the elements needed to be a stress relieving, development stimulating song. Event though it is not the more popular Mozart, it still checks off all of the boxes to being a great composition for mothers to use with their child. Music is everywhere in life just like nursing can be. They intertwine mostly through education of patients that are going the path to having a new baby in their lives. Music can be used to facilitate bonds and relieve stresses with prenatal and postnatal babies and the mothers as long as it is used in compliance with certain regulations. These can be taught by the strong, caring nursing there to guide a new family on a new chapter in their lives.

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