Triadic relationships in the Lullaby:
Father as a musical basis of inspiration and bonding for mother and child
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Aims and Objectives
The aim of this paper is to define lullabies and play songs as reflective of the triadic interaction between father, mother and child. As much of the recent literature in developmental psychology, attachment theory, and music psychology has focused on the relationship between mother and infant, this paper will introduce the father’s presence in the tonal qualities of lullabies and play songs. The father presence is found in the cross-rhythms and syncopation that form the movement, direction and emotional import of the music.

In terms of the triadic structure of the father-mother-infant relationship and sung lullabies, the particulate principle of the Humboldt system (Merker 2002) is useful as a point of reference to identify many levels of triadic diversification, both musical and relational. The one musical structure that is examined in depth from this perspective is Brahms’ Lullaby.

In order to preserve the important quality of singing to infants and further to understand the means by which lullabies create “emotional engagement” and a “loving” tone (Trehub, 2001), a new musical analysis from the performer’s perspective is introduced.

Context
Cultural anthropology, developmental psychology, attachment theory and music psychology literature examine origins of music from vocal interactions between mother and child, using lullabies and such discourse as motherese (Dissanayake, 2001; Freeman, 2001; Gratier, 1999; Imberty, 1997, 2001; Jaffe, 2001; Malloch, 1999, 2001; Melen, 2001; Papousek & Papousek, 1990; Robb, 1999; Rock, 1999; Shore, 1994; Sroufe 1996; Stern, 1985, 1995, 1999, 2001; Trehub, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1997, 1999, 2001; Trehvarthan, 1999, 2000). This research extends the perception of mother-infant reciprocity to include the principle of father presence as a generic principle of “other” (Fairweather, 1997). Father presence can be sensed in the resonant tones of the bass range, and is recognised in musical qualities of stability, constancy and silence. This stasis gives rise to vertical spatial dimensions within the music of lullabies, creating an ineffable sense of being in a context. The musical quality of father presence also includes the performance of grace notes, as they are performed in quicker gestures of the higher partials and encourage upward and
outward, vertical orientations in infants (Lopez, 1991; Trehub, 2001). From a performance perspective, these qualities form a polarity with maternal modes of expression (rhythm and linear time), and combine, for example, in cross-rhythms and harmonic vs. non-harmonic tones, to form the basis of empathy and emotion that is transmitted from singing to the mother-father-infant triad. Finally, the musical sense of father presence is conveyed through the mother as well. Even when the mother is singing to the infant, it is the presence of the father in relationship to the mother that is transmitted through the music.

**Methodology**

The methods used in this research are taken from various musical disciplines. Both traditional and non-traditional musical analysis is used to analyse the lullabies and play songs (Lopez, 1991). After a brief overview of the six sequential song stages of lullabies and play songs, the analysis of Brahms’ *Lullaby* is presented in detail as it represents the ideal form of a Western lullaby.

For purposes of demonstrating the above concepts, the musical analysis looks at triadic movement and interaction of the hierarchical structures of tone and rhythm as: isosynchronous repetitive sequencing of the lullaby modeled (Imberty, 1997); principles of cue abstraction (Deliege, 1996, 1997, 2001; Melen, 2001) as it forms motifs and melodic contours in “temporal feeling – shapes” of emotion (Imberty, 1997, Lopez 1991); phrase structure, harmonic progression and dynamic vectors related to state transformation.

Bel canto treatises and vocalizes of 18th and 19th centuries reveal a specific character for each vocal ornament and scale degree in the diatonic scale (e.g. Corri, Nathan, Crivelli, and Vaccai). Sung grace notes can be executed on any note outside the harmonic envelope (Ogdon, 2002), giving a sense of being held by the sound itself. These singing techniques offer a singer’s perspective to the musical analysis of Brahms’ *Lullaby*.

Video recordings of newborn and one-year-old infants responding to a sung lullaby and play song were made and reviewed in order to analyse whether differing qualities of facial expression, body movement and state of alertness could be identified in response to the varying music. Also, spectral analyses of the musical timings and intensities when singing to infants were developed.
Results

Results of the musical analysis of lullabies and play songs exposed the underlying triadic nature and evolution of these songs as they follow infant development (Lopez, 1991). In short, melodic contours of lullabies undulated in 3-5 second phrases shaped in the archetypal gesture of “mother love.” Play songs expressed musical impulses in shorter vertical contours of “joy.” The increasing complexity and organisation of these songs progress sequentially, emulating and perhaps stimulating the growing capacities and competencies of each stage of infant development as described by Sroufe (1996) and Schore (1994).

Brahms’ *Lullaby* is composed around hierarchical triadic structure, both musical and in its symbolic reflectivity of the family. Repetition, variation and the progression of tension and release patterns in the music are key to the lulling effectiveness of the lullaby. Motion and stability coalesce into motifs and melodic contours as the principle of father presence is represented in the harmonic modulations, the ground bass and other isosynchronous features of the lullaby. This sense of other contextualises the upper accompaniment part and melody and coalesces into the melody as the central feature of the song. Through performance, dynamic action of the sung grace notes set the vestibule-cochlear functions of the ear into motion, and mobilize the entire nervous system (Tomatis, 1991:206). This effect of balancing and integrating “both” sides of the ear (low and high), combined with the direction and velocity of the breath, imbue the voice with emotional shutters that resonate in “loving tones.” These tones and melodic contours are reflective of the coalition of the two parents (symbolic in the relationships formed in the music), as in a particulate system, coalesce to form a new resonant field. The vitality of this musical field endows a meaningful place of resonance wherein the infant’s body and being are moved in musical expression towards a growing sense of self.

Video presentation of newborn and one-year old infants listening to sung lullabies and play songs reflect the differential responsiveness to the lullabies and play songs reflective of their individual sense of mother/father presence. Generally, infants with positive father presence respond to both lullabies and play songs. Infants were more symbiotic and cried more during the play song in subjects where “father” involvement was compromised.

Thus we can begin to discern connections between the emerging musical qualities in the stages of children’s song to the emerging triadic relationships conceptualizing the infant’s growing sense of self. The qualities of music as they affect the ear demonstrate a power within the musical dimensions of melody to move and inspire the development of the child and its relationships.
Key Contribution

Introduction of father presence as the musical sense of “other” extends the dyadic structure of mother-infant interaction to triadic structures in relationship, both musical and human. Lullabies and play songs are formed in patterns posited here to describe father presence as the source of inspiration for mother-infant interaction. This research introduces a new approach to understanding triadic process inside the experience of singing. Performance dynamics play upon the ear’s capacity to shift from inside the tonal pitch space to outer non-harmonic resonance. Performance matters as it forms the basis of that which makes us human, triadic reflective relationship with “other,” here defined more specifically as father presence. Embedded within the music of children’s songs, father’s presence creates the “magic” that charms the mother and infant into sublime states of love and belonging.

Bibliography


