

Songs in childhood

The toddler drone, also known as the children's chant

The *toddler drone*, 'de kleuterdreun' or 'Leiermelodik' originated from the calling chant: so-la-so-mi. The 'toddler drone theory' is especially well-known in the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium.

When writing songs for children, keep the pitches of the toddler drone in mind.

The *calling chant* is known as 'het oergegeven', 'Urmelodie' and based on the descending so-mi (major third) interval. The intervals in this chant can also vary between do-re (major second) and do-so (... fifth).

The notated examples below (Rinderer, 1952) are the foundation of the original 'Helligkeitshören' (where the child distinguishes pitches through differences in *timbre*) and 'Tonikeitshören' (where pitches are distinguished based on tonal function).

1. Die Rufterz 2. Ringa-Ringa-Reia Motiv: Ton La 3. Do als Ansprungeton 4. Verbindung von 2.+ 3.

5. Ton Re als Gleitton 6. Re als Spiegelton zu La 7. Ton Fa als Gleitton 8. Fünftönereihe

9. Sechstoneihe 10. Verspätetes La 11. Das hohe do'

12. Betontes La, betontes Fa 13. Wiegenliedformel Hirtenruf

14. Auftaktquart 15. Dreiklang als Naturklang 16. Das tiefe la,

17. Neue Liedhausteine 18. Der Leitton „Ti“

Liberman (1975:32) suggests that the toddler drone is used for taunting, exulting and singing nursery rhymes. Its most familiar instantiation is perhaps on the taunting nonsense string "nyah, nyah, nyah, nyah, nyah". It has both a fixed melody (the intervals being quite exactly defined) and a fixed rhythm.

Since the constraints on tune-text association (at least in their raw, descriptive form) are considerably more complex for this children's chant than they were for the vocative chant, and since they are crucially related to the rhythmic pattern of the chant, the initial musical examples below represent the rhythm as well as the melody.

In its minimal form, the Children's Chant consists of five notes, arranged as:



In addition to this "lilting" compound-time version, a more foursquare rendition is also possible:



Liberman (1975:33) found the first version more natural, but for others only the second version is possible to execute. On the basis of a very limited sample, it seems possible that there is some geographical distribution of the variants.

In both versions, two pairs of notes are located a minor third apart, as in the vocative chant, with the higher note of each pair on the downbeat of its measure, the lower note is on the second, weaker beat. Between these two pairs there is a "grace note, which is always a submetrical interpolation into the rhythm established by the other four notes, whatever its actual time-value. Instrumental analysis of some native-speaker renditions of the chant suggest that in most cases this grace note actually has a pitch which moves through the range between a and g, or their transposed equivalents.



Resources

Ontwikkeling van de muzikaliteit.

Rinderer, Leo. 1952. *Musikerziehung.*

Liberman, Mark Yoffe. 1975. *The intonational system of English.* PhD dissertation. Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.



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