

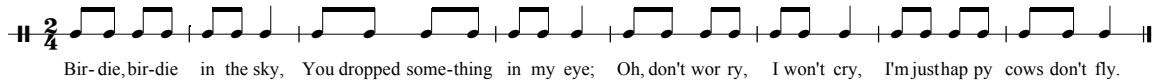
# Yes! You *Can* Help Your Students Sing In-Tune!

August 19, 2015: Eastern Washington Education Conference  
Christopher Roberts (cr777@uw.edu)

For elementary general music teachers, in-tune singing is one of the most important skills for students to achieve. Many students enter our classrooms singing accurately, but others do not. What's a teacher to do?

1. Sing as much as possible: the more minutes students put in, the more likely pitch matching will develop.
  - a. Play repetitive singing games and play parties (*On the Mountain, Goin' Down to Cairo, My Landlord*)
  - b. Sing longer songs; for older students, story songs in verse-chorus form (*The Keeper, Ballad of Springhill*) For younger students, repetitive songs with picture books (*This Old Man, Mary Wore Her Red Dress*)
2. Use techniques for helping students locate the head register.
  - a. Use props (*slide whistle, kazoo, koosh ball thrown in the air*)
  - b. Vocalize (and visualize) swirly patterns (*roller coaster, flashlight on the wall, train ride in the mountains*)
  - c. Imitate animal sounds ("Can you meow like a kitten? Say this chant like a mouse?")
  - d. Exclaim in the head register: (e.g. a parent calling "yoo-hoo!;" a cowboy yelling "yee-haw!")
  - e. Sing songs with pitch exploration possibilities in them (*This Old Man, Teddy Bear*)
  - f. Read books with pitch exploration (*Bright's Georgie, Crews's Shortcut*)
3. Encourage solo singing.
  - a. Play singing games with built-in solo opportunities (*On the Mountain, Gypsy in the Moonlight, Charlie Over the Ocean, Here Comes the Mailman, Just from the Kitchen*)
  - b. Sing Call & Response and Echo songs, which lend themselves well to solos (*Risseldy, Rosseldy, Oh My, Telephone Song*)
  - c. Sing songs that lend themselves to textual improvisation (*Little Tommy Tucker, Dinah, Whistle, Daughter, Whistle*)
  - d. Invite children to sing with a puppet
  - e. Use a microphone to "pass the song," in which individual singers sing short phrases
  - f. Perform "song surgery," working individually on specific, short passages
4. Give opportunities to sing with a balance of large group, small group, and solo experiences.
  - a. While performing "song surgery," switch back and forth between small group and solos
  - b. In literacy segments of your lesson, reinforce the point with small group efforts
5. Encourage the reluctant singer, but don't pressure.
  - a. "Do you want to choose a friend to do it with you?"
  - b. Use props: a child might be willing to make a stuffed animal sing
  - c. Find other ways for students to do something alone: play an instrument, show a dance
6. Remind students to stand tall, breathe deeply, and to sing softly with tall vowels.
7. Ask students to listen and analyze.
  - a. "How did we sound?" "Were we right in tune?" "Listen to your neighbor." "Were their voices the same?" "If you can't hear your neighbor, you're singing too loudly." "Listen louder, sing softer."
8. Give honest and constructive feedback.
  - a. Be specific: "Try it again: can you make your voice a bit higher?" "Like Kamira's?"
  - b. Don't tell them it's good if it's not: "That's closer! We'll keep working on it!" or "Thanks!"
  - c. Find a positive: "Good posture!" "Look how widely he opens his mouth!" "Nice shirt!"
  - d. Maintain high standards of musicianship, both for the students and the teacher
9. Use peer modeling: research shows that children most accurately imitate another child.
  - a. Have a child demonstrate whenever possible
  - b. Pair stronger and weaker singers
9. Sing songs with solfege, with or without handsigns.
10. Choose songs wisely.
  - a. Consider range and key of song material
  - b. Consider intervals: so-mi and so-mi-la-so-mi easiest to sing
  - c. Consider pentatonic vs. diatonic
  - d. Consider songs children like!
11. Limit (but don't eradicate all together) teacher accompaniment, both instrumental and vocal.
  - a. A capella singing aids intonation
  - b. The piano (or guitar or teacher's singing) can become a crutch for students
12. Maintain a safe and joyful classroom environment: expect respect, and have fun!

## Birdie, Birdie



*Source:* Schwartz, T. (Collector). (1953). *1, 2, 3 and a zing zing zing (FW 7003)* [CD]. Washington DC: Smithsonian Folkways. Transcribed C. Roberts, 6/2009.

## Here Comes the Mailman



*Source:* unknown, but this sounds about as teacher-created as it gets. Definitely not a folk song!

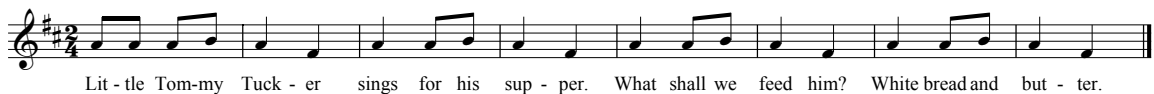
**Game:** Standing circle. Students close eyes and sing the chorus, as the teacher walks around the circle, dropping various objects (e.g. button, penny, etc.) into individual students' open hands. At the end of the chorus, the students open their eyes and close their hands. The teacher sings the question, and appropriate students answer.

## Little Tommy Tinker



*Source:* Bolkovac, E. (Ed.) *101 Rounds for Singing*, p. 19.

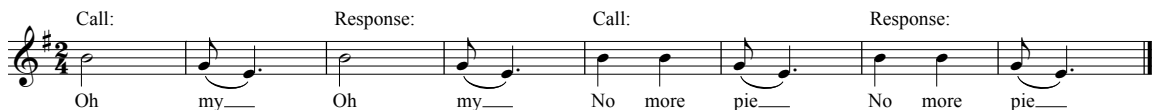
## Little Tommy Tucker



*Source:* *The Song Garden (Heath)*

**Cumulative song:** Individuals suggest various items for Tommy to eat, sung to the tune of the last two measures (e.g. "...what shall we feed him? White bread and butter! Caesar salad! Pepperoni Pizza...).

## Oh My, No More Pie



*Source:* Jenkins, E. (1989). *Adventures in Rhythm* (Sound recording, SFW 45007).  
Also found in Feierabend, J. (2003). *Book of Echo Songs*. Chicago, IL: GIA Publications.

*Verses:*

Pie's too sweet...I want a piece of meat...  
Meat's too red...I want a piece of bread...  
Bread's too brown...I think I'll go to town...  
Town's too far...I think I'll take the car...

Car won't go...I fell and stubbed my toe...  
 Toe gives me pain...I think I'll take the train...  
 Train had a wreck...I fell and broke my neck...  
 Oh, my...  
 (Repeat as desired...)

## On the Mountain

On the moun-tain stands the la - dy, who she is I do not know. All she wants is gold and sil - ver,  
 all she wants is ice cream cones, so jump in my dar - lin', so jump out my (ba - by?)

Schwartz, T. (Collector). (1953). *1, 2, 3 and a zing zing zing (FW 7003)* [CD]. Washington DC: Smithsonian Folkways. Transcribed C. Roberts, 6/2009.

**Game:** Jump rope rhyme. On the recording, one can hear the rope slapping the floor in the background.

## PK Penny Packet

P K pen-ny pac-ket, First you chew it then you crack it, Then you stick it on your jack-et, P K pen-ny pac-ket.

Source: *The website for the Association for Cultural Equity:*

<http://research.culturalequity.org/rc-b2/get-audio-detailed-recording.do?recordingId=12198>.

Recorded in Aberdeen, Scotland in July, 1951, by Aland Lomax, at the home of John Mearns. Child performers are not identified, but likely included Jack Mearns, Kathleen Mearns, Pat Cushnie, Jennifer Cushnie, Jim Hunter, Willie Hunter, Norma Watt, Tom Watt, Arthur Ronald, Christopher Ronald, and Gwen Ronald.

This is a ball-bouncing chant, and one can hear the sound of a bouncing ball in the background.

P.K. is a brand of Wrigley's gum, no longer available in the UK, although it is made in Kenya, and can be found throughout Kenya and Tanzania.

## Telephone Song

Call: Hey, John - ny! Response: I think I hear my name, Call: Hey John - ny! Response: I think I hear it a - gain,  
 C: You're wan - ted on the te - le-phone. R: If it i - sn't Ma - ry, then I'm not home,  
 C: With a rick - tick - tick - e - ty tick\_\_\_\_\_ Oh yeah.

Source: A print version can be found in *American Methodology*, by Ann Eisen and Lamar Robertson. Per Rita Klinger, it was collected by Marilyn Murata who learned it from New York City children in the summer of 1976.