

Explore & Learn

Rhythm Nation

Music holds many potential benefits for young people, and Central Arkansas has struck a chord with ample organizations for musically inclined kids and teens

By Dwain Hebda
Photography by Katie Childs



For many children, the world is a musical place. From lullabies to nursery rhymes; from “Sesame Street” jingles to simple Sunday School hymns to “Baby Shark,” much of what we communicate to our children, either directly or indirectly, is set to a beat and carries a melody.

Science has backed us parents up on these tendencies, citing the emotional and development benefits of music in a child’s formative years. And a growing body of evidence suggests there’s a lot to be said for music as a component of intellectual development as well.

Scholastic.com reported in 2017 a bevy of studies that showed the positive impact music has on various aspects of a child’s development. The site cited various studies of children in pre-kindergarten through second grade that showed music as an incubator for executive functioning, literacy and language processing, memory and emotional well-being.

“When they move and sing, children feel good about themselves,” the site quoted Dr. Julene K. Johnson, professor at the University of California, San Francisco, “Study after study has found that singing relieves anxiety and contributes to quality of life. ... It takes something intimate, a sound that begins inside you, shares it with a roomful of people, and it comes back as something even more thrilling.”

Teenagers also stand to benefit greatly from music and music education, according to scientific data compiled by The NAAM Foundation. High levels of music involvement, especially in formal music programs, positively impacted math competency, graduation rates, SAT scores and college attendance. Teens also reported in surveys that music is an important social tool, helping them bond with their peers without regard to race, age or gender differences.



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TRUST TREE FACILITATOR KEESHA BASS AND CAMPER SAMIYAH HERVEY WORK ON SAMIYAH'S SONG.

To this long list of benefits, add leadership skills, said Keesha Bass, director of outreach and communications for Trust Tree, a Little Rock-based music and arts program for girls ages 9 to 16. Trust Tree puts those girls through one- and two-week camps during which time they develop skills in songwriting and the basics of instrumental and vocal music.

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“Our program is just as much about leadership, teamwork and communication as it is music,” Bass said. “They are working on their songs, but they’re also working together on problem-solving and time management and team building and they have to work through a lot of differences. In trying this new experience, they are also able to surprise themselves with what they are able to accomplish. They build pride and self-esteem that transfers into other endeavors.”

Trust Tree alums carry their experiences to surprising heights. Jamee Ellisa McAdoo performed the song she developed through the program in pageants, developed a video for “Admire Me,” viewable on YouTube, and has performed all over Little Rock. Many others work to nurture what Trust Tree plants in them.

“We have a few annual fundraisers and our girls will get together and play in front of the community,” Bass said. “They continue working on their songs whenever they can get together with their bandmates.”

LET THE MUSIC PLAY

In addition to Trust Tree, several programs throughout Central Arkansas specialize in building musical foundations in kids and teens. Here are a few noteworthy organizations:

Arkansas Symphony Orchestra arkansassymphony.org

ASO offers a wide range of educational programs for young musicians. Parents of kids in first through third grade will want to check out The Orchestra and You, a free program introducing children to symphony instruments. Those seeking a more formal education will want to explore ASO’s Sturgis Music Academy, providing a proven method for developing confidence, creative thinking and a general work ethic that will assist students’ musical and non-musical endeavors. Or, check out the Summer Strings Camp for musicians with at least one year of lessons under their belts.



Art Porter Music Education artporter.org

Leveraging the power of music to promote academic success, Art Porter Music Education supports various programs, including Minors in Music, a platform that combines workshops, musical and educational relationships with professional musicians and educators, and a community service component to create a customized training program. The transformative power of music impacts young people in a way that empowers, educates and socially connects them universally.



Jettway Performance thejettwayperformance.com

It’s a short drive to Hensley, about 20 miles south of Little Rock. But once you’re there, you’re going to get



music and songwriting lessons from members of the Zac Dunlap Band, named 2018 Entertainer of the Year and Vocal Group of the Year, as designated by the Arkansas Country Music Awards. Zac and Hannah Dunlap, along with two other members of the group, provide the finer points of instrumental and vocal music, songwriting and even the chance to play a real gig in front of real fans.



Little Rock Music Academy
littlerockmusicacademy.business.site

Located at 11220 N. Rodney Parham Road in Little Rock, the LRMA offers music lessons for all ages across a broad range of musical instruments. Among the available lessons that the academy offers are those for piano, voice, orchestral strings, brass, woodwinds, guitar, banjo, mandolin, ukulele, drums—even bagpipes!



Little Rock School of the Arts
Irschoolofthearts.com

This Midtown Little Rock school offers one of the widest art curriculums in the region with private and group lessons in various iterations for guitar, bass, woodwind, brass, piano, strings, drums, percussion and voice. For little ones, check out Music and Movement Plus, an introduction to music class for kids ages 2 to 5. Or, try a one-day seminar in songwriting or lab band for a unique musical experience.



Rock City School of Music
rockcityschoolofmusic.com

Ready to get serious with your musical career? Check out Rock City School of Music for instruction in drums, guitar or keyboards through private, one-on-one weekly lessons (30- or 60-minute sessions available) or opt for group lessons and learn and interact with other students at various skill levels. Monthly workshops are also available. Visit their website for a free first lesson.



The Rep
therep.org

Arkansas Repertory Theatre provides a range of classes for young people, including semester-long courses occurring in the fall, winter and spring for kindergarten through adult-age students. Course offerings include training in a variety of curricula, including musical theater, acting, theater dance, tap dance, audition preparation, Shakespeare, physical theater and more. Tuition payment plans, as well as full and partial need-based scholarships, are available for all education programs upon application.



Trust Tree
trusttree.org

The music, arts and leadership program for girls ages 9 to 16 has doubled in size in each year of its existence. Founded by the members of a local all-women band, Trust Tree offer one- and two-week camps during which time



girls are taught the fundamentals of songwriting, instrumental and vocal music. The girls, most of whom have little or no prior musical experience, form bands or work solo on their creations, which are performed for parents.



Wildwood Park
wildwoodpark.org

Find here the West Little Rock Performing Arts Academy, which offers private voice lessons during the school year and summer months under the direction of professional musicians. Una Voce, an auditioned high school honors choir, attracts youth from around Central Arkansas who perform locally, regionally and will be touring Europe in the summer of 2020. For younger children, don't miss the Wildwood Academy of Music and the Arts, a summer music festival and arts camp designed for students ages 6 to 18 who are interested in studying music and other artistic endeavors.



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