



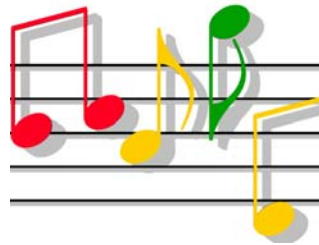
Alzheimers Disease Caregiver Tips

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From the Editor

In last month's issue, I wrote about what we think we know with regard to how people with dementia react to music throughout the progression of their condition, and cautioned readers to look for individual *perceptions* and *preferences*. This month I am continuing the musical discussion with tips on how to use music effectively with people with dementia once their preferences and perceptions are known.

When I first wrote about this topic in 1994, I quoted Melanie Chavin, author of *The Lost Chord*, (now out of print) who was then a practicing music therapist and is now Vice-President for Program Services of the Greater Illinois Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association. Her thoughtful advice remains valid all these years later.



What *has* changed over the years is the number and variety of resources available to anyone interested in bringing music in some form to people with dementia. I want to call your attention to two in particular: 1) the specific CDs called "Front Row Seat" created by my friend Barbara Jacobs, who follows all the advice given on the following pages, (You can order them directly from her website (<http://www.frontrowseatvideos.com/>) and 2) the multitude of creative offerings from ElderSong, owned by Beckie Karras, another person I have long respected in this field. (<http://www.eldersong.com/StoreFront.bok>) Read on, check them out and keep singing!

Kathy Lawrence

Age and AD adjustments



As we age, our vocal range tends to diminish, which means that most recorded and sheet music is too high for older adults to sing. In group settings, accompanists should look for music in lower keys, or if they can transpose music themselves, simply play it in a lower key. (Some electronic keyboards can accomplish this with the push of a button.) If there is no accompaniment, try having a participant with a bass or alto voice start the song.

Older adults also tend to prefer hearing music at slightly slower tempos. It helps them to keep up with the words and to take breaths more easily.

For people with Alzheimer's disease, keep accompaniment simple, and whenever possible, live, rather than recorded, so the person playing can adjust to the needs of those singing along. A console piano (so the player can face the singers) works well, but now there are many choices in keyboards. Many of these have a variety of enhancements available at the push of a button, but simple chords and single-note melody lines are preferable for people with AD. Singing without accompaniment is also fine, especially for people with late stage Alzheimer's disease.

The most positive responses tend to come from using familiar music, particularly music that had meaning for us in our teenage and young adult years – music we fell in love to. Many older adults also react positively to classical music, Broadway show tunes, familiar religious music, and for the foreign-born, ethnic music appropriate to their homeland. (Sometimes this music brings



tears, but often those tears are cathartic.) As always, know the individual. One person may thrive on country music; another may find it as appealing as nails screeching across a chalkboard.

Group singing



Barbara Jacobs' formula for success working with people with AD is to lead a music class, not just a sing-along. She begins with a reminiscing warm-up activity, bringing in a CD, for example, of Nat King Cole or Judy Garland. After playing a song or two, she provides some brief information on the artist's life

(easily found on the CD cover or the Internet), and then encourages participants to share their memories and knowledge. The singing follows, helped along by large print copies of the lyrics, for those who want them.

There are many other ways to enliven group singing. Barb, as demonstrated on her CDs, adds such things as dancing, blowing bubbles and children to the mix. Another idea is to change the words. For example, the song "My Favorite Things" from "Sound of Music," has been re-written in an aging version that includes these lines:

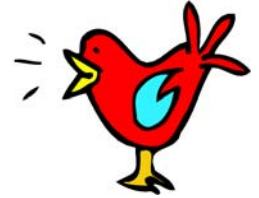
When the pipes leak,
When the bones creak,
When the knees go bad,
I simply remember my favorite things,
And then I don't feel so bad.

Parodies are fun to sing (and create), but a simpler way to change the words is simply to change the nouns. For example, change the:

- Flowers in "When You Wore a Tulip, and I Wore a Big Red Rose" (lilac and daffodil?)
- Ethnicity in "My Wild Irish Rose" (Mexican?)
- Fruit in "Yes, We Have No Bananas" (cantaloupe, tomatoes)



- Name in any song that uses one, such as "I'm in Love with Amy," (why not Nancy or Susie?) or "I'm Just Wild About Harry" (Why not Johnny or Jimmy?).
- Colors in any song that includes them (Why not red suede shoes, purple rose of Texas or blue cliffs of Dover?)



All of these ideas can also be used to start a reminiscence discussion on a musical theme, too. For example:

- Talk about colors participants like by singing songs like "The Little Brown Jug," "When the Red, Red Robin," and "By the Light of the Silvery Moon."
- Talk about the funny things you did when you were younger by beginning with silly songs: "The Flat Foot Floogie," "Mairzy Doats," and "Barney Google."
- Talk about names you like or how you were named by singing "Sweet Adeline," "My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean" "Alexander's Ragtime Band," and "When Johnny Comes Marching Home."
- Discuss your courting days and sing, "Love and Marriage," "I Want a Girl," "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," "Makin' Whoopee," and "Get Me to the Church on Time."

There are dozens more songs in each of these categories and dozens more categories that will stir up memories and start the toes tapping. One resource for ideas and trivia games with song titles is ElderSong's "Say it with Music."

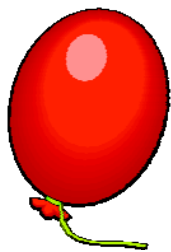
You can intersperse singing with discussion as Barb Jacobs recommends, whenever you need a change of pace. People with AD tend to be good at filling in the blanks when you say the beginning of a line or title to a song, such as:

- Hail, Hail . . . The Gang's All Here
- I Wonder Who's . . . Kissing Her Now
- In the Good Old . . . Summertime
- Let Me Call . . . You Sweetheart
- You Must Have Been . . . a Beautiful Baby



You can also ask opinion questions about music: *Do you like Big Band music? Do you enjoy close harmony singing like barbershop quartets or the Andrews sisters?*

Music and exercise



People who are singing get exercise because they are breathing deeply, taking in oxygen, and stimulating their bodies and organs. But adding upper body exercise (by tossing a balloon to music) or leg motions (by dancing) increases the benefits to the body. Melanie Chavin recommends balloons because they are colorful, relatively slow moving (giving people more time to react and reducing the possibility of fright), generally harmless (even when tossed with vigor) and somewhat unpredictable (increasing the fun).

An alternative is to form a circle (either seated or standing) and give each person a portion of a parachute, lightweight quilt, or colorful sheet to hold. Then lift, shake, push, pull and shimmy the cloth to music. (Avoid directions like right and left, because in a circle when you are looking at the person opposite you, it is easy to mix up directions.) Working both with groups or one-on-one, another possibility is to wave a colorful ribbon or scarf to music. People tend to make gentle, flowing motions with these objects, creating beautiful motion while exercising.

With any of these choices, Melanie suggests using only instrumental music because a singer's words could interfere with the leader's instructions and cues. ("Look up, George. It's coming your way.")

Dancing was a primary social activity for many people in today's older generation. Often people who can't walk steadily regain their grace on a dance floor, but even when they don't, they may enjoy moving gently from side to side, or just holding another person's hands and swaying arms while sitting.



Never underestimate what might be possible. Barb Jacobs tells a poignant story of her first day in a new community when she randomly chose Lou to dance with her while she played a CD of Judy Garland singing, "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." They danced in each other's arms and as the song closed, Lou stared into her eyes and clearly said, "Why, oh why can't I?" the staff was dumbfounded because this was the first time they had heard Lou speak, much less dance.

Musical instruments

Instruments can be used to accompany singing or to substitute for singing. Pianos (or some form of keyboard) and guitars tend to be the most common instruments for accompaniment.

If you use additional rhythm instruments, aim for quality choices, if possible, for both durability and better sound. You may be surprised how musically

talented and discriminating some participants are.



In her music therapist days, Melanie Chavin avoided tambourines because they are too loud, and concentrated instead on bells, small drums, jingle taps and small jingle

bells, maracas, and wood blocks. I have also seen leaders expertly use unusual instruments from African and Indian cultures. Sometimes people will choose what's familiar and what they believe they can have success at, and other times they enjoy the novelty of a new choice.

Melanie Chavin notes the idea of rhythm instruments is to create music, not noise. The leader is key to setting pleasing rhythms and helping each participant contribute an enhancing element to the whole. That said, I recently wrote an article about the Really Terrible Orchestra that author Alexander McCall Smith participates in and helped found. It "exists to encourage those who have been prevented from playing music, either through lack of talent or some other factor, to play music in the company of similarly afflicted



players.” In other words, they are bad, they know it, but they have loads of fun anyway. If the process is fun, don’t sweat the outcome.

Music as a calming influence

Over the years I have known a number of people who have used music as the basis for what I call a vesper service – a music program that is intended to create a peaceful atmosphere as afternoon becomes evening.



I have long hated the term “sundowning” because it suggests that people with AD are acting in an abnormal way.

At the end of the day we ALL sundown, i.e., we are all tired, and if we had a chance, it would be nice to curl up in our mother’s arms and let her sing softly to us for a little while.

Years ago, music therapist Joan Whitcomb told me she sets the stage for this “evensong,” by closing the drapes, arranging the chairs in social settings, using soft lighting and playing soft recorded music of songs from participants’ youth as they enter. She begins with songs that combine singing with body motions or clapping to channel energy, and gradually moves into slower, gentler songs about home or inspirational or religious songs. She finds spirituals especially effective, personalizing them when possible, (“It’s Mary, Oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.”) Her favorite is “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child,” because it expresses and validates deep feelings. She ends on an uplifting note with a song like “May the Good Lord Bless and Keep You,” “Happy Trails to You,” or “I’d Like to Teach the World to Sing.” This late afternoon session provides nourishment for the soul, and helps to sustain calm through the evening meal, which in turn aids digestion and natural sleep.

Experiment

We noted last month that music played constantly is likely to be agitating, not calming, but you needn’t limit your experiments with music to a structured class or activity. Some people have found that music played during mealtimes can set a cadence for

putting fork to mouth in people with AD; for others it’s a distraction.

Some people have found that playing a CD of birds singing can gently wake people in the morning. Others have tried ocean waves or crickets chirping to encourage sleep at night and other ambient music at other times of day if a person seems restless.

Family members who come to visit their loved ones in a residential care setting sometimes find that if they come in singing or whistling, their loved ones are quickly alerted to and delighted by their presence.

Those working with people in later stages sometimes find they must provide more repetition – singing the first verse of a song several times until everyone “tunes in” – or greater simplification. The latter might mean no accompaniment, one-on-one interaction and singing a lullaby softly into the person’s ear while holding her hand.



Music gives people with AD a voice for their feelings and that is a powerful means of communication.

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