



## Music in the School Grounds

The outdoors has long been an inspiration for composers and a setting for some of the most memorable musical performances. Just consider Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* and Mendelssohn's *Hebrides Overture*, or performances from buskers in your local shopping centre to major outdoor concerts and music festivals.



**What instruments can we create outside?**

Instruments outside can take many forms; from planting grasses and bamboo to create sounds when the wind blows, to outdoor glockenspiels and xylophones.

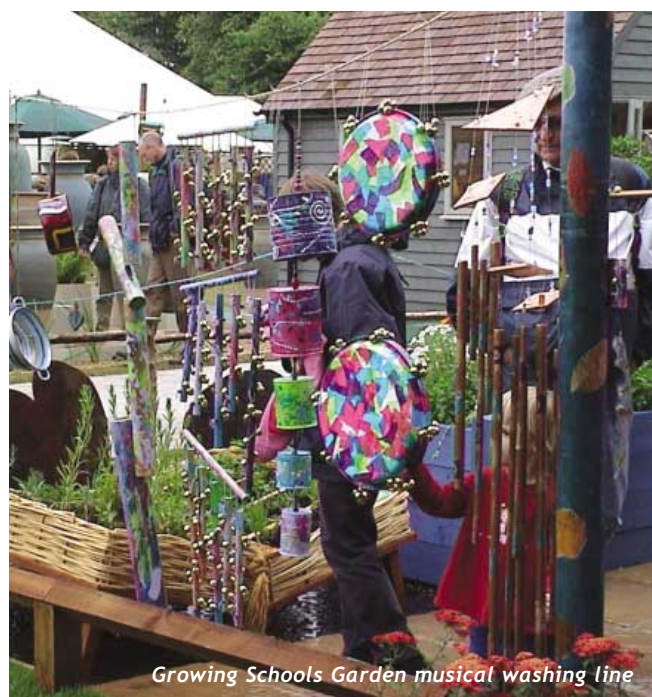
For very young children the act of creating sounds can be exciting in itself and having simple elements that can be hit, rattled or rung can be all that is needed. However, even for some very young children tone and pitch can also be important.

So why not use your school grounds as an inspiration for new compositions, a setting for presentations and a place to listen to the sounds that are around us every day?

Music has always been a feature of school grounds - think of all the playground games that use rhymes and rhythms, many with tunes that stay with us for life and help create some of the best memories of our school days.

But music in the school grounds can be so much more than playground games - the sounds of the grounds can become an inspiration for songs or soundtracks; elements of the grounds can be used to create musical instruments or sampled to add to compositions; whilst stages and amphitheatres provide places for formal or informal performances.

So how do you make sure music becomes a feature of your school grounds? This Groundnotes gives examples of the types of instruments you could add to your site; ideas for lessons and activities based in or on the school grounds; websites and resources to help you develop your ideas and inspiration for the types of space that can encourage more music outdoors.



*Growing Schools Garden musical washing line*

As children get older they can use more sophisticated instruments, with tuning and tone becoming more important. Some large playground equipment suppliers now produce panels with musical elements whilst some schools have worked with artists and craftspeople to create instruments that are unique to their own school.



*Sunningdale Special School*

Instruments can also be made out of recycled materials. There are several companies that work with schools to create this type of instrument - see the list of suppliers at the end of this Groundnotes.

Drainage pipes can be cut to various lengths to create different notes when air is forced down them - usually by striking with some kind of paddle (an old trainer can work well). The tubes inside carpet rolls can also be painted and used in this way. Calculating the lengths needed can be linked into the Science curriculum and the selection of appropriate materials and construction details to Design and Technology.

Large planters can be made into drums by stretching duct tape over them, whilst other containers, such as bins and water butts, can be used to create drums with different pitches.

Don't forget to use any instruments you have in your grounds in lessons as well as at playtime.



*Mill Hill Nursery*



*Chadsgrove Special School*

## Using the grounds as a resource and inspiration

### Collecting everyday sounds

If you go outside and listen you will find all sorts of sounds impact on your school grounds. These will vary throughout the day: sounds at the start of the day will be very different from those at break and lunch, or quieter times when external sounds impinge more on the site.

Pupils can record these sounds, or create their own notation to transcribe the different sounds that they hear. These could be used as a survey tool - which parts of the grounds are noisiest when? - or as a starting point for a composition about a day in the life of your school. The *Sounds Around Out & About* will help you to extend this activity - on [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk) in Member Services.

You can also listen out for birdsong - younger pupils can see if they can tell the difference between the different songs whilst older pupils may try and transcribe them.

### The seasons in your grounds

Do you have a place where you can hear the rain drumming on a roof or a paved area?

What sounds do autumn leaves make?

How could you represent the sound of new growth, popping through the soil in the spring?

What sounds remind you of summer in the grounds?

There are also many poems, songs and orchestral pieces based on one or more of the seasons - use some in assemblies. Use these together to compose music about the seasons in your area. This could become quite a descriptive piece, using the sounds collected as a starting point, or more of a song, based on an existing or new piece of writing.

## Rhythms and rhymes

Everyone knows some playground songs or clapping rhymes. Some of these date back many years whilst others develop with new trends and ideas. Why not start by investigating what rhymes your pupils know, or go into your school grounds (or another local school) to record the rhymes that are currently being sung. This could be done electronically or transcribed directly.

You could also undertake research about rhymes that parents or even grandparents used to recite. Pupils could also question teaching and non-teaching staff about their memories.

There are a number of books and websites that record playground rhymes - from the UK and further afield. Some of these are listed at the end of this Groundnotes.

Pupils could create new rhymes and songs based on topical themes - whilst older students might like to create something new for younger pupils.



Skipping Games

## Outside performances

Performing music outside can be done in an informal way at play and lunch times, or more formally in performance with an audience.

However, the one thing that is needed, whatever the type of performance, is somewhere to perform. This could be a quiet corner away from footballs, in front of a painted backdrop to encourage informal signing and dancing, or on a specially created stage or amphitheatre which can seat the whole school. The *Performance Art Spaces Groundnotes* contains ideas about where and how to create suitable spaces - on [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk) in Member Services.

For young children you may wish to create a space where recorded music can be played and they have the opportunity to dance. Being outside gives more freedom to do this without being in the way of others.

As children develop their performance skills providing them with an opportunity for busking can develop their confidence as well as give them a chance to perform together. You may wish to establish a place near to seating that is suitable for busking and set up a schedule of performances throughout the year.

If the weather is suitable there is no reason why larger performances should not take place outside. However, it is probably a good idea to have a contingency plan if you are inviting people onto the site!

You may also think about inviting guest musicians to perform outside - this could be as part of a festival, a celebration or a residency. They may be able to work with pupils on a performance that uses the school grounds as a focus and a setting.



Ravenstone School

## Considering the neighbours!

Whatever you plan to do outside do consider your neighbours - one school created a play train and bell but soon had to muffle the bell as the neighbours complained. So do think about who lives nearby as well as who else within the school might be disturbed by loud noises coming from outside the classroom. This is particularly important when you are considering where you wish to locate a performance area or musical instrument in the grounds.

## Useful publications

### [The Singing Game by Iona & Peter Opie](#)

This book is full of playground songs and rhymes including their history and origins.

Published by Oxford University Press 1985 ISBN 0-19-211562-6

### [The Music Show by Clive Kempton](#)

Includes musical activities for 7-11 year olds, some of which include using sounds from the outdoors.

Published by Southgate Publishers ISBN 1-85741-072-6

### [Thematic Poems, Songs and Fingerplays by Meish Goldish](#)

Contains a range of poems and songs, with linked activities, that could help you develop ideas for taking music outside.

Published by Scholastic ISBN 0590496387

### [Arts in the School Grounds by Brian Keaney](#)

Published by Southgate Publishers ISBN 1-85741-036-X

### [Heard it in the Playground by Allan Ahlberg and Fritz Wegner](#)

A collection of poems to pass on down the generations.

Published by Puffin ISBN 040328246

## [Big Book of Playground Rhymes and Chants by Robert Deweese and Jo Supancich](#)

Contains 32 big (11" x 17") reproducible charts with rhythm activities that develop language and motor skills. The rope rhymes can be done by individuals, in pairs, or with small groups.

Published by Evan-Moor Corp

## [Sounds like playing - music and the early years curriculum by Marjorie Ouvry including CD with songs written by Soo Beer](#)

Children love music, and early years practitioners know it. But many lack the confidence to help children use and enjoy music throughout the day. Sounds like playing is here to help.

Published by and available from Early Education

[www.early-education.org.uk/publications.htm](http://www.early-education.org.uk/publications.htm)

## [Drumatrix](#)

An instruction booklet and cassette based on a new approach to rhythm and drumming.

[www.rosemary-schonfeld.co.uk](http://www.rosemary-schonfeld.co.uk)

## Websites to inspire your music lessons

[www.firebirdtrust.sagenet.co.uk/](http://www.firebirdtrust.sagenet.co.uk/)

Heard it in the playground is an intergenerational project initiated and designed by music and arts organisation Firebird. Visit this website for ideas for a project of your own and to read about games and rhymes used in the playground.

[www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/studentssite/playgroundrhymes.html](http://www.woodlands-junior.kent.sch.uk/studentssite/playgroundrhymes.html)

Pupils at Woodlands Junior School have collected playground rhymes from their own school grounds.

[www.gameskidsplay.net](http://www.gameskidsplay.net)

A website with lots of rhymes for skipping games.

[www.nwlg.org/pages/resources/pmusic/playground\\_platter\\_intro.htm](http://www.nwlg.org/pages/resources/pmusic/playground_platter_intro.htm)

Warrington Primary School outlines a music scheme of work based on playground games - Playground Patter divides into 5 activities for Y1/2. The aims are to look at rhythmic patterns and compose and perform a chant in the form of a rondo.

[www.wildsong.co.uk/faq\\_birdsong.html](http://www.wildsong.co.uk/faq_birdsong.html)

Has information about how and why birds sing - a useful site if you want to use birdsong in your compositions.

[www.reep.org/resources/s\\_musicorigins/origins3.html](http://www.reep.org/resources/s_musicorigins/origins3.html)

On the Website of the Religious Education and Environment Programme there is a section of secondary resources including information on the origins of music - including from the natural world. It includes ideas for both Music and RE lessons.



## Making your own musical instruments for the outside

[www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/energy/media/teaching/Windy\\_music.pdf](http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/energy/media/teaching/Windy_music.pdf)

Windy music a Science Museum activity for making a wind chime which can double as a wind- speed monitor.

[www.schoolsgarden.org.uk/plan/outdoormusic.asp#washingline](http://www.schoolsgarden.org.uk/plan/outdoormusic.asp#washingline)

Instructions on how to make a musical washing line on the Growing Schools Garden website.

## Some websites for inspiration to create outdoor musical instruments

[www.tidewater.net/~xylojim/](http://www.tidewater.net/~xylojim/)

An American website with lots of ideas (including an instrument made from tuned spanners) and links to other interesting websites.

[www.ninestones.com/potophone.html](http://www.ninestones.com/potophone.html)

Another US site but this time with a flowerpotophone!

[www.sonicarchitecture.com](http://www.sonicarchitecture.com)

Interesting projects on quite a large scale.

[www.soundplay.com](http://www.soundplay.com)

Another American site but with lots of ideas to inspire you.

## Creators and suppliers of musical instruments

[www.ehocity.co.uk](http://www.ehocity.co.uk)

Based in Islington but working throughout the UK, this company creates musical instruments for schools and other organisations.

**John Hall** - 38 Westcliffe Road, Seaburn, Sunderland SR6 9NP  
Maker of outdoor musical structures.

**Kevin Renton** - 56 Russell Terrace, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV31 1HE 01926 426703

Percussive instruments from recycled materials.

**Up-Beat!** - William Embliss, 61 Kitchener Road, London N17 6DU 020 8801 8830

Tuned percussive instruments.

[www.usl.org.uk](http://www.usl.org.uk)

Urban Strawberry Lunch are based in Liverpool and create and perform using instruments made from junk.

Some large playground suppliers (e.g. HAGS, Landscape Structures, Charles Lawrence) now produce musical elements such as chimes and musical panels. Check out their latest websites and catalogues to find out what they are currently offering.

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