Basic Stages of Early Musical Development
Adapted from *Affective Development and the Creative Arts: A Process Approach to Early Childhood Education* by Linda Carol Edwards

To plan and implement music and movement experiences for young children, teachers should understand the basic stages of early musical development.

**The 3-year-old:**
- Sings along on certain phrases of familiar songs.
- Can establish and maintain a regular beat.
- Sings songs with repetitive words and sings in tune.
- Is more consistent in rhythmic responses and can accomplish sudden stops or “freezes.”
- Enjoys listening to recorded music and responding or imitating the motions of others.
- Suggests words for songs or additional verses to songs.
- Interested in rhythm instruments.
- Can learn simple finger-plays.
- Claps in different tempos and at different levels when imitating an adult.

**The 4-year-old:**
- Makes suggestion for musical activities.
- Adds words to songs and creates songs on instruments.
- Creates new rhythms.
- Enjoys singing and is more aware of sounds and rhythms in the environment.
- Imitates movement of animals, machines, or other familiar objects of people.
- Can learn longer and more complicated finger-plays and songs.
- Has increased ability to master song lyrics.
- Combines creative drama with movement and singing.
- Matches and classifies sounds according to volume and pitch.
- Memorizes finger-plays, chants, and action songs.
- Forms basic concepts such as loud-soft and fast-slow.

**The 5- and 6-year old:**
- Sings complete songs from memory.
- Enjoys songs and dances with specific rules and patterns.
- Moves rhythmically to a regular beat and can keep time with music.
- Has greater pitch control and rhythmic accuracy.
- Can learn simple dance steps and adapt them to rhythms.
- Plays instruments with more precision and accuracy.
- Has large repertoire of songs.
- Changes in tempo and dynamics come easier, and music enhances dramatic play.
- Works well with a partner and with small groups in musical activities.
- Enjoys group singing in which everyone has a turn and is especially interested in musical games in which words are often repeated.
- Longer attention span when listening to records and other recorded music. Can compare several sounds and pitches.