



Gari Stein leads classes and programs for small children through her Music for Little Folks business. She has degrees in psychology and dance, and she's been an educator for 40 years.

How long have you been leading Music for Little Folks programs and classes? And about how many kids have participated, over the years, would you guess?

I became an educator in the mid-60s and started Music for Little Folks in 1993. I would guess about 1,000 children have participated.

What do you most love about your work leading music & movement programs for little children?

It is hard to answer simply because I love everything about what I do. Through classes, family & school concerts, staff development and The Ann Arbor Symphony Kinder concerts, Music for Little Folks has helped build a community around the power music can have in the lives of young children. Seeing those precious little faces is a privilege, which brings me enormous joy. To watch children grow and develop in so many ways, not just musically, is a gift that keeps on giving. Also, the parenting piece, the nurturing of relationships between the little ones and the grown-ups who love them, is an important part of making music together.

What is your earliest recollection of music as a child?

I remember my mother rocking me as she lulled me to sleep chanting Ah-ah, ah-ah ba-by. Ma-ma is a la-dy. Dad-dy is a gen-tle-man and you're the lit-tle ba-by. My childhood was filled with the sound of music.

What music did you love as a teenager?

The first 45 record I bought was At the Hop, by Danny and the Juniors. I spent much of my time singing and dancing to Broadway show tunes in my living room, but looking back I was pretty much a folkie. Dylan, Buffy St. Marie, Joan Baez, Peter, Paul and Mary, James Taylor and Phoebe Snow were among my favorites.

What music do you especially love at this time in your life?

I love Celtic airs and waltzes, classical, opera, jazz, big band, new age, Gregorian chants and blues. But along with the traditional music, in-between all the peace and love, I have to admit, I still like to rock and roll.

What is the most beautiful place you've ever been to?

When I think about beauty, the first image in my mind's eye is my grandchildren. Being with them is the most beautiful of all places. This summer, my husband, Ira Lax, and I traveled by train to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. The lush landscapes along the St. Lawrence River, herons and other wildlife kept my eyes glued to the window for almost 2 days, except for meals in the dining car, of course.

What do you do for fun in the wintertime in Michigan?

Besides being with my grandchildren, I love to walk along the river, especially at Furstenberg Park, and there is also a great boardwalk in Marshall. I find that winter gives me more time to do some serious cooking. Two favorite pastimes are watching old movies late at night and reading by the fire, sometimes sleeping on the floor pretending I am camping.