

Arty Crafty Kids

Janet Walker investigates why parents and children love to get creative in their free time

The sheer volume of activities available to children in Hong Kong can be overwhelming for parents, and their pockets. With only limited hours in the day, where on earth do you start – academic, sporting, performance, crafty?

Many of our children will have made their stage debut in a pre-school show; showing off their elf or reindeer skills in the Christmas show or participating in a lion dance for Chinese New Year. Is this the start of a glamorous showbiz career, or the most nerve-wracking experience they'll ever go through?

At a time when the UK, for example, is seeing falling numbers of drama teacher training courses, children in Hong Kong have ample opportunity to tread the boards from a very young age. Sometimes it's the least likely children who shine too - being shy in the real world doesn't always translate to stage fright, so drama is a great way for even the smallest children to take on a new persona.

Keon Lee, General Manager at Faust International and a father of two, says "The arts are vital for a child's overall development. The arts are how we view, express and understand the world. Children understand themselves and others better through the arts, whether it is an image, a story or a performance. Drama, in particular, also helps children develop their confidence and creativity. Children learn skills and knowledge of how to express their ideas, tell stories using physicality, voice and imagination."

Three of Sarah Rooney's four children have taken dance or drama classes and she feels the same as Keon. Her daughter





has been dancing since age two and the proud mum says this has produced a “very self-assured, mature and responsible teenager.”

Music is another performance art with proven benefits for the learner. It doesn't have to be about endless scales and reaching the highest grade, though, it's about fun. Mother of three, Rachel Tandy explains:

“The benefits to children of learning an instrument are amazing. As parents, we tend to look at it as a great developmental tool for fine motor skills and for helping to build muscle memory, posture and listening skills. We all know it has the added benefit of helping our kids learn how music goes from being a few notes on a page, to being a song they hear on the radio or a carol that they sing every year. It also helps them learn to appreciate other types of music and where their instrument fits into a band or an orchestra.

A hidden boon is that music can be a great tool in confidence building;

it feels amazing for kids to perform in front of an audience and to receive appreciation – whether it's an impromptu show in the living room, or a larger performance in a concert hall. Being part of an orchestra is a wonderful way for our ‘Wall Flowers’ to perform with their friends, to feel part of a team and to gain confidence. That confidence can be used in so many other areas: the playground, the sports field, the art room, public speaking and ANYTHING new they care to try! When our kids are confident and have good self-esteem, they are better equipped to deal with peer pressure and responsibility, which is something we all want for our children.

The direct benefits on our children's organisational skills aren't immediately apparent but they do build up over the years, trust me. Musical development works in many areas of the brain including helping children with organisation, maths, language, programming, sports and concentration.

All three of my children play at least one instrument, not because we force them to but because they love the sound of it. For them there's an exhilarating feeling, when after practising and practising and learning new notes each week, they go from the start of a music book or a music piece thinking, ‘How will I ever learn the James Bond Theme Tune?’ to mastering it and playing it beautifully and knowing that it sounds great and their hard work has paid off.

It doesn't make a difference which instrument they choose, they all have benefits – drums give great rhythm; trumpets are fab for breathing – just pick something and try it. So, if your kid says to you, “I want to learn the...” talk to a music teacher, see if it will suit your child and give it a go. Not for a week or two, but for at least six months. Long enough for them to know it's not the easiest thing they'll ever do; long enough to learn about the instrument, reading music and playing





the notes; and long enough to learn that perseverance is key to success. Soon they will get that happy, confident feeling of playing something beautifully and getting it right.”

Fine motor skills and perseverance are great transferable skills that also improve with the craft-based side of arts classes. For example, knitting is seeing something of a renaissance these days with several schools offering it as an extra-curricular activity. Honor Williams, age eight, is in Kellett School’s knitting club and tells us “Knitting helps you focus, and if you stop for a bit it’s like riding a bike, you never forget how to do it.” That happy confident feeling of playing a beautiful piece of music is the same feeling the beginner knitter gets from completing that first scarf or bookmark.

Adri Blumberg, who runs Craft Hour Asia – an arts and crafts school with a focus on life skills – agrees. With a wide range of small classes, including origami, mosaic and upcycling, for children age four up, Adri says “We focus on stimulating creativity,

assist and improve fine motor skills, boost self esteem, improve bilateral communication between left and right sides of the brain and teach children the importance of social cognitive abilities. Many parents who have hyperactive kids or children with concentration issues have been telling me how the craft classes really calm their children down, that the kids come home relaxed and excited about their achievements in craft class.”

The arts often get short shrift as a soft option in education, especially in Hong Kong. But many parents, teachers and children see the benefits, such as motor skills development, social skills, organisational abilities and tenacity. As Adri says, “life in Hong Kong is hectic with a high demand on achievement and academics. Parents do not always have time to sit down and do crafts with kids, and schools definitely do not allow enough time for this development and therefore, I believe, kids miss out.” So, have your children put on their dancing shoes, take to the stage or flex their fingers – the benefits are endless! 

Art and Drama

Pinocchio 15-17th February.

Take your little ones along to see the adventures of Pinocchio, the puppet who is desperate to be a real boy, performed by the Faust International Youth Theatre this month. It’s a great way to inspire your children to join some drama activities themselves.

www.urbtix.hk.

Art Central 21-25th March

Art Central showcases art from around the region and attracts a broad range of visitors, including families. The Sovereign Art Foundation’s booth will be based on a book about Queen’s Road West. Aiming to re-create one of the street’s lantern shops, the booth will be full of colour and will sell nick knacks, such as lanterns and incense sticks. Original prints from the book will decorate the walls and children visiting the fair can decorate the lanterns, hanging them in the ‘shop’ thereby creating an installation during the fair.

<http://artcentralhongkong.com>

Melodia 26-29th April

Another great opportunity to inspire young creatives is taking them to see Melodia, an original production created by Cirque du Soleil composer and singer duo, Violaine Corradi and Rose Winebrenner, in collaboration with Hong Kong Youth Arts Foundation founder Lindsey McAlister. This unique cross-genre performance mixes word, song, dance, aerial arts, puppetry, physical theatre and acrobatics.

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Art Central: Image William Furniss