



The Gift of Music for the Holidays

By Barbara Jacobs, M.S.

As a caregiver for someone with dementia, you may be wondering what gift to give your loved one for the holidays. Have you considered the gift of music this holiday season?

In my fifteen years of experience as a therapeutic musician, I have led countless musical sing-along programs for those with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. During these programs, I often witness music's power to unlock memories. I find this to be true for all stages of the disease and current research confirms my experience.

One of my students, Edie, is 85 and has mid to late stage Alzheimer's disease. She rarely speaks, but when I played "Home on the Range" on the piano, she went from sitting quietly to becoming quite animated. Edie shouted, "I had a horse named Buddy." This type of reaction to familiar music no longer surprises me. Music can bring dramatic behavioral changes, encourages socialization, and improves the overall well being of those with dementia.

Research confirms the benefits music has for Alzheimer's patients. It has been reported that music therapy on a daily basis will raise the brain chemicals melatonin, epinephrine and norepinephrine in our blood levels, thus positively affecting our mental state. **Testing of patients with dementia who sing daily shows that these elevated blood chemicals can help them to become more active, more cooperative, and may even improve their ability to sleep.** Dr. Kumar with the University of Miami's School of Medicine found that music provided lasting benefits for elderly men with Alzheimer's disease who participated in a music therapy program for 30 to 40 minutes a day, five days a week, for a month. The research further found that music's benefits continued for these men for several weeks after their participation in this music program had ended.

With evidence of the positive benefits of music and singing, wouldn't it be wonderful if your loved one could sing every day? There are a variety of ways to bring old favorite music into their lives. Your local public library is a good resource for renting free musical CDs and old movies or operas on DVD that are sure to bring a smile to their faces and words to their lips, as they sing or hum with joy and recognition. There are a number of music and sing-along programs on the market that can be purchased through senior product catalogs, including my own sing-along programs, *Front Row Seat Videos*.

I have always known that music can open hearts. Through my teaching experience, reinforced by recent research, I have seen how it can open minds as well! So, as the holidays approach, consider a musical gift for your loved one. I know you will be happy you did, as it will be beneficial and enjoyable for them, and it just may give you some well deserved respite time.

For questions or more information you can e-mail me at: barbara@customvideosf.com

Happy Holidays!

Barbara Jacobs, M.S., is a therapeutic musician who has taught music classes at long-term care facilities for the past fifteen years. See her Web site at www.FrontRowSeatVideos.com

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