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In-womb surround sound? A new way to rock your baby

Bonnie McCarthy

Feb 3rd 2010 at 11:00AM
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Filed under: **Family Money, Technology**

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Music industry glitterati took home free the **Ritmo Advanced Pregnancy Sound Systems by Nuvo** along with the rest of the enviable graft in their gratis *Grammy Awards MusiCares* goody bags this year. Designed to support a pregnant belly, aid in fetal development, and provide, "unparalleled quality and safe sound to prenatal listeners," the system aspires to be a multi-tasking baby Bose for the in-utero crowd.

I saw *August Rush*, I get the idea. Nuvo, however, cites scientific studies to prove its case.

Dr. Alexandra Lamont from Leicester University's Music Research Group at the School of Psychology (UK) reported that babies can remember sounds they heard in the womb more than a year after birth,

"This provides new evidence about the influence of nurture in early child development," he said. "Babies can remember and prefer music that they heard before they were born."

In addition, Nuvo notes information from authors Sloboda and Deliege, who wrote *Musical Beginnings: Origins and Development of Musical Competence (1996)* and stated, "musical interactions from the earliest moments are directly related to brain development and may be the building blocks for future musical ability, intellectual development, and ultimately functioning in the culture in which the child lives".

Lamont's study, however, reports that there is currently no evidence that playing classical music (or reggae, rock, country, swing, or rap) will help baby's brain development. Of course, baby's pre-disposition to success in the music world can also be greatly influenced if mom or dad happens to be a Grammy-winning rock star.

For those of us not on the Grammy gift bag A-list, the Ritmo runs \$139.99 at Petit Tresor on trendy Robertson Blvd, in West Hollywood. "We just got them in last week," I was told by a sales clerk, "and we only have one left." They are also available online at Amazon.com for \$127.97. Touted as the perfect way to bond with baby, as well as a cool new shower gift, the gadget is also being billed as "stylish."

Created out of wide black bands encircling the torso like a belt, it wraps under and over the belly and features four lime green speakers. The Ritmo does have a sort of space-age, euro, techno-geek appeal -- but it's about as stylish as maternity underwear. It looks comfortable, which is never a ringing fashion endorsement, but is increasingly important as those nine months wear on.

Because the Ritmo adapts to all iPod and MP3 players (and can incorporate a headset for mom), parents are in charge of the playlist. Nuvo suggests, "Reactive listening begins at 17 weeks, so choose classical music for the calming Mozart Effect, the classic rock of the Beatles, or the upbeat show tunes of Broadway." Show tunes? *Hello Dolly? Guys and Dolls?*

Obviously, baby can't make requests, but I suggest choosing wisely or those teenage years will be payback time. Nuvo has more ideas, "Why not get Dad and other family members involved? Record dad reading his favorite children's book, siblings talking, grandparents singing a lullaby, or the family dog barking."

Experienced mom of two that I am, here's what I'm thinking: in that precious time before parents are completely and wonderfully consumed with the task of caring for a newborn, there must be something better to do than record the family dog. Anything.

So what's a young family on a budget to do if they can't afford the Ritmo and relatives didn't take the hint? Don't skip the stroller. Research suggests baby will hear many of the same sounds -- for free. No recording or iPod required.

In an article by Chris M. Martin, *How Husbands Can Talk to Their Baby in the Womb*, he writes: According to Dr. Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, PhD, of the University of Delaware, "...Babies in the womb can recognize the mother's voice, but unfortunately, they don't recognize the father's voice right away."

William Fifer, a developmental psychobiologist at Columbia University said, "It appears the fetus can even hear specific speech patterns and intonations." Fifer suggests daddies-in-training try reading aloud to baby or having a conversation. No matter what you do, kids catch on pretty quickly - even though they may act like they can't distinguish a father's voice in later years.

However, since parents do have a captive audience, it might be a good time to go over some ground rules for good behavior, discuss allowance, college expectations, dating guidelines and maybe even have that "big talk." It couldn't hurt, but don't be surprised if they claim they didn't hear you.

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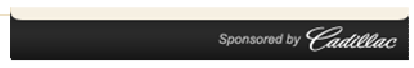
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