

# **KODÁLY METHOD AND ITS INFLUENCE ON TEACHING WIND INSTRUMENTS IN HUNGARY**

**Jozsef Csikota  
Midwest Clinic  
Chicago, Illinois U.S.A.  
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## **KODÁLY METHOD IN HUNGARIAN SCHOOLS**

In Hungary, every student learns music, but not all play an instrument. Each week in elementary and high schools students have at least one music lesson that includes singing, basic music theory and music literature. Teachers use Kodály method, which is based on vocal training. Kodály believed that singing should be the foundation of all music education. “It is a long accepted truth,” wrote Kodály, “that singing provides the best start to music education; even the most talented artist can never overcome the disadvantages of an education without singing.”

In Hungary, every student has the opportunity to sing either individually in a music lesson or in a choir. They use the relative solmization system in which the places of the syllables change according to the tonal center. ( what Americans call movable “do”) This differs from the system in which the note “C” always has the same syllable (“do”) regardless of its place in the musical scale( fixed do). Young students first learn to sing easy Hungarian folk songs with narrow range. Later, as they get older, they sing more and more difficult and serious songs with wider ranges and deeper emotions. By learning to use syllables in the relative solmization system in singing traditional tunes, students develop a sense of relative pitch, which becomes very useful in instrumental lessons. This method of music education is known by every Hungarian student in elementary and high school. Those students who want to learn an instrument go to special music schools. They receive solfeggio lessons twice a week, with about 15 students in a class, where they learn basic music theory based on Kodály method, and they have private lessons on the chosen instrument.

By the time children start to play an instrument they have already acquired basic knowledge of music theory. Through the knowledge of basic music theory, students learn to understand the music they play; and they learn to memorize through the mind instead of through mechanical drilling of the fingers. The Kodály method sharpens the student's mental faculties, mental discipline, and develops a high level of imagination. As a result, students can learn to hear the printed notes in their minds without the help of an instrument, and also will be able to write down music that is heard. As Kodály said, "A good musician should hear what he sees and he should see (in terms of notes) what he hears." In other words, through the Kodály method, a student is led to the ability to read music as if he were reading in his mother tongue. Good reading ability is the first step in becoming an accurate sight-reader and effective musician. This is fascinating fun for those who learn music only for enjoyment, and essential for those who choose music as a career. This method is designed to educate audiences as well as to train professionals.

### **ADVANTAGES OF VOCAL TRAINING**

I have already mentioned that the use of voice is one of the most defining features of the Kodály approach. Let me explain the advantages of vocal training. In singing various kinds of pieces—slow and fast, happy and sad, loud and soft, etc.—students have to recognize tempo changes, different rhythms, etc., which are essential for an effective performance. The following are also easy to learn during a choir experience and are extremely important:

- correct, punctual beginning of each note together
- balanced volume
- balanced dynamics

The next step is to sing songs in two, three or four parts. Students still do not use instruments but now they begin to learn how to cope with more difficult, serious pieces and musical forms.

During vocal training, children learn the intervals, pay attention to intonation, develop their hearing and they also develop the sense of recognizing different musical forms. In Hungary, there is usually at least one choir in each school. The choir experience applies what they learned in music lessons.

## TEACHING MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

With such musical background, students who want to play instruments have only to deal with the technical and acoustical challenges of their instruments. In facing those challenges, students are aided by Hungary's unique system of giving each student the opportunity to attend a state-sponsored music school. Those music schools provide the student with private lessons on the chosen instrument from a specialized teacher. The unity of the established theoretical and practical previous musical training with specialized teachers results in rapid development of the students' musical skills. That's makes the Hungarian music education world famous.

Instrumental study follows the same path as earlier singing. After learning to produce a tone that is characteristic of the instrument, with good embouchure and good use of the breath, the student learns easy, traditional songs with narrow ranges. And, as in the earlier vocal training, they progress to more demanding pieces with wider ranges and greater variety of expression.

The beginning instrumental student has already learned four important things from Kodály method:

1. Students have to be able to recognize the key signature and be able to *sing the melody or part of the piece using relative solmization* in the instrumental lesson. This process helps children to orient themselves between different tonalities/ keys, to recognize different intervals and to correct intonation problems that might occur.
2. *The student has to clap or tap the rhythm of the piece. He has to recognize the meter/time signature in order to play accents in correct positions.* Another important thing is that children should be able to recognize and construe every rhythmic element, unit, figuration (syncope, dotted rhythm, etc.)
3. *Recognizing the musical form with the help of the teacher* is also important. Analysis of the musical form teaches students to think of longer musical units when they play and also is useful to recognize different musical sentences within each musical unit.
4. *Students are asked to interpret the mood of the piece.* It is very important because they have to choose the right tempo. Choosing the proper tempo is essential because it

determines everything- the musical expression, the mood of the piece and the proper performance of rhythms.

After reaching the required level, instrumental students in the music school have the opportunity to form various chamber ensembles. First, they play duets, then trios, quartets, and quintets, etc., again with striking similarity to vocal training. In the music schools there are wide varieties of instrumental groups like trumpet quartets, trombone quartets, clarinet quartets, brass quintets and others.

When students play polyphonic pieces of many parts they can use a whole consort, such as a clarinet choir of E-flat soprano, B-flat soprano, E-flat alto and B-flat bass. The situation is quite similar with brasses and saxophones.

I have already mentioned great similarities between vocal and instrumental training. When children sing four part songs in the choir they learn five major things: how to pay attention to each other, recognize harmonies, sing in tune, follow the same tempo, and to sing with the same tone color and balance. Let me give you two examples on a recording.

#### 1. CD LISTENING (choir)

Practically, students have to pay attention to exactly the same things when they play on an instrument. (correct intonation, agogics, balance of tone colors, etc.) That is why we, teachers and conductors, should transcribe choral pieces for our wind ensembles and bands to play.

2. Imagine that a choir is singing. This group sounds like a mixed choir.

#### CD LISTENING (Budapest Anonymus Brass quintet)

## **PERSONAL EXPERIENCES**

There are two useful exercises to practice with our orchestras using Kodály's concept:

1. *Practice the piece or one part of the piece separately with each group of instruments.*

I usually start to work out the piece or a given part of the piece with the trombone section. Later, after practicing, I mix with tubas. In this case, the sound must not change. Students have to hear their playing as if they were singing in a mixed choir.

2. *Play a scale , b flat for example, in unison.*

Practicing the scale is the first step in the exercise since later I sing a melody with solmization syllables and students have to play on their instruments. The melody is also demonstrated with hand signals which is played by the students as a sequence melody. They have to transpose it to different tonalities which is not only a good mental training but also a great warm up activity for the players. They learn to play together properly and perfectly in tune.

## **SUMMARY**

To sum up, We recognized the similarities between the choir and the wind band. The wind band or chamber ensembles should produce that same balanced and homogeneous sound that a choir is able to produce. Wind orchestra musicians should follow principles that are followed by vocalists. Whether singing in a choir or playing in a band or orchestra, you always have to do the same: perform from your heart and express your deepest. According to Kodály every student has to be musically literate. Through musical literacy everyone may join in musical experiences of being a vocalist, a solo instrumentalist, an orchestra musician or only one member of the audience.

I would like to set good bye with a quotation from Kodály:

The characteristics of a good musician can be summarized as follows:

1. Well-trained ears,
2. Well- trained hands
3. A well-trained heart
4. Well-trained mind/intelligence.