

## SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE KODÁLY CONCEPT

By Gillian Earl

These Principles are an integral part of the Kodály Philosophy and Concept. There is no particular significance in the order in which they are listed here. Each can be likened to the spoke of a wheel, starting with music at the hub and leading out to the ever expanding circumference of the wheel as the understanding of the language of music increases with progress.

1. **Begin with the music** - the joy of the experience. Music is taught in the way children learn naturally, by experiencing the music first. Taking child development into account it is recognised that children do not learn through intellectual and theoretical abstractions. Musical elements are learnt unconsciously before being made conscious, after which they are practised (through singing), read, written then reinforced further by being presented in new contexts: all this is done in a carefully pre-determined pedagogical order.
2. **Begin in the kindergarten.** Although the Concept can be adapted to be applied to any age, the age from three to seven years is the most important.  
"...the first steps are the same for everyone.. ." Z.K.\*
3. **The first musical instrument is the voice.** It is not possible to sing anything which has not first been imagined in the 'inner ear'. Singing is the proof that the music has been assimilated and understood.  
"A child who plays an instrument before he sings may remain unmusical for a lifetime. That is why we encounter so many skilful pianists who have no idea of the essence of music" Z.K.\*
4. **Relative Solfa is used.** The solfa is the sound. It renders the sounds tangible and memorable and expresses their relative pitch and tonal functions. It is never used as just "another verse" to a song. It defines melody, modulation, chromaticism, intervals and harmonic progression. It aids transposition.
5. **Handsigns** are a visual aid used to express the solfa. They provide the link between the sounds and the written notes. They have an effect of producing a reflex action in the vocal cords.
6. **Notation** is initially in rhythmic solfa or stick notation. This is never completely discarded. Reading from the stave, with most do positions, (there are seven) is learnt before fixed pitch is taught. Reading with G and F clefs and, later, the C clefs follow.
7. **Music should be of good quality**, - initially the musical mother-tongue. It should be given time to take root before another musical 'language' is introduced.  
"Folksong is the school of good taste ... those who develop a taste for what is good at an early age will become resistant later to what is bad. " Z.K.\* The reverse is also true.
8. **Pentatonic music** is used in the early stages. The distinctive shape of the pentatone, d r m s l, in which any of the sounds can be the final, makes it easier to acquire tonal orientation. Also, tunes without semitones are easier to sing in tune. The roots of much of our common musical heritage spring from pentatony. From this starting point greater insight can be gained into modal music\*, and thus a better understanding of the historical development of music.  
\* This is why Relative Solfa is so named and used in this context rather than Tonic Solfa.

9. **Intonation.** Voice tunes with voice. Two different sounds sung simultaneously and tuned, acoustically, with each other enhance the perception of their relative pitch and their tonal functions. The sounds are re-created through the 'inner hearing' and are not supposedly supported or prompted by a piano which has tempered tuning and a timbre with which it is not easy for young children to identify. Good intonation is vital to maintaining tonality. **Musical literacy\*** cannot be developed without secure intonation.

\* The ability to 'hear' what you see (read) and see (write) what you hear.

10. **The rhythm** of the music of a nation (its folksongs) is borne of its speech rhythms. Rhythm is inseparably bound up with the other principles of the Concept. From the outset the elements of music are taught within phrases, or motifs, never in single sounds or notes. The aim is developing a sense of rhythmic continuity and to acquire a sense of the shape of phrasing. Mistakes in reading should not be allowed to interrupt performance; they can be corrected afterwards and will often, on repetition, self correct.

11. **Two-part work** in all its possibilities of combinations and permutations has high priority. Such things as 'question and answer', performance in two parts simultaneously by two people or groups - this includes activities such as tapping the beat or an ostinato with another part, canon, independent parts; the possibilities of various combinations are endless. Ideally a minimum of three people is required - two to perform and the teacher to act as 'referee'. The practice of silent singing (in the mind) develops inner hearing. It occurs naturally in the course of two-part music making when each performer learns to "think" the other's part. Two-part music making trains not only the powers of concentration, memory and awareness, it also trains the ability to listen polyphonically and the powers of co-ordination. This paves the way for the development of harmonic hearing leading to the study of form.

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"If, through the reading of music, a child has reached the stage where he is able to sing a small masterpiece in two parts with another child, he has acquired a hundred times as much music than if he had thrashed the piano from sunrise to sunset. Many people are looking for the door to the treasury of music in the wrong places. They obstinately keep hammering on the locked gates and pass right by the open doors that are accessible to everybody."

\*Zoltan Kodály 1882-1967.