The application of the Kodaly method to instrumental music education

Sherry Black

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarship.richmond.edu/honors-theses

Recommended Citation
THE APPLICATION OF THE KODÁLY METHOD TO INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC EDUCATION

Sherry Black
January, 1982
I would like to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to Dr. Ellen McCullough and Dr. David Graves for their guidance and constant moral support in my preparation of this paper.
Music educators have constantly searched for more effective ways to teach their subject. In the past thirty years, several philosophies and methods of music education have had considerable influence on the music curricula in American schools. An examination of one of these methods, the Kodály method, will be the focus of this paper. Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), a Hungarian composer and educator, believed that the voice was nature's first instrument and that only through its correct utilization could a child develop correctly in all other aspects of music. The history, goals and techniques of Kodály's method will be outlined in this paper and a means of utilizing these techniques to reach similar goals in instrumental music will be presented. The theories behind each technique used in the instrumental instruction will parallel the original theories.

History/Goals

Early in the 20th century, Zoltán Kodály became concerned about the lack of musical literacy in his native home, Hungary. Kodály wanted the people of Hungary to become more familiar with their own musical heritage and to increase the musical literacy of the students of the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest and the population as a whole. He pursued these goals by collecting and publishing authentic Hungarian folk songs and by introducing new methods for teacher training.

The Royal Academy of Music had become rather lax in its responsibility of training teachers. Kodály felt very strongly about
the quality of those who should be teaching music to Hungary's children. He stated, "It is much more important who is the music teacher in Kisvárda than who is the director of the opera house in Budapest . . . for a poor director fails once, but a poor teacher keeps on failing for 30 years, killing the love of music in 30 batches of children." Because of Kodály's influence and active promotion of his philosophies of music education, the Academy now has very stringent requirements for those preparing to teach.

As a means of restoring Hungary's musical heritage, Kodály began collecting and analyzing Hungarian folk music. Accompanied by Béla Bartók, he succeeded in collecting some one thousand children's songs, which he subsequently used as teaching material. There were three basic reasons for his choosing Hungarian folk songs as teaching materials: (1) Kodály felt that a child should learn the folk songs of his native country before other music; (2) The simple forms, basic pentatonic scales and comprehensible language of folk songs were well suited for children; and (3) Folk music is not contrived for pedagogical purposes, but is a living art in itself.3

Kodály came very close to reaching his goal of providing the entire population of Hungary with skills in reading and writing music. To accomplish this, he proposed a program of sol-fa teaching which gives each pitch in the scale a specific syllabic name. Going up the scale, tonic is do, followed by re, mi, fa, sol, la and ti. Kodály's program concentrates on choral musicianship and
includes sightsinging, dictation and music reading and writing skills. Through this method Kodály felt the child would be prepared to sing and hear the notes correctly. In later lessons, the students would be able to identify a note by its sound, name and placement in the scale.

Techniques

The basic tools of the Kodály method are: (1) movable do, (2) Curwen hand signs to reinforce intervallic feeling, and (3) note values with specific syllabic equivalents. Kodály's utilization of these within the folk songs served as the basis for his teaching. The sequence of the method begins with the children singing intervals of a minor 3rd, sol-mi. Having listened to many children at play, Kodály concluded that a minor 3rd was the most natural interval for a child to sing and hear. Following the teacher's hand signs, the students concentrate on matching pitch in their sol-mi exercises, adding la, do and re. The lower la and sol of the pentatonic scale are taught last. The scale steps fa and ti are not introduced until the second year.

The concept of solmization was popularized by Guido d'Arezzo during the eleventh century. It began as a fixed do system in which sol-fa syllables were assigned to specific pitches. The movable do system, which developed somewhat later, labeled the tonic pitch of any major key do. Kodály used this device to develop the sightsinging skills of his students.
The hand signs Kodály used were derived from a method of tonic sol-fa developed by John Curwen in the 19th century. The Eclectic Curriculum in American Music Education, a text published by Music Educators National Conference, describes Curwen's hand signs in the following manner:

They utilize the pull of certain scale tones toward the tonal center and toward the fairly stationary sounds of mi and sol: ti, represented by pointing upward, tends toward do; fa, with the thumb pointing downward, tends toward mi; re, with the hand pointing obliquely upward also tends toward mi.9

The signs give a spatial representation of the high-low relationships between notes. The hand signs for the seven pitches in the major scale are illustrated in Example A. They are made in front of the body, with do at the waist and la at eye level.10

The third tool cited was the use of rhythmic values with specific syllabic equivalents. Kodály first introduced the quarter note and then the eighth note. The quarter note is described as the child's walking pace and the eighth note as his running pace. Kodály gave each rhythmic value a specific syllable to help the child read music more easily:

\[
\begin{align*}
ta & - \quad \uparrow \\
ti-ti & - \quad \frac{\uparrow}{\uparrow} \\
ti-ri-ti-ri & - \quad \frac{\uparrow}{\uparrow} \frac{\uparrow}{\uparrow} \\
tri-o-la & - \quad \frac{\uparrow}{\uparrow} \frac{\uparrow}{\uparrow} \\
syn-co-pa & - \quad \frac{\uparrow}{\uparrow} \frac{\uparrow}{\uparrow} \\
\end{align*}
\]

The developmental approach to teaching vocal music uses simple duple-meter rhythms coupled with the three notes, sol - mi - la, as a starting point.11
EXAMPLE A

- ti
- la
- sol
- fa
- mi
- re
- do
As stated earlier, Kodály used singing as the basic mode of instruction. He felt the voice to be the most personal and immediate means of musical expression. Kodály also realized that some types of instruments would be unavailable in many Hungarian schools. He felt that through vocal music the students could best be trained to distinguish intervals and to produce pure tone and accurate intonation.

The idea behind relative sol-fa teaching is that rhythmic and melodic motives and patterns will be analogous to the words and phrases making up the initial learning experiences in language. These rhythmic and melodic motives are encountered first through singing and hearing them. Singing in sol-fa helps the child develop music skills in sight-reading, writing, analysis, transposition and score reading, all of which are important to the child's overall musical development.

Another important aspect of Kodály's instructional system is listening. Kodály believed that it was one of the basic skills contributing to the child's general musicianship. Ear training exercises are designed to develop inner hearing abilities. Children start to recognize intervals and to sing entire songs silently. Inner hearing also plays a major role when students begin to sing in parts.

Training through sol-fa also helps the child with techniques necessary for the various instruments. Ear training along with sol-fa precedes the teaching of instruments in order to provide a
more solid basis for developing the child's ability to play. It can be adapted to each instrument according to its own particular nature. As an example, consider the violin's open G string to be do. The child first sings do, re, mi and then plays G, A, B on the violin. The child proceeds to do this on the D, A and E strings. Having the sol-fa tune so firmly in his mind from earlier training enables him to understand these concepts from the very first lesson.16 Pupils learning to play instruments can apply the absolute pitch names with the sol-fa intervals. Sol-fa also helps the child to read in various keys and clefs.17

Instrumental Adaptation

Denise Bacon, an authority on the adaptation of Kodály in the American school systems, discusses the aspect of adaptation and the Kodály philosophy. "... this method should begin at the beginning, as early as possible, with the first grade or earlier. It is not easy and, in most cases not successful to begin at junior or senior high level."18 If the entire method were to be started at the secondary level, Bacon's statement would probably hold true, however, it is possible to use some of Kodály's techniques and ideas in a junior or senior high school situation. With some modifications, the sequence of events can follow very closely those Kodály has suggested.

Junior High School

A common belief of music educators is that a person can play his part correctly if he can sing it correctly. This adheres
closely to Kodály's philosophy of music education. The concept is that if one can hear the part and feel the physical movements necessary to produce the part, he can reproduce it on his instrument. From this standpoint, it makes sense to sing new intervals before playing them. It enables the student, using his own voice as an instrument, to experience the breathing process and to hear the correct pitch before trying it on a new instrument. The suggested sequence of instructional techniques is:

1. To familiarize the students with singing and recognizing pitches sol, mi, la, do.
2. To demonstrate the Curwen hand signs.
3. To familiarize the students with singing and recognizing pitch re.
4. To demonstrate sol, mi, la on students' instruments.
5. To familiarize the students with singing and recognizing the pitch ti.
6. To demonstrate do on students' instruments.
7. To familiarize the students with singing and recognizing the pitch fa.
8. To demonstrate re on students' instruments.
9. To demonstrate ti and fa on students' instruments.
10. To introduce the written notation for sol-fa in the method book being used.

The first lessons should concentrate mainly on singing intervals following hand signs. The amount of singing will be reduced gradually as the students become more proficient on their instruments. It is important, however, to continue the sol-fa singing regularly throughout junior high school. As musical problems are
encountered on the instruments, students can work to correct the problem by singing the passage first. In order for this to be an effective tool, the singing skills must not deteriorate.

The instructional techniques presented follow Kodály’s suggestions closely. It should be mentioned, however, that after the first week of instruction these techniques should be used as a supplement to the chosen instrumental music method book. Using the Learning Unlimited method, published by Hal Leonard, as an example, several exercises and songs will be presented to demonstrate how the instructional techniques can be implemented. The pitches used in the exercises are coordinated with the pitches first used in the Learning Unlimited method. These will vary depending on what instrumental method book is used. It is suggested that the exercises (Example B) and songs (Example C) be used to familiarize the students with new intervals. In the exercises, only the pitch has been given. The method of teaching rhythm is left to the discretion of the instructor. The songs in Example C illustrate the Kodály concept of movable do by using different tonal centers as do. Utilization of movable do with the instruments should be delayed however, until the students have learned a sufficient number of pitches.

A creative activity which can be used from the very beginning of instruction and throughout high school is improvisation with the tones of the pentatonic scale. Using Curwen hand signs for pitches, the instructor combines these with a rhythmic ostinato pattern to
EXAMPLE C


The Wishing Song p. 147

Quaker, Quaker p. 148

Bell Horses p. 150

Rain, Rain p. 148

Lucy Locket p. 149

Ding Dong Bell p. 152
EXAMPLE C - Cont.

**Fais Do-Do** p. 155

\[ \text{Music notation} \]

**Mary had a Little Lamb** p. 158

\[ \text{Music notation} \]

**Built my Lady a Fine Brick House** p. 164

\[ \text{Music notation} \]

**Brother John** p. 200

\[ \text{Music notation} \]

**Hey, Ho, Nobody Home** p. 204

\[ \text{Music notation} \]

EXAMPLE D Improvisation Ostinato Patterns

\[ \text{Music notation} \]
be played in unison by the students. After the pattern has begun, the instructor selects a student to improvise a melody using any of the pitches in the pentatonic scale. This activity can reinforce new pitches, promote creativity and develop a sense of aesthetics in the student. Sample illustrations of ostinato patterns are given in Example D.

As mentioned earlier, three techniques used by Kodály are movable do, Curwen hand signs and syllabic note values. The suggested adaptation uses movable do in singing and later in playing. It introduces and drills the intervals with Curwen hand signs. It does not use Kodály's syllabic note values. The rhythm syllables suggested by Kodály could interfere with the development of correct articulation by wind players. For this reason, the teaching of rhythmic values is left to the particular method book being used.

Kodály's use of folk songs and the pentatonic scale as a means of instruction are not as applicable in American instrumental instruction as they are in Hungary. Many Hungarian folk songs are based on the pentatonic scale whereas many American folk songs are based on major, minor or other modal scales. Most primary method books do not include pentatonic melodies with their instructional material, nor do they emphasize folk songs. For these reasons, the use of folk songs and pentatonic scales in instrumental instruction are dealt with as a creative activity.

Senior High School

Two of the most critical problems encountered by high school bands are balance and intonation. The diverse nature of the
instruments themselves often makes it difficult to establish a correct balance. Intonation problems can stem from the player, the instrument, or a combination of both. All too often, students forget to listen to others as well as to themselves. Kodály techniques can be adapted at this level to promote the students' listening skills and concentration abilities. An example would be the utilization of Curwen hand signs as a warm-up exercise. Similar to the instructional techniques given earlier, the instructor designates a particular pitch as do and proceeds with the exercises using the hand signs. The students follow the hand signs for the sequence of pitches, trying to play in tune with each other. Intensive listening is emphasized in order to match pitch. Sample intonation exercises are given in Example E.

Curwen hand signs can also help with the band's balance problems. The instructor divides the sections of the band into two halves. One half follows the right hand, while the other half follows the left hand. As harmonies are created between the two halves, the students should strive to blend with each other. This exercise also improves listening and concentration skills as well as the student's basic musicianship. Sample balance exercises and simple harmonized melodies are illustrated in Example F. The exercises and melodies should be done at a relatively slow pace, allowing the students time to hear and adjust to the pitch.

Summary

Kodály had definite concepts which the instructor should keep in mind at all times. Listening and musicianship were goals to be
EXAMPLE E Intonation

EXAMPLE F Balance

Poor Wayfarin' Stranger  Minor key - starting pitch la

Shenandoah
found in each of his lessons. Otto Till, a Hungarian music educator, writes,

An auditive appreciation of music should always precede instrumental realization. The instrumental activities of pupils with a sound technical basis are consistently linked with music as an auditory experience. During the whole course of study, musical training and technical advancement thus proceed hand in hand, in continuous interaction. Clear and deliberate phrasing supports the development of each step in instrumental instruction, while instrumental movements practiced with correct functions promote musical understanding and thereby the expression of the musical subject matter.19

Lili Veszprémi, a fellow Hungarian music educator, further elaborates,

The teaching of every instrument, moreover, rests on the common principle that from the very beginning the pupil should be trained to notice relations and connections in music, and to avoid purely mechanical activity . . . The development of technique is not treated as an end in itself, but is always connected with material under study. The principle is always observed that from the beginning instrumental training should be directed to producing a balanced, free movement, because still movements, once acquired, are very hard to eradicate later.20

These were the goals Kodály had in mind when he devised his method to improve the general musicianship of everyone in Hungary, and it has proved to be quite successful. Although Kodály felt singing to be the basis of good musicianship, he was not adverse to instrumental training, nor did he think that singing should supplant instrumental instruction. In a lecture presented in New York in 1945, Kodály stated that, "... the United States has done more for popularizing instrumental music than any other country in the world and if a careful balance can be achieved between instrumental music and singing, this country may possibly produce more
concrete and valuable results than elsewhere in the world." The suggested adaptations of the Kodály method have the same goals in mind, to improve the general musicianship of each instrumentalist. In America, the instrumentalist often views singing as a completely different field in music. Perhaps it is possible to take the best of both worlds and achieve a balance between instrumental music and singing, producing "... more concrete and valuable results than elsewhere in the world." The techniques described in this paper are a step in that direction.

The adaptations suggested in this paper are my own hypotheses. To my knowledge, they have not been carried out in the manner presented, with the exception of the warm-up exercises for senior high, which were first presented to me in 1978 by George Naff, musical director of the All Student Marching Band, U.S.A. I hope to test their feasibility and effectiveness in my student teaching, Spring semester 1982.
FOOTNOTES


2Ibid.

3Ibid., p. 8.


5Choksy, p. 132.

6Ibid., p. 18.

7Ibid., p. 21.

8Ibid., p. 18.

9Landis, p. 56.

10Choksy, p. 21.

11Ibid., p. 17.

12Landis, p. 50.

13Ibid., p. 46.


15Landis, p. 59.

16Frigyes, p. 44.

17Ibid., p. 30.


19Frigyes, p. 200.

20Ibid., p. 203.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


