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KODÁLY STRATEGIES FOR INSTRUMENTAL TEACHERS

When the Kodály method is extended to string and other instrumental instruction, it offers opportunities for enhancing student musicianship.

BY PRISCILLA M. HOWARD

The incorporation of Kodály vocal techniques into instrumental teaching, especially string teaching, is a new frontier with potential for limitless creativity and flexibility for the teacher. For the student, it can result in increased knowledge and better musicianship. The Hungarian composer Zoltán Kodály (1882–1967) based his philosophy of music education on singing. Kodály believed that singing, rather than instrumental proficiency, was the foundation for broad musical literacy. Today, many American music students think of singing and playing an instrument as two separate entities. But they can be linked.

Kodály Method

Kodály's basic principles centered around the premise that "music belongs to everyone."¹ He believed that music was meant to develop a person's entire being, including personality, intellect, and emotions. He taught that "music is not a toy for a very few selected people ... music is spiritual food for everybody."² His teaching went far beyond the classroom to encompass a way of life.

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Kodály believed that music selected for study and listening should be of the highest quality. In this list of music, he included folk songs and games of a student's own culture, traditional folk songs and games of other cultures, music written by distinguished composers from all generations, and pedagogical exercises created by master composers.

According to Kodály, singing provides an excellent foundation for the study of music. The human voice is an instrument provided by nature and is one that almost everyone can develop. Just as children develop language by constantly hearing speech, they can

also learn to match pitch and develop musicianship by hearing their role models sing frequently. Singing develops the inner ear, which is the most important musical goal of all. An a cappella vocal foundation can sharpen the ear even further. Instruction should progress until the student is well-grounded in the fundamentals of musicianship: sight singing, dictation, ear training, part hearing, harmony, form, and memory. A rhythmic system of mnemonic syllables can assist in the instruction of counting.

Musical study, according to Kodály, should start in early childhood, and the student should have certain musical experiences before studying notation. Children learn best through frequent opportunities for active participation in performing and moving to music. Learning should be child-centered and properly sequenced, and the curriculum should be carefully planned and based on experience for optimal learning.

Applying the Kodály Method

The basic principles of the Kodály method can be incorporated into instrumental teaching. The use of the singing voice and the study of folk music become the primary components of beginning instruction for instrumental students. The movable do system (relative solfège) is advocated by Kodály. Since most folk

Place the rhythm pattern of a song on the chalkboard and have the instrumental class chant it using the vocables “ta” and “ti” (see figure 3a). Alternatively, students can be invited to write part of the pattern on the board or they can simply “draw a quarter note.” Students love to write on the chalkboard. Also, students can keep a small music staff notebook in their case or folder along with a pencil. When new notes or rhythms are introduced, encourage students to write them down. Keep any written assignments short.

After placing the rhythm on the board, have the students perform the rhythm on an open string (D) or play an easy open note on a wind instrument before adding the finger numbers. Strings can play pizzicato first and then arco. Next, show the song having this rhythm (see figure 3b). It is a good idea to sing the melody in solfège syllables (shown in figure 3b) before playing it on the instrument. Classes can also chant the letter names or finger numbers (shown in figure 3b) before playing or reading the song. Be sure to play the passage on the instrument very slowly at first—muscles need to be trained slowly.

Unfortunately, the altered note names presently used in English-speaking countries are not well suited to singing purposes. F-sharp, in figure 3b, is an example; it has two syllables (“F” and “sharp”) for one note. Kodály singing practice has evolved with new altered note names; F-sharp, for example, becomes “fease.” The Altered Note Names sidebar shows the new names and how to pronounce them.

A step-by-step, “rhythm to note” technique can be used for advanced string players and their compositions. With this technique, a student plays a rhythm on open strings only. An example for solo violin (see figure 4a) is provided from the *Roumanian Folk Dances* by Béla Bartók. First, play the syncopated rhythm of the example, with no fingers, on the open G string (see figure 4b). Then, play the syncopated rhythm on the open D string (see figure 4c). Next, play part of the rhythm on the open G string and part of the rhythm on the open D string, as if the passage were on both strings

Figure 3a. A rhythm pattern (with vocables) of a song to be taught



Figure 3b. The song with solfège and fingering added



Altered Note Names

Note names altered by one sharp:

Note	Pronunciation
F-sharp = fease	feast (without the letter “t”)
C-sharp = cease	cease
G-sharp = gease	geese
D-sharp = dease	dease
A-sharp = ace	ace
E-sharp = eas	eas (as in “eastern”)
B-sharp = beas	beast (without the letter “t”)

Note names altered by one flat:

Note	Pronunciation
B-flat = bes	best (without the letter “t”)
E-flat = es	es (as in “escalator”)
A-flat = ice	ice
D-flat = des	desk (without the letter “k”)
G-flat = guess	guess
C-flat = cess	cess
F-flat = fes	fes (as in “festival”)

Note: This chart is based on information from Erzsébet Hegyi, *Solfège according to the Kodály Concept*, vol. 1 (Kecskemét, Hungary: Zoltán Kodály Pedagogical Institute of Music, 1975), 110–11.

(see figure 4d). Fingers should not be placed on the strings yet. Bowings, dynamics, and articulations can be checked at this point for accuracy (see figure 4e). After listening to the first four bars on a professional recording, try playing the notes of the opening passage on both the G and D strings. Use the fingers in first position, without going up on the G string. When the rhythm, bowing, and intonation are correct, add the technique of performing this passage exclusively on the G string (see figure 4f).

Teaching phrasing is very important in the Kodály concept and leads to inner hearing. Instrumental classes can “walk the beat” in a circle, changing directions with the phrase. Simple songs, such as “Twinkle, Twinkle, Lit-

tle Star” and “Mary Had a Little Lamb,” can be introduced first and are easily memorized. In an instrumental class, split the class in half for “phrase playing.” Start by playing in unison. Next, have each half of the class alternate playing a phrase. Switch sides so that each half has a chance to play all sections.

The same techniques used for teaching phrasing can be expanded to teach the form of a composition. The ABA form is an excellent form to start with. First, have the class learn the song. Remember to “hear the music, move to it, sing it, write it, and finally read it.” Have the class sing and play the song. Locate phrases that are alike. Alternate groups of students playing each section as described above. When

the class is familiar with the material, try it at different tempi. To add variety, let the piano or a select group of instruments play the B section while all others play the A section.

Singing the song and using body motions can help students play phrase endings correctly. Bring the hands gracefully down at the end of a phrase. Emphasize that the last beat or note of the phrase is not accented. Also, sing to demonstrate the phrase.

Part Playing

Ostinatos are an excellent way of introducing part singing and part playing. Two suitable songs to use are “Are You Sleeping?” and “Scotland’s Burning.” Students do not need music to start this activity. In “Are You Sleep-

Figure 4. Excerpt from *Roumanian Folk Dances* with exercises

(a) Example:
Allegro Moderato ($\text{♩} = 80$)

(b) Open G string:
 5

(c) Open D string:
 5

(d) Combination of open D and G strings:
 5

(e) Bowings, dynamics, and articulations:
 5

(f) G string only:
Allegro Moderato ($\text{♩} = 80$)

Source of excerpt: *Roumanian Folk Dances* by Béla Bartók. Copyright 1926 by Universal Edition. Copyright renewed 1953 by Boosey & Hawkes, Inc. New York. Used by permission of Boosey & Hawkes, Inc.

ing?” teach them the “Ding, Dong, Ding” part first. Sing “do, so, do” and “D, A, D” in the key of D Major. Depending on their level of advancement and what you want the student to learn, the notes D, A, D can be played on the open strings (see figure 5a). Or they can be played on an open D string with the first finger on the G string (see figure 5b). Or the ostinato can be played with the third finger on the A string to obtain the pitch D, and then lifting it to play the pitch A on the open string (see figure 5c).

More advanced classes can choose which method they prefer. The class can play the passage pizzicato and then arco. Next, the teacher can play the melody and the class can play the ostinato. Conversely, the class can sing the melody and the teacher can play the ostinato. And finally, the class can be divided into two sections, with one playing the ostinato and the other playing the melody. The teacher can also take turns playing both the melody and the ostinato pattern with classmates.

The same procedure can be utilized for “Scotland’s Burning” in the key of G Major. The ostinato pattern can be played on two D’s, an octave apart, using half notes (see figure 6a). This is a good time for the students to listen to the intonation of the third finger (fourth finger for cello) with the lower string, checking for the correct pitch at the octave. Another ostinato for this song could be G, D, D (see figure 6b). Since both of these songs are rounds, this is another step in the development of part playing. Play the rounds in two to four parts and add the ostinatos.

An expansion of this procedure is to place the solfège syllables of a song, such as “Scotland’s Burning,” on the chalkboard, without identifying the song. Sing the song based on pitch relationships and then play it. See if students can identify the song.

Take the time to teach comprehensively. As each new concept is introduced, such as “ostinato” and “round,” prepare the class with a definition of each. Repeat the word and the definition often. Language teachers often say it takes at least seven repetitions and uses to remember a word and concept. Instrumentalists need the same reinforcement.

Figure 5. Ostinatos for “Are You Sleeping?”

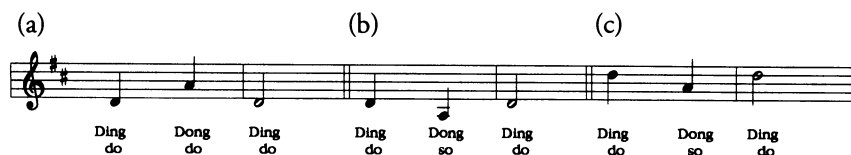


Figure 6. Ostinatos for “Scotland’s Burning”



A way of reinforcing memory is to first have the students learn a song and then memorize it as a group. Start with an easy song like “Hot Cross Buns.” After learning to play the song, each student is assigned one note. The song is played with each person playing only the assigned note. As the students progress, this technique can also be used in advanced pieces. With longer songs, each student can be assigned a short phrase. Longer songs can be taught one phrase at a time.

Canons can be used for warm-ups, ear training, and oral skills. Select a good canon and use it often. Kodály wrote numerous canons, which are readily located in vocal texts and instrumental books. The level of difficulty should be slightly easier than the student’s level of playing. As a warm-up, have the instrumental ensemble play the canon and sing the syllables or letter names. Use the hand signs and then play, sing, and sign from memory. Divide the class into sections and have them perform in canon with one another. One part of the class can do the hand signs. Advanced students

can play the canon on their string instruments, sing another part, and be in canon with themselves. The canon can be transposed into other keys by singing, signing, and playing. The transposition does not need to be written down. “Dona Nobis Pacem” is an example of a delightful round to utilize at the secondary level.

Pentatonic scales particularly lend themselves to string instruments because the instruments are tuned in fourths and fifths. Many of the Kodály exercises, which are based on the pentatonic scale, can be performed without transposition, using the open-string keys G, D, A, and E as starting points. This is a natural approach for string teachers and players. Have students improvise on the notes of the pentatonic scale of la-do-re-mi-so-la. This can also be played on the black keys of the piano with instant success. The keys of D and A are excellent for string pentatonic improvisation. Students can sing comfortably in the key of D, and it is also a good key for beginning string players. For arm position and bow control, the pentatonic

scale, beginning on A, is excellent for violins. The keys of A and G, however, are harder for students to sing.

The music of Béla Bartók is especially well suited for early study, and introducing his music is an excellent way to present twentieth-century literature to students early in their training. It is in a format students can naturally play and sing because the material is based on the “universal notes” (so, mi, la) of young children. Many of his folk songs are written in ABA form and in the sharp keys. They are entirely playable in the first position, making them easy pieces for beginners.



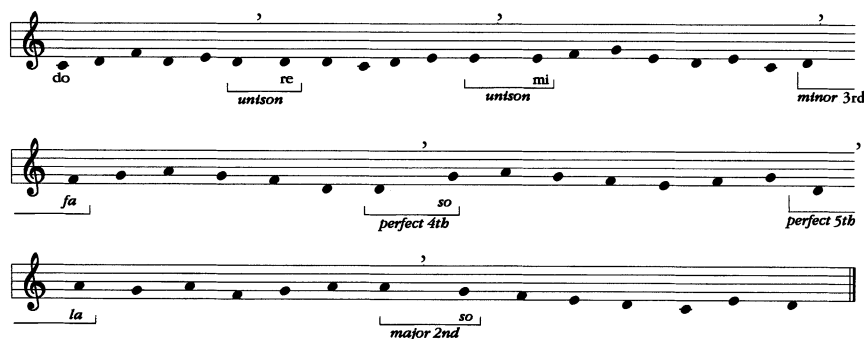
Teachers should think of vocal and instrumental music as one discipline.



The Selected Resources sidebar provides examples of available literature, with a special listing for string teaching. These lists are not intended to be all-inclusive, but they may serve as a starting point in guiding the selection of music. Many of the two-part exercises, such as *55 Two-Part Exercises*, can be played and/or sung with a divided class.³ Switch parts often, even in the middle of phrases, while the class is playing. A full list of the keys, modes, and other information is given about each exercise in the index of this two-part book.

The “Hymn to St. John the Baptist” (see figure 7), which Guido d’Arezzo used to teach sight singing, remains an excellent beginning piece. Each phrase starts on a different solfeggio syllable (from which “do, re, mi, fa, so” and solfège originated). The last notes of the phrase progress to the beginning notes of the next

Figure 7. “Hymn to St. John the Baptist”



phrase in this manner: from a unison, to a minor third, to a perfect fourth, and then to a perfect fifth. The pattern is varied by progressing to a major second in the last phrase. In the key of C, it can be used as a warm-up for string players at the middle school or the junior high level. For elementary or beginning strings, the warm-up can be transposed to the key of D major. Band instrument students will be able to play this warm-up in the key of C at the elementary level.

Learning Terminology

Both vocal and instrumental teachers will benefit from this approach to teaching because their students will progress more quickly. However, instrumental teachers will need to consult with vocal teachers to coordinate terminology and ideas, so that students will not think two different systems of music are being presented. Students will also learn faster if they do not need to learn two different sets of terms. For instance, many general music teachers, who teach the Kodály method at the primary level, call the meter signature a “mailbox.” In the beginning instrumental lessons, it should be called by the same name. A rest is “a beat with no sound.” The lines on a staff are the “floors of an apartment”; the spaces on the staff are the

“apartments.” The top of the staff is “the roof”; the bottom of the staff is “the basement.” Use a small letter “l” for la, not a capital letter. Keep capital letters for the letter names of notes and small letters for solfège. Stress the musical alphabet and which note comes after G. Use “stick” notation for rhythms. Discuss these issues with the vocal/general music teacher and decide together on similar terminology.

Teachers should think of vocal and instrumental music as one discipline. Instrumental classes need to stress “inner hearing.” Singing, before playing or reading music, is essential to good musicianship. The inclusion of Kodály techniques in instrumental class does take additional time. However, the incorporation of these concepts in the instrumental classroom will provide better understanding between vocal and instrumental teachers and greatly enhance the musicianship of the student.

Notes

1. Jean Sinor, “The Ideas of Kodály in America,” *Music Educators Journal* (February, 1986): 34.
2. *Kodály Concept of Music Education* (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1965), 2.
3. Zoltán Kodály, *55 Two-Part Exercises*, edited by Percy M. Young (New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1954). ■

Selected Resources

Music and Exercises

- Bacon, Denise. *Six Short Pieces for Early Steps in Piano Playing Based on Kodály Principles*. Wellesley, MA: Kodály Center of America, 1994. A way to apply Kodály-based tools and techniques to piano teaching. Uses musical material in creative ways that can serve as examples.
- Erdei, Peter., ed. *150 American Folk Songs to Sing, Read, and Play*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1989.
- Hegyí, Erzsébet. *Solfège according to the Kodály-Concept*, vol. 1. Kecskemét, Hungary: Zoltán Kodály Pedagogical Institute of Music, 1975. Contains a wide variety of sight-singing material that can be adapted for instrumental teaching. Available at most large university libraries and from Boosey & Hawkes Publishers.
- Houlahan, Micheál, and Philip Tacka. *Sound Thinking: Music for Sight Singing and Ear Training*. 2 vols. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1990. Based on American folk music with new rhythmic elements introduced and practiced at a gradual pace. The volumes, arranged by concept, follow the traditional sequence associated with most Kodály programs. There are fourteen canon examples written in score form.
- Kodály, Zoltán. *24 Little Canons on the Black Keys*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1954.
- _____. *333 Elementary Exercises in Sight-Singing*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1963.
- _____. *55 Two-Part Exercises*. Edited by Percy M. Young. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1965.
- _____. *66 Exercises in Two Parts*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1964.
- _____. *Bicinia Hungarica I–IV: Progressive Two-Part Songs*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1962.

String Text and Method Books

- Applebaum, Samuel. *Early Etudes for Strings*. Miami, FL: CPP/Belwin, 1963.
- O'Reilly, Sally. *Fiddle Magic*. San Diego, CA: Neil A. Kjos, 1991. 180 technical exercises for the violin.
- Pinkston, Patricia, and Milona Moore. *Champion Strings*. San Diego, CA: Neil A. Kjos, 1985. A beginning string method that includes numerous vocal techniques and games.
- Szilvay, Csaba. *Cello ABC*. Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser, 1992. Part of the "Colourstrings" collection.
- Szilvay, Geza. *Violin ABC*. Books A and B. Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser, 1992. Part of the "Colourstrings" collection combining color and Kodály principles for use with young children.
- _____. *Violin Scales for Children*. Books 1 and 2. Part of the "Colourstrings" collection.

String Orchestra Music

- Alshin, Harry. *Four Songs of Hungary*. Bryn Mawr, PA: Theodore Presser, 1987. For string orchestra.
- _____. *Romanian Dances*. Miami, FL: CPP/Belwin, 1992. By Béla Bartók, arranged for middle school string orchestra.
- _____. *Three Chinese Scenes*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1990. Based on pentatonic scales.
- _____. *A Young Bartók Suite*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1990.
- Bartók, Béla. *44 Duos*. 2 vols. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1960. Duets for two violins.
- _____. *Roumanian Folk Dances for Violin and Piano*. New York: Boosey & Hawkes, 1953. Also available for chamber orchestra.
- Caponegro, John. *International Strings*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1983. Folk song fantasy for string orchestra.
- Garafalo, Robert. *Rounds, Canons, and Catches for String Orchestra & Ensembles*. Ft. Lauderdale, FL: Meredith Music, 1985.
- Frost, Robert. *Famous American Spirituals*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1985.
- _____. *Strings in the Round*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1981.
- Isaac, Merle. *American Folk Song Suites No. 1, 2, and 3*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1979. For string orchestra.
- Matesky, Ralph. *Learn to Play in the Orchestra*. Van Nuys, CA: Alfred Music, 1971. A beginning string orchestra book with historical annotations and numerous songs easy enough to hand sign and sing.
- Siennicki, Edmund J. *Chaconne*. Cleveland, Ohio: Ludwig Music, 1986. A variation based on a round for string orchestra.
- Stephan, Richard. *Two Sets of Rounds*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1989.
- Thurston, Richard. *Folk Song Variations*. San Antonio, TX: Southern Music, 1989. By Dmitri Kabalevsky, arranged for string orchestra.
- Wielozynski, Stephen. *Round, & Round, & Round*. Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1993. Includes "Are You Sleeping?" "Scotland's Burning," and "Kookaburra" for string orchestra.
- _____. "Dona Nobis Pacem." Delevan, NY: Kendor Music, 1988. Christmas round.