

Kodály Method

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The **Kodály Method**, also referred to as the Kodály Concept, is an approach to music education developed in Hungary during the mid-twentieth century. Though named after Hungarian composer and educator Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967), the method itself was not created by him. His philosophies of education served as inspiration for the method, which was then developed over a number of years by his associates.

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History

Kodály became interested in the music education of children in 1925 when he overheard some students singing songs they had learned in school. Kodály was appalled at the quality of these songs, and was inspired to do something to improve the system of music education in Hungary (Eösze 1962:69-70). He wrote a number of controversial articles, columns, and essays to raise awareness about this issue (74). In his writings, Kodály criticized the schools for using poor-quality music and for only teaching music in the secondary grades (72). Kodály insisted that the music education system needed better teachers, better curriculum, and more class time devoted to music (Dobszay 1972:30).

Beginning in 1935, along with colleague Jenő Ádám, he embarked on a long term project to reform music teaching in the lower and middle schools by actively creating new curriculum and new teaching methods, which included new musical compositions for children. His work resulted in the publication of several highly influential books that have had a profound impact on musical education both inside and outside his home country.^[1]

Kodály's efforts finally bore fruit in 1945 when the new Hungarian government began to implement his ideas in the public schools (Eösze 1962:74). Socialist control of the educational system facilitated the establishment of Kodály's methods nationwide (Landis 1972:64). The first music primary school, in which music was taught daily, opened in 1950. The school was so successful that over one hundred music primary schools opened within the next decade (Eösze 1962:79). After about fifteen years

approximately 50% of the schools in Hungary were music schools (Russell-Smith 1967:44).

Kodály's success eventually spilled outside of Hungarian borders. Kodály's method was first presented to the international community in 1958 at a conference of the International Society for Music Educators (I.S.M.E.) held in Vienna. Another I.S.M.E. conference in Budapest in 1964 allowed participants to see Kodály's work first-hand, causing a surge of interest. Music educators from all over the world traveled to Hungary to visit Kodály's music schools (Choksy 1999:4). The first symposium dedicated solely to the Kodály method was held in Oakland, California in 1973; it was at this event that the International Kodály Society was inaugurated (6). Today Kodály-based methods are used throughout the world (DeVries 2001:24).

Pedagogy

Using these principles as a foundation, Kodály's colleagues, friends, and most talented students developed the actual pedagogy now called the Kodály Method (Choksy 1981:8). Many of the techniques used were adapted from existing methods (Choksy 1999:15). The creators of the Kodály Method researched music educational techniques used throughout the world and incorporated those they felt were the best and most suited for use in Hungary (Choksy 1981:9).

Child-developmental approach

The Kodály Method uses a child-developmental approach to sequence, introducing skills in accordance with the capabilities of the child (Choksy 1999:10). New concepts are introduced beginning with what is easiest for the child and progressing to the more difficult (Landis 1972:56). Children are first introduced to musical concepts through experiences such as listening, singing, or movement (Wheeler 1985:12). It is only after the child becomes familiar with a concept that he or she learns how to notate it (Landis 1972:46). Concepts are constantly reviewed and reinforced through games, movement, songs, and exercises (58).

Rhythm syllables

The Kodály Method incorporates rhythm syllables similar to those created by nineteenth-century French theoretician Emile-Joseph Chêvé (Choksy 1999:16). In this system, note values are assigned specific syllables that express their durations (12). For example, quarter notes are expressed by the syllable *ta* while eighth note pairs are expressed using the syllables *ti-ti*. Larger note values are expressed by extending *ta* to become *ta-a* or "ta-o" (half note), *ta-a-a* or "ta-o-o" (dotted half note), and *ta-a-a-a* or "ta-o-o-o" (whole note) (Wheeler 1985:13). These syllables are then used when sight-reading or otherwise performing rhythms.

Rhythm and movement

The Kodály Method also includes the use of rhythmic movement, a technique inspired by the work of Swiss music educator Emile Jaques-Dalcroze (Choksy 1981:10). Kodály was familiar with Dalcroze's techniques and agreed that movement is an important tool for the internalization of rhythm (Landis 1972:42). To reinforce new rhythmic concepts, the Kodály Method uses a variety of rhythmic movements, such as walking, running, marching, and clapping. These may be performed while listening to music or singing. Some singing exercises call for the teacher to invent appropriate rhythmic movements to accompany the songs (43).

Rhythm sequence and notation

Rhythmic concepts are introduced in a child-developmentally appropriate manner. The first rhythmic values taught are quarter notes and eighth notes, which are familiar to children as the rhythms of their own walking and running (Choksy 1999:10). Rhythms are first experienced by listening, speaking in rhythm syllables, singing, and performing various kinds of rhythmic movement. Only after students internalize these rhythms is notation introduced. The Kodály Method uses a simplified method of rhythmic notation, writing note heads only when necessary, such as for half notes and whole notes (13).

Movable-do solfege

The Kodály Method uses a system of movable-do solfege syllables, in which, during sight-singing, scale degrees are sung using corresponding syllable names (*do, re, mi, fa, so, la, and ti*). The syllables show function within the key and the relationships between pitches, *not* absolute pitch (Landis 1972:45). Kodály was first exposed to this technique while visiting England, where a movable-do system created by John Curwen was being used nationwide as a part of choral training (Landis 44). Kodály found movable-do solfege to be helpful in developing a sense of tonal function, thus improving students' sight-singing abilities (Choksy 1981:8). Kodály felt that movable-do solfege should precede acquaintance with the staff, and developed a type of short-hand using solfege initials with simplified rhythmic notation (Choksy 1999:14).

Melodic sequence and pentatony

Scale degrees are introduced in accordance with child-developmental patterns. The first Kodály exercise books were based on the diatonic scale (Choksy 1999:3), but educators soon found that children struggled to sing half steps in tune and to navigate within such a wide range (11). It is thus that the pentatonic scale came to be used as a sort of stepping stone (9-10). Revised Kodály exercises begin with the minor third (*so-mi*) and then, one at a time, add *la, do, and re*. Only after children become comfortable with these pitches are *fa* and *ti* introduced, a much simpler feat when taught in relation to the already established pentatonic scale (12).

Hand signs

Hand signs, also borrowed from the teachings of Curwen, are performed during singing exercises to provide a visual aid. This technique assigns to each scale degree a hand sign that shows its particular tonal function. For example, *do, mi, and so* are stable in appearance, whereas *fa* and *ti* point in the direction of *mi* and *do*, respectively. Likewise, the hand sign for *re* suggests motion to *do*, and that of *la* to *so*. Kodály added to Curwen's hand signs upward/downward movement, allowing children to actually see the height or depth of the pitch (Wheeler 1985:15). The signs are made in front of the body, with *do* falling about at waist level and *la* at eye level. Their distance in space corresponds with the size of the interval they represent (Choksy 1999:14). The hand signs were featured in the 1977 film, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Materials

Kodály Method materials are drawn strictly from two sources: "authentic" folk music and "good-quality" composed music (Choksy 1999:16). Folk music was thought to be an ideal vehicle for early musical training because of its short forms, pentatonic style, and simple language (2). Of the classical repertoire, elementary students sing works of major composers of the Baroque, Classical, and Romantic music eras, while secondary-level students sing music from the twentieth century as well (16).

Kodály collected, composed, and arranged a large number of works for pedagogical use (Young 1964:83). Along with Béla Bartók and other associates, Kodály collected and published six volumes of Hungarian folk music, including over one thousand children's songs. Much of this literature was used in Kodály Method songbooks and textbooks (Choksy 1999:15). High quality music was needed in short and simple forms in order to bridge the gap between folk music and classical works (2). For this purpose, Kodály composed thousands of songs and sight-singing exercises, making up sixteen educational publications, six of which contain multiple volumes of over one hundred exercises each (Eösze 1972:69). Kodály's complete pedagogical works are published collectively by Boosey & Hawkes as *The Kodály Choral Method* (Eösze/Houlahan 2006).

Results

Studies have shown that the Kodály Method improves intonation, rhythm skills, music literacy, and the ability to sing in increasingly complex parts (DeVries 2001:24). Outside of music, it has been shown to improve perceptual functioning, concept formation, motor skills, and performance in other academic areas such as reading and math (25).

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External links

- OAKE: Organization of American Kodály Educators
- IKS: International Kodály Society

See also

- Waldorf education

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