

SINGING AS SPIRITUAL FOOD – THE KODÁLY METHOD

Debra Shearer-Dirié

Dr. Shearer-Dirié is the Musical Director of the Brisbane Concert Choir, and also founded the Vox Pacifica Chamber Choir. She teaches at the University of Queensland and supervises the Masters level Choral Conductors as well as travelling nationally adjudicating and conducting.

The most important attributes of a good musician:

- A well-trained ear
- A well-trained hand
- A well-trained intelligence
- A well-trained heart.

All four must develop together, in constant equilibrium. As soon as one lags behind or rushes ahead, there is something wrong.

The principles that have led to what is known as the “Kodály method” of music education, according to Kodály, are:

- Music is a prime necessity of life.
- Only music of the highest quality is good enough for children.
- Music education must begin nine months before the birth of the child.
- Music instruction must be a part of general education for everyone.
- The ear, the eye, the hand, and the heart must all be trained together.

These principles, as well as his views of education, served as the inspiration for the so-called method that is now in place under Kodály’s name. Combining different, already proven, educational tools, Kodály’s colleagues developed the pedagogy which has now come to be known as the Kodály Method or Concept (Lois Choksy was integral in this and has published two books with these titles).

Here are the key themes:

- The use of the **mother-tongue**, one’s own musical heritage.
- Music should be of **good quality**.
- Music is for everyone. Music education through singing and doing.
- A **child-development approach** to sequence, introducing skills at the time the child is developing these capabilities. Children are introduced to musical concepts through experiences such as listening, singing, or movement.
- **Musical Literacy**. The ability to read and understand the notation of music is central to Kodály’s goal of making children musically independent.
- The method incorporates **rhythm syllables** similar to those created in the 19th century by French theoretician Émile-Joseph Chêvé and Galin.
- **Rhythmic concepts** are introduced in a child-developmentally appropriate manner.
- **Movable (relative) do solfège syllables**. During reading, scale degrees are sung using corresponding syllable names (*do, re, mi, fa, so, la, ti*). The syllables show function with the key and the relationships between pitches, not absolute pitch. Although this work has its roots in the 11th century work of Guido d’Arezzo (who

used the syllables *ut, re, mi, fa, so, la* as mnemonic devices to train his singers), Kodály saw this in the work of Sarah Glover's and John Curwen's movable-*do* system in England which was being used nationwide as part of choral training.

- **Melodic sequence and pentatony.** Again, scale degrees are introduced in accordance with the child-development patterns. Because children struggle to sing half steps at a young age, Kodály used materials based on the pentatonic scale in which the minor third (s – m) is the first interval the children experience.
- **Hand signs,** also borrowed from the teachings of Curwen, are used as a visual aid. A hand sign is assigned to each scale degree that illustrates its tonal function. *Do, mi, so* are stable, *fa* and *ti* point in the direction they want to move. Each hand-sign is used in an upwards or downwards movement, allowing the children to actually see the height or depth of the pitch. The distance between each hand-sign corresponds to the size of the interval.
- Kodály strongly advocated singing without the aid of a piano because its use is a deterrent to the correct intonation required for vocal excellence. “