

Kodály Concept – Overview

Zoltán Kodály (1882 – 1867) created a music education system that is now taught all over the world. It began with an interest in the folk music of Hungary which led to one of the most important collaborations in ethnomusicology with fellow composer, Béla Bartók. Together, they collected over 3,000 Hungarian folk-songs. This in turn sparked not only an interest in preserving his cultural heritage through music but also the importance of improving music education. The principles of Kodály's concept are a culmination of pedagogical thoughts that had been examined over many time periods and cultures.

Kodály set out to create a comprehensive music education system that taught the foundations of music learning through singing. He believed that it was important to teach through the use of our voice for two reasons. From a practical stand point, we are not limited by finances to learn how to sing, and secondly, the human voice trained to sing melodically has benefits that translate later on in instrumental playing.

The Kodály system uses solfege, rhythm syllables, children's songs, and games as part of the curriculum. Solfege is the naming of the musical notes in the scale. However, it is far-more than a labelling system, for it ultimately leads the student to understand complex relationships between the notes that make up musical theory and form. Kodály believed that solmization allowed students to sing with better intonation, for "If we give a note a name with relative solfa, we are also saying what its function is... we are determining its function in the tonality."¹ Kodály was concerned with the learning of function because not only is the aim to sing correctly but also to have an understanding of music theory and form. This improves musical literacy so that not only are simple pieces understood but also the great works heard in the concert hall.

Activity-based learning allows the child to experience the sound in a kinesthetic way. Games help children to visually and kinaesthetically process the words and sounds of the music. The goal is to develop the child's inner imagination. Music material is taught by rote with words, rhythm syllables, and solfege. From here the music is practiced, games are taught, and ultimately a selection of repertoire is kept to be performed by the children by heart.

The philosophy promotes child-centered learning through discovery. Through memorization, kinesthetic movements, and aural skills, the child experiences music in both an abstract and concrete way. With the development of strong music skills, instrumental learning will be improved and the child will gain musical literacy.

¹ Cited in László Dobszay, *The Kodály Method and its Musical Basis in After Kodály*, (Kodály Intézet: Kecskemét, 2009), 102.