

When I first introduced Ocarinas to schools over thirty years ago, the 3D secrets of the Ocarina were largely unknown. I felt compelled to give up my secure music-teaching job in order to make Ocarinas more generally available, and to develop them for class music. Through those 30 years, I have become increasingly amazed at the historic and scientific significance of the Ocarina, and the future potential of such an outwardly simple, unassuming musical instrument. The modern English 4-hole Ocarina was invented, and is manufactured, in Britain; its unique 3D qualities are proving to be world class in record-breaking as well as in Music Education.

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## Kodály and why it works: Raising standards in Cheshire East

– Liz Nicholas-Stannard

**Kodály Specialist and musician Liz Nicholas-Stannard discusses the principles of the Kodály approach and how they can benefit primary schools.**

I am a transformed musician. My colleagues at the Love Music Trust in Cheshire, school staff and fellow musicians have been drawn into an approach which has completely turned our way of thinking and teaching on its head. When delivered across an entire school last year the results were so undeniably evident that a documentary was made. What was more surprising was that whenever the approach was first mentioned, it was often met with resistance and rolled eyes. Several years of research and delivery later, I feel it important to share what is going on in Cheshire East and how crucial it is for the future of music education... an approach that guarantees every child will become a much better musician.

The often misunderstood 'Kodály approach' is based on the work of Hungarian composer, philosopher and educator Zoltán Kodály. He revolutionised the music education system in Hungary as he believed that everyone had the right to a musical education; to read, write and hear music. The poor standard of the musicianship of conservatoire students shocked him into creating a new approach where music was first learned by ear and then by eye.

The impact of the Kodály approach on my own musicianship is almost immeasurable. I first

experienced it four years ago through a weekend workshop aimed at early years and primary practitioners. I caught the 'bug' and started using the Kodály activities straight away. After four years of hard study, I am proud to now be a trustee of the British Kodály Academy and I am also the Kodály Specialist for The Love Music Trust (the Cheshire East Music Hub).

### Playing by ear

I was never one of those musicians who could just play by ear. I didn't have perfect pitch and was irritated by my husband who was gifted with a musical ear. He was able to instantly play anything he could remember, in any key. However, since he had relied on his ability to play 'by ear', his sight-reading skills were never developed to the point of being very poor. There was always a communication gap between us when he couldn't understand why I couldn't just 'hear it' and I couldn't understand how he couldn't just 'read it', having both gained music degrees. Since we have both studied this approach, the playing field has been leveled and we have 'topped up' our lacking skills almost to the point of equality.

In the beginning I was mainly teaching 'Wider Opportunities' and used the activities I had learnt as way of developing musical skills before I gave out the instruments. It worked! My pupils could hear the music before playing it and could correct their playing themselves. I needed to know more.

I took part in a six month course for advanced

Early Years tutors and learned about the philosophy of the approach; start as young as possible with native songs and make progress through simple logical steps and most importantly, have fun. Whilst I was on the course I was teaching every class in another primary school where I started to use the activities with older children, to great success. Since then I have been on three British Kodály Academy summer schools, two study tours to Hungary in Budapest and Kecskemét, in association with the Kodály Institute in Kecskemét. With each course and visit it became more apparent that this journey was not just about making me a better teacher but also a better musician.

Last year I completed the Higher Education Level 3 Springboard Course offered by the British Kodály Academy and Roehampton University. This course

gave me an in-depth knowledge of the approach, taught by Lucinda Geoghegan, (NYCoS). Part of this primary music course also included passing two musicianship tests; one to get onto the course and one to finish it. I had to show that I had developed both my teaching and musicianship skills, including singing modal scales in solfa and playing pieces in two parts on the piano whilst singing a third part with precise intonation. I learnt how to sight sing and do two part dictations easily, things that at one time I never thought I would be able to do.

The most exciting moment of my first BKA Summer School was when we sang up and down the chords of a Bach chorale. I was singing the theory I had learned silently, mathematically with just a pencil at music college. Previously I had known the 'rules' but never known instinctively what they sounded like.

### Kodály and its impact

This approach is about learning music through singing and doing. It is accessible to all children.

As well as thoroughly teaching musicianship, it builds social skills, confidence, links with literacy and numeracy and creates a musically literate and happy school.

Initially it is rather like 'learning by stealth' as children think that they are simply playing games. Once they have a good repertoire of materials and have learnt basic skills during this stage, (such as keeping the beat and showing the rhythm,)

you make conscious the skills they have already demonstrated. This is alternative to the common practice where skills are explained first, taught second.

I have been working for nearly two years at Wistaston Church Lane primary school through the Love Music Trust. I teach almost every class weekly. Class teachers are present and I leave them activities to do between my sessions. Initially, headteacher Graham Prince expressed his doubts but I promised him that every child would engage with the approach. In a recent interview for a documentary inspired by the success of this approach, he said: "Every child, irrespective of age or gender or prior musical ability, everybody has relished the Kodály music and got a tremendous amount out of it. Peering through the classroom doors and spending time in lesson observations it's self evident that every child has really looked forward to their Wednesday 30 minute slots with Mrs Nicholas and their class teachers."

The approach encompasses all learning styles and has allowed each class to move at its own pace. There is not necessarily a fixed curriculum where, for example, Year 3 study 'beat'. This means that you can quite easily have Year 3 children ahead of Year 6 children. Interestingly, last year's Year 6 classes performed very well, however this year, the Year 4 classes are ahead of where Year 6 were last summer. This is because the approach is cumulative. Consequently, this cannot be a one-year programme. Each year that goes by the children's standard is raised significantly and this presents exciting challenges each September when planning.

The most noticeable thing that has happened at Wistaston is the improvement in confidence, not just with the children. Now, the staff join in with everything and I hear about their escapades between my visits. About a term into my time

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*“The Kodály approach is about learning music through singing and doing. It is accessible to all children and builds social skills, confidence, links with literacy and numeracy and creates a musically literate and happy school”*

there, the music co-ordinator told me that the staff had been so confident about leading songs in assemblies that she was able to sit at the back and just watch for the first time. Songs are shared between classes in assemblies and on the playground. I am often scuppered when I plan to teach a class a new song and find that they have already learnt it from siblings, friends or other classes!

This is the epitome of the Kodály approach in action. It has brought a common language to the school, a language that is then taken home and shared between siblings, other groups and friends. It is a social experience that transcends vertical ‘levels’ and tightly defined ‘grades’. It is almost impossible to put into words what the philosophy of this approach is. It is something which really just needs to be experienced.

A school which embraces this approach is giving its staff and its pupils an opportunity to have music in every part of their lives, to have music and singing as something which is normal and easy. This is what Kodály wanted to achieve for the children in his country and we have the opportunity to give this amazing gift to our schools and children too.



*In 2013, Liz Nicholas-Stannard completed the Higher Education Level 3 Springboard Course offered by the British Kodály Academy and Roehampton University. The course gave her an in-depth knowledge of the approach.*

### Sharing the approach

As part of my role as a Kodály Specialist for the Love Music Trust I have visited a number of schools across the county. I am teaching in Wistaston and able to give other teachers the opportunity to visit and experience this approach in action first hand. I have also been working alongside a number of schools to build the profile of their whole school music through this approach.

Ofsted recently said that we do not expect enough from our pupils in music. They believe the main problem is that our staff are not always trained and therefore lack the confidence and skills required to pass judgement on the quality of a music lesson. As I work with these schools my main aim is to build the confidence and skills of the staff, to support them in their own musical

abilities. I have heard so many teachers say things like ‘why didn’t they teach it like this when I was at school? It just makes sense’. Plans for the future include further training opportunities for the staff that have been working with us. They can choose whether they would like weekly visits or a termly inset. The main change which music co-ordinators are commenting on is the newly instilled enthusiasm and eagerness of pupils and staff to get involved. I look forward to working with other schools in the future and seeing the long-term impact of this approach as the children move up to high school.

Follow the British Kodály Academy on Twitter at @kodalyuk or follow Liz at @penguinlizzy.