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## The Kodály Method: Valid or Missing the Mark for Developing a Musicking Musician?

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## **The Kodály Method: Valid or Missing the Mark for Developing a Musicking Musician?**

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# The Kodály Method: Valid or Missing the Mark for Developing a Musicking Musician?

## Annotated Bibliography

**ABSTRACT.** *In the ever-evolving world of music education, a handful of “methods” have been identified as favorites, mainly Orff, Suzuki, Dalcroze, and Kodály. These are used in whole or in part in classroom and private music instruction, based on an expected understanding that they produce results. However, these methods are often used without regard for the quality of their delivery, and are relied upon without consideration for the context in which they are delivered. Many music educators are speaking up and analyzing their own teaching, conducting studies, and bettering their understanding of the principles behind these methods. It is from this body of knowledge that the relevance and efficacy of the Kodály method (for that is the method of focus here) can be better understood, and therefore appreciated for better application in teaching contexts.*

Bacon, Denise, John Bice, Geoffry Russell-Smith and Lois Chosky. “Controversy on Kodály.” *Music Educators Journal* 56, no. 1 (September 1969): 3-4, 6-8, 11- 12, 15-16.

For the purpose of this study, I will only discuss the first and last authors of this article. This article is a collection of responses posted in the *Music Educators Journal* to a previously written article by Lois Chosky. Bacon touches largely on the importance of cultural context when looking at the Kodály method. She states the method works in Hungary because it is a state-mandated curriculum whereas music education varies widely in America from school to school, and migration of students further complicates the need for consistency in music education and creating proper sequencing for students. Chosky responds at the end, agreeing partly with Bacon about the cultural differences, and clarifies her arguments. These sources discuss an important component of the larger discussion—cultural context in music education. This is a very important component when criticisms are aimed at teachers. A Bacon points out, teachers are rarely set up for success, and Chosky rebuttals that the teaching will only be as good as the teacher. Therefore, we are force to ask to what extent is the efficacy of the Kodály method self-inherent and how can we tease this understanding from the various factors such as cultural context and teacher aptitude?

Benedict, Cathy. "Processes of Alienation: Marx, Orff and Kodály." *British Journal of Music Education* 26, no. 2 (07, 2009): 213-224. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051709008444>.

Benedict argues that methods such as Kodály and Orff remove musical instruction from the actual musicking process and “estrangle us from an educative process that celebrates creativity and intelligence”. She compares this estrangement to Marx’s analogy where tools have the potential for individual creativity of mere manufacturing. Benedict forces the reader to question whether these methods have had a positive or negative influence on musical instruction, especially if these methods facilitate natural music-making or stall creativity. Benedict makes a more philosophical argument based largely on concepts from Marxism among other

philosophers, and analyzes these with her own experiences from teaching. The article was published in a reputable, peer-reviewed journal, and the author is an active educator, professor, and author with a doctorate in education. This source brings a philosophical argument to the table. Through the reflections of her own teaching experiences, Benedict seeks to find a return to wholesome musical instruction that views the student as an individual rather than a cog in the music education machine. This, like Bennet's article, does not undermine the potential of the Kodály curriculum, but seeks to put it in its place and educate instructors on a better way of understand the method.

Bennett, Peggy. "When 'Method' Becomes Authority." *Music Educators Journal* 72, no. 9 (May 1986): 38-40. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3396639>.

Bennett argues that there exists a lack of understanding amongst many music educators about the term "method". She goes so far as to call it a buzzword. She places much of the blame on workshop presentations as the source of information, where instructors do not receive any educational depth. This has caused many to mistake teaching techniques such as Kodály's rhythm syllables and hand signs, as the method. She argues that understanding a mere basic application is no substitute for understanding the underlying principles which are in actuality the "method". She provides ways to identify good and bad use of method, as well as how teachers can seek to correct this misunderstanding in their teaching. This article is published in the reputable Music Educators Journal, but does not provide and references or bibliographic sources to support the article. It is possible this information is included elsewhere in the journal and not attached with the excerpted source. The author is a collegiate professor of music education at a reputable institution, and is probably stating many of these claims from her own (valuable) experience and teaching. This source seeks to clarify the use of the term "method", not to be confused with "techniques". This source may explain why certain educators find fault with the Kodály method in various contexts, a point which should be discussed further amongst pedagogues familiar with the Kodály method.

Bowyer, James. "More than Solfège and Hand Signs: Philosophy, Tools, and Lesson Planning in the Authentic Kodály Classroom." *Music Educators Journal* 102, no. 2 (December 2015): 69-76. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24755663>.

Less conversational, this is an excellent resource for teachers looking to get an overview of the Kodály method and its various techniques. The components of the Kodály method are broken down and explained, even compared to other methods. Most importantly, Bowyer states at the beginning the importance of comprehensive depth, and therefore provides an explanation of the concepts, philosophies, and objectives of the method. This source qualifies the efficacy of the Kodály method and makes it accessible to teachers on the basis of needing to understand the why before we teach the how. This is an excellent example of how educators should be approaching the Kodály method, with a need to understand, and a willingness to use only what will add to the instruction without rigidly holding one's teaching to the method without question.

Eklund, Jennifer. *Piano Pronto: Keyboard Kickoff*. 2nd ed., Piano Pronto Publishing, 2014.

This piano curriculum, at first glance, seems less Kodály than the other musical scores. It does not include solfege, nor Kodály rhythm syllables. I include this curriculum after reorienting my own understanding of the Kodály method. While such sources as Piano Safari and Kodály's own pedagogical compositions include specific techniques from his method, this curriculum embodies other very important concepts from the Kodály method. Piano Pronto teaches students through folksongs and favorite classical tunes. Kodály strongly believed instructional music should be good music, especially folksong. Eklund is a seasoned piano instructor with a reputable music education. Her curriculum shows that, while many of the foundational concepts of the Kodály method rely on good instruction, reliable methods that embody some of Kodály's theories are available to teachers, and Piano Pronto is one of them.

Fisher, Katherine and Julie Knerr Hague. *Piano Safari Repertoire Book 1*. Piano Safari LLC, 2018.

This piano method combines two teaching approaches—reading and rote—that are often used separately, in order to reap the benefits of both instruction styles. This method also provides technical exercises, theory, improvisation, and sightreading alongside the repertoire. This method introduces the student to Kodály rhythm syllables from the beginning of the method. This is an appropriate tool for teaching elementary-age students, the target age group of this method. The Kodály syllables are not written into the pieces for the students to see. It is the teacher's job to reinforce this counting method throughout the repertoire. While this is a very good teaching tool, it should be noted that students are not introduced to metric counting or numerical counting at a later point in the method, which could be considered a weakness of the curriculum, and teachers should be prepared to introduce this concept at the appropriate time to their students. Many methods introduce rhythm syllables in some form or another. This method in particular uses the Kodály rhythm syllables, determined to be useful by the authors who both have significant teaching experience. This method is a demonstration of how the Kodály method can be successfully co-opted for various musical instruction settings and need not be used in its entirety, but its components may be considered valuable of their own accord.

Goopy, Jason. "'Extra-Musical Effects' and Benefits of Programs Founded on the Kodály Philosophy." *Australian Journal of Music Education*, no. 2 (2013): 71-78.

Goopy's article is a valuable resource, combining many research studies that seek to answer questions regarding the effectiveness of the Kodály method. Many of the studies, in one capacity or another, support the title's claim that the Kodály method has "extra-musical" benefits for students. These extra-musical benefits are often unrelated to musical education, but show students to improve or do better than their peers in other areas of learning and further develop students' reasoning skills, creativity, and self-esteem. Goopy finds many aspects that could be improved in the studies or prompt further questions. For example, some studies do not clearly state their methods of research, and there is little done to examine the methods of instruction in the other areas of study (such as mathematics), meaning there are more variables that should be taken into account. Goopy's article adds merit to the Kodály method, but also gives further substance to the concerns that the method may not be superior to other methods of instruction. Goopy himself studied music education, is a grade school music teacher in Brisbane, and is a council member of the Australian Kodály Music Education Institute of Australia. Goopy's article

adds to the conversation by illuminating holes in current research, and lending merit to the concerns around the Kodály method's use in music education, whether the culprit be the method itself or the delivery of instruction.

Kodály, Zoltán. *24 Little Canons on the Black Keys*. London, U.K.: Boosey and Hawkes, 1945.

This is a primary resource from Zoltán Kodály's pedagogical compositions. Most importantly, this is one of the few pedagogical compositions written for piano, where many others are vocal exercises for the individual or choir. These little compositions force the player to read pitch from solfege. This practice is combined with basic rhythmic notation and playing the exercises in canon. This is an excellent aural training source for musicians, and an excellent demonstration of how the Kodály method can be accessible to all instrumentalists, and improve the foundational skills of musicians. It can also be adapted for group instruction, at the piano or with voices, and can be a learning tool for Kodály hand symbols. This source would be valuable to teachers looking to incorporate technical exercises from the Kodály method, regardless of the instrumental context, especially to the purpose of teaching students solfege. Beyond immediate skills, it could be argued these exercises teach the valuable musical skill of listening. I believe it is important to see the value in Kodály's own pedagogical compositions to see that it is really the application of his method that matters, not the method itself, thereby placing much of the responsibility for this question on the delivery of musical instruction.

Palotai, Michael. "Has Hungary Outgrown Kodály?" *Music Educators Journal* 64, no. 6 (February 1978): 40-45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3395394>.

In this article, the author Palotai analyzes a radio panel discussion conducted in Hungary in 1972 with music educators who discussed the Kodály method's use in the country. Also included in the published discussion were responses to a questionnaire on the Kodály method. Palotai states he has been a teacher of the Kodály method for some years. Palotai aims to familiarize his readers with the cultural context from which the method emerged and was largely developed, as well as bring to light the various viewpoints discussed during this obscure publishing. There was dissent between the panelists, and some took a very critical stance against the curriculum, and some defended and supported it. Criticisms were given for inept teachers, stagnant repertoire, bureaucracy, ignoring individuality in students, and a fixation on results rather than the process. This source illuminates important firsthand accounts of the method's use in a specific context, valuable evidence when analyzing the Kodály method. Palotai is thereby reigniting the conversation and opening additional analysis of the curriculum in other contexts, such as the American education system. This article caused a stir in the scholastic community, and therefore is an important link in this conversation.

Price, Constance. "Kodály Legacy: Overlooked or Misunderstood?" *Kodály Envoy* 45, no. 2 (Winter 2019): 6-12.

Price seeks to clarify many of the pedagogical concepts Kodály developed. The main points are as follows: (1) the voice is the most important instrument and should be taught first from a young age, (2) musical instruction should develop an internal sense of language, speech, time, pitch, tonality, beauty, and community, (3) instructional music should be good music,

especially folksong, and finally, (4) that kindergarten is the foundational basis for all musical instruction. Price uses various curriculums and many excerpts of Kodály's own writing to illuminate these concepts. Price herself plays the piano but is a choir teacher and therefore has the experience to validate the importance of the vocal instrument. Many musicians will also relate to her experience of floundering in aural skills during collegiate instruction, even after many years of instrumental development. Although the writing of this article lacks coherent communication in places, Price still manages to defend Kodály's concepts and provide a strong argument through her reasoning and sources. Price, like many of the authors aforementioned, seeks to clarify a teacher's understanding of the Kodály method for a more authentic and accurate comprehension, and therefore application in the teaching environment. This source comes from a non-scholarly journal called Kodály Envoy, although the journal itself is a relevant source to this topic.

Sinor, Jean. "The Ideas of Kodály in America." *Music Educators Journal* 83, no. 5 (March 1997): 37-41. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3399007>.

Sinor is a professor of music education and is also past president of the Organization of American Kodály Educators. This article discusses the cultural implications of using the Kodály method in America, and compares the American education system with that of the Hungary. Sinor states that the method will encounter difficulty because its basic goals are difficult to mold to American culture, and also describes the difficulties American teachers will encounter. There is no bibliographic information provided. I assume that, being a professor, Sinor may count herself as the source. This source adds the conversation by considering the cultural factors for the Kodály method, agreeing with Bacon and Chosky on the perceived difficulties, but also agreeing that the method is worth adapting. Since the method is worth adapting, this is an excellent resource for American educators to use as an approach to doing so. Not only should they be aware of the Kodály method and its various cultural "incompatibilities", but also how those incompatibilities can be adapted and overcome to utilize the effective and positive aspects of the Kodály method. It shows that it is possible, and possible from a place rooted in philosophy and not mere technique.

deVries, Peter. "Reevaluating Common Kodály Practices." *Music Educators Journal* 88, no. 3 (November 2001): 24-27. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3399754>.

deVries, an experienced teacher, makes many valuable points in his article, published in the reputable Music Educators Journal. He examines through his own experiences and through other teacher's studies, the effect of the Kodály method. Just like Goopy, he states the extra-musical benefits of the method with sources, also stating that there are obvious musical benefits to it as well, sourced from his own experience. deVries seeks to find a balance in musical instruction between the Kodály methods application and the educational needs of students. Many of these balances suggest using instruments in addition to the voice (instead of just the voice), using a process-oriented curriculum where students discover and experience musical creativity (rather than rehearsing skill-based exercises), and including a diverse body or repertoire that students will enjoy and recognize, including popular music and folk music from other cultures (instead of being limited to mother-tongue folksongs). deVries, while agreeing with many of the other sources in this conversation, actually gives a practical understanding of how these concerns

are landing in education and how we can feasibly correct them, mainly from a student-oriented perspective. This article is an indispensable resource for teachers looking to understand the Kodály method and grapple with it in their practical applications.