

FORWARD

My own music education involved a large amount of singing. From a young age I was involved in choirs and had singing lessons. Music lessons in school involved a great deal of singing too. I was taught to read music by singing it and music theory was a subject that involved a great deal of listening to and performing of pieces that were being analysed.

I was surprised to find that when I studied for my bachelor degree in music, there was a dramatic drop in the amount of listening and performing in the music theory class. As I learnt about more and more abstract concepts I found that I was becoming unable to imagine the sounds, my ability to sight-sing stopped improving at the same rate, and, even though I had a great knowledge of many concepts, I was unable to use that knowledge in anyway that could enhance my performance skills. In short, I felt that there was a large divide between what I considered to be music (a skill in performing, the ability to recognise musical features by listening, the ability to create in a practical way) and the knowledge that I had 'about' music (labelling features on a score, writing exercised according to a given 'rule', talking about the life and times of a composer).

My career took me into the world of school music education and I have now taught music to children from pre-school to 18 years old. As I grew as a teacher, I returned to the use of singing as a core part of every lesson. I have been lucky enough to have worked with and been inspired by many superb teachers and musicians who have shown that singing is highly effective as a tool for inspiring young musicians, helping them to discover music through performance. Not only that, the experience of singing helped students to hear any concepts connected with the music as it gave a direct link to an actual sound that the student made.

I would like to make reference here to the so-called 'Kodály philosophy'. Throughout my teaching career, this has been a guide for how and why singing can be used as a central part of music education. Zoltán Kodály (Hungarian composer, philosopher, ethnomusicologist, pedagogue, 1882-1967) is often quoted as saying that 'if one were to attempt to express the essence of this education in one word, it could only be – singing' (Kodály, 1974, p.206). Singing has indeed helped many children to read and write music, to be able to perform great works of music, to develop skills and understanding of music. The active participation of the student in making music with their own sound and subsequently the direct connection to the sound has, with guidance from a teacher, helped students to reach high levels of understanding and control of the music. My exploration of the Kodály philosophy has taken me back and forth over the years to Hungary and other places around the world to see examples of the types of lessons where singing is successfully used. I have then tried to reproduce or adapt these examples into my own teaching. In successful examples I have seen: how lessons have been full of singing (that is that the majority of the lesson time may be spent actively singing); students who are able to understand and use concepts of music theory (I have seen classes of 7 and 8 year olds improvising in the dorian mode and then transform it into another mode); children perform complex music in many parts from all periods of music history and have risen to the challenge to do so; students have been able to write down with ease their own musical thoughts, be that in dictation or composition; and, most importantly to me, there is joy in the class, created in the lesson through play, discovery, development of skills, and the sheer delight of making music. In talking about the alternative, that is, music being taught by

the learning of so-called rudiments, Kodály is quoted as saying: 'teach music and singing at school in such a way that it is not a torture but a joy for the pupil' (Kodály, 1974, p.120). Singing, in the Kodály philosophy, is supported by the use of teaching tools such as movable *do* solfège¹, hand-signs to show these solfège names, rhythmic solfège names.

This then is the background for the inspiration in my teaching and the starting point for this research. Singing is one way, which, in my experience, is a very effective tool for teaching music and, in particular, music theory. I have enjoyed creating lessons and collecting appropriate repertoire so that I can teach in this way and this is something that continues to be a stimulating challenge as my career takes new directions.

¹ Names are assigned to a pitch's function within a given tone-set. The names *do re mi fa so la ti* are used most often in relation to the major scale and altered names are used for chromatic inflections. This is opposed to the 'fixed *do*' system whereby *do* is related to a fixed pitch (C in letter names) and is always so irrespective of the tone's function within a piece.