

Thirty Years of Colourstrings

Artistic pedagogical activity based on Zoltán Kodály's philosophy began in Helsinki, Finland, over a quarter of a century ago.

Many generations of children have become either professionals or active hobbyists in music through the instrumental approach to music education called '*Colourstrings*'.

Colourstrings has become known all over the world through training courses for music professionals by the authors of the method and their colleagues; the frequent international concert series and busy recording schedules of the Helsinki Strings orchestra have also contributed to this end.

The time is ripe – and the experience of thirty years both entitles and obliges the authors – to make a brief summary of what *Colourstrings* is about.

1. Above all, *Colourstrings* aims to realise Kodály's principal idea that "music belongs to everyone". With the help of the so-called **Singing Rascals** and **Rhythm Rascals Picture Books**, *Colourstrings* strives to bring a creative musical environment to every home where children are growing up. Musical fairytales, stories, pictures and records have been designed to raise children's (and their parents') interest in music.
2. After having been enticed towards music by the influence of these fairytales, the child is offered carefully structured pre-instrumental preparatory education at the music kindergarten. The **Singing and Rhythm Rascals** teaching material – picture books, exercise books and CDs – prepares the child for the future instrument playing by singing, clapping and moving and a host of other, increasingly specific, activities.
3. A child who is ready to start instrumental study will firstly be introduced to the different instruments. In the course of observing individual and group *Colourstrings* lessons regularly with the child, the parents can state in what kind of an instrumental atmosphere the child feels comfortable. This ensures that the **will of the child** is respected when making the choice of instrument.
4. Instrumental teaching is a natural continuation of the music kindergarten. *Colourstrings instrumental tutor books* include songs, nursery rhymes and rhythms familiar from the Rascals books. With their help, the
 - musical,
 - technical,
 - intellectual and
 - emotional

capabilities of the child are sought to be developed simultaneously.

- a) For the first time in the history of the instrumental teaching, **colour** is being used. Sounds affect the emotions and arouse certain kinds of emotional states. From the physical point of view, sounds can be compared to colours that likewise influence the emotions (the analogy sound – vibration – colour). By using different components simultaneously the influence on emotional life can be increased and the interest in the arts can be aroused and maintained. The *Colourstrings* method has used just this co-operation of different senses: the notes and the strings of the instruments are coloured according to a certain scale.
- b) By means of colours and **visual perception**, all the skills and knowledge necessary for basic instrumental education are portrayed.
- c) By using colours, reading music becomes not a burden for the child but a pleasant challenge. The colourful figures and notes facilitate the reading of music. In turn, the reading of the notes connects the instrumental technique and coordination with brain function and thus makes the playing an intellectual action. The child's **solfege and theory needs are integrated** into the instrumental tutor books.
- d) Considered systematic **transposition** (and transformation) of the **Rascals** melodies makes it possible for the child to acquaint himself with the instrument 'globally'. On a stringed instrument, for example, s/he will be able to play on the whole fingerboard, i.e. in all positions.
- e) **Relative solfa** used in the *Colourstrings* approach promotes good intonation, gives shape to the material, facilitates transposing and helps the child's fingers move independently and freely in all positions. On a stringed instrument, the child becomes acquainted with the fingerboard both lengthwise (positions) and sideways (finger patterns and string crossings).
- f) *Colourstrings* introduces **techniques** not previously a part of basic education: for example, left hand pizzicato with every finger, natural harmonics, including those found in first position, early transposing and game-like bow exercises develop the technique of both hands in an useful manner and ensure pure intonation.
- g) *Colourstrings* instrumental tuition combines individual and group teaching. The secrets of the chamber music and ensemble playing will be revealed to the child by means of duos, trios, quartets and orchestral arrangements that are based especially on the familiar Rascals songs. The versatile ensemble-playing scheme makes what was traditionally **individual** playing become instead a **social activity**.

- h) Music is the most international language: however, a child is entitled to a **mother tongue** of his own, even in music! *Colourstrings* takes this need into consideration, too. Hence, there are methodological chapters in the instrumental tutors that end with pages encouraging the teacher to look for and write familiar, locally known melodies sung in the child's own mother tongue, according to the pattern of the Rascals songs.
- i) The exercises promoting the **creativity of the child** are also an invitation for the parents to take an active part in their child's hobbies.
5. Children raised according to *Colourstrings* are not separated from their natural environment with other children of their age, but their talent is allowed to influence other children. It is therefore considered of vital importance that artistically valuable music is present in the everyday life of the child. The requirement of this daily presence is fulfilled by the primary school. The combined activities of the school, which gives an all-round education, and the artistic institution responsible for the instrumental education, together provide the child with an **ideal environment**. Besides the parents, the schoolteachers and instrumental teachers are responsible for bringing up the children.

Serious, daily pursuit of music and playing develops

- concentration
- memory
- coordination
- social skills and
- mental discipline

and hence helps the learning of all other subjects.

Colourstrings is a family-centred and a child-centred educational philosophy, programme and technique which, with the help of music, desires to strengthen a happy childhood. A happy childhood makes a happy adulthood possible.

The authors wish that in the children's bookcase, alongside the fairytale books, there will also be space for the *Rascals* books and records, and that in more and more children's rooms, there will be a music stand in the midst of the lego bricks, balls and toy engines, declaring, "in this family, music belongs to children"!

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Géza Szilvay

Translated by Minna Launonen and Deborah Harris