

# COLOURSTRINGS

## continues to inspire

*The world-famous method is the outcome of a passion for teaching.*

**M**usic matters. It develops the child all-embracingly. Children who make music will learn almost everything else more easily. But should they have to give up childhood, the shortest yet most precious and decisive stage in their personal development in order to enter the land of music? The Colourstrings approach based on the Kodály philosophy aims to solve this conflict by creating an environment in which singing, playing games and instruments live side by side, for the happiness of the child. A music land such as this, which is an integral part of the child's world of play, should be available to all.

### HOW IT BEGAN

The Hungarian inventors of the method, **Géza** and his brother **Csaba Szilvay**, began teaching in Finland in 1971. Their approach was developed little by little. After years in use, various illustrations, visual explanations, musical pieces, chamber music arrangements and exercises in technique came to constitute a method – and the 'Colourstrings School' was born. The first-generation Colourstrings children were raised at the East Helsinki Music Institute. They began by giving concerts at their own music school, but gradually made appearances on other concert podiums and eventually started to draw attention to themselves. Then a series of 56 programmes ("Mini-fiddlers in Musicland") shown on Finnish television revolutionised music education in Finland. Thousands of families were introduced to music in their homes, and shops all over Finland soon ran out of instruments. The strings boom had begun.

The Helsinki Junior Strings were formed 30 years ago from the Colourstrings pupils at the East Helsinki Music Institute. Still conducted by Géza Szilvay, the orchestra has performed regularly abroad, made a number of records and more than 70 TV appearances.

### INSTRUMENTAL TUTORS

Seeing and hearing go hand in hand in Colourstrings teaching. In the Violin ABC the four strings are identified by different colours and characters. Initially reading music means



Géza Szilvay

matching colours and following the melodic line of pictures. In this way 'reading' is not a burden to the child. The colourful pictures and notes gradually give way to conventional notation. At the beginning Colourstrings uses relative solmisation (a movable Do) and the child is later introduced step by step to the absolute letter names and pitch.

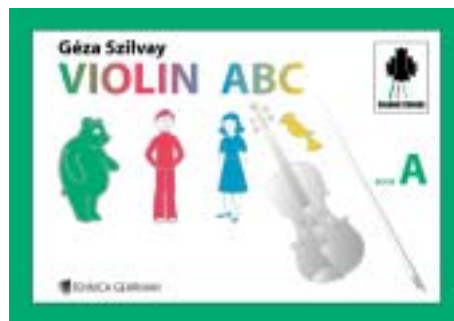
The instrumental tutors are not limited to teaching manual dexterity, since they also tend to present the child with the music as a whole, as a 'package' in which instrumental technique, musical listening, understanding and emotions are at all times balanced.

Individual tuition is complemented by group teaching which introduces the child to chamber music at an early age. The instrumental tutors are therefore accompanied by chamber music series, such as the *Violin Duos* arranged by **László Rossa**.

Colourstrings is a child-oriented mode of teaching music. The philosophy and method do not form or mould the child to suit the instrument; rather, they 'tame' the instrument and the teaching to meet the needs of the child.

The Colourstrings method has been used by 40,000 string players around the world. In Finland every second Colourstrings-trained child has, on estimate, become a professional, and quite a few have even won international recognition. Musicians such as **Pekka** and **Jaakko Kuusisto**, **Réka Szilvay**, **Jan Söderblom**, **Linda Lampenius** and **Marko Ylönen** now on the international circuit started with this method. Looking back over 30 years, Géza Szilvay can spot some salient features of children trained by the method:

- Fine intonation
- Equally advanced technique in both hands
- A developed musical intellect
- Good ability to read music
- An artistic aptitude for musical timbre, nuance, detail and phrasing



- Rich creativity developed through transposing, transforming, improvising and composing
- Solo playing developed alongside chamber and orchestral musicianship (solo/soli/tutti).

Teachers who have attended Szilvay's courses often say that the method contributes to the child's social education as well. Many children from difficult backgrounds have, through music, become more motivated and cheerful.



### ESSENTIAL TEACHER TRAINING

Teacher training is an important part of the method. Géza and Csaba Szilvay have lectured at close to 130 congresses, courses and symposia around the world since 1977. Colourstrings International was established in London in 1990 and soon grew to take in national and international teacher-training courses. Nowadays CI arranges courses for kindergarten, violin, cello, piano, guitar, viola and double-bass players and teachers. The UK has a network of Colourstrings kindergartens, and several thousand children are being brought up through these musical play-schools.

Colourstrings is gaining popularity throughout the English-speaking world. It has been fostered by such international organisations as ESTA (European String Teachers' Association), ASTA (American String Teachers' Association), AUSTA (Australian String Teachers' Association), ISME (International Society for Music Education), NMPU (Nordic Music Pedagogical Union) and IKS (International Kodály Society). The numbers of academies and conservatories that teach it and of master's and doctoral theses on it is growing steadily.

According to Géza Szilvay, the Colourstrings method can make a violinist of almost anyone with five fingers. The key to maintaining musical culture nevertheless lies with the teachers. Given a teacher such as Szilvay fired with a passionate desire to train future generations, the classical musical heritage has nothing to fear.

HENNA SALMELA

*This article is based on interviews and texts by Géza Szilvay.*