

**WORDS OF CHORAL WISDOM
FROM REHEARSALS AND
LECTURES UNDER THE DIRECTION
OF
DR. MARTA MCCARTHY**

Compiled by Malcolm Bradley

In July, 2007, I had a wonderful opportunity to work with Dr. McCarthy, head of the choral programmes at the University of Guelph. This young musician was truly an inspiration as a conductor,



teacher and human being. The music and the choristers were her prime concern and even in the pressure of preparing for a concert within a very short time frame, there was always a sense of joy and appreciation of the music and never a sense of frustration with the choristers. That attitude and approach fostered a wonderful response of caring and willingness to work very hard on the part of the choristers. Her approach to the choral art was a great model for anyone working with young singers, older middle aged singers or any singers for that matter.

The following is a brief list of comments, images and rehearsal techniques that were very effective and might help in your work. They are in no specific sequence.

1. In singing vowels that require a great deal of space and sense of openness, think of the body as a cathedral - on singing the aw vowel, move one hand up while lowering the other hand to give a sense of space and a sense that the sound is anchored in the lower body.
2. Start a rehearsal with silence - all choristers close their eyes, take in slow, deep breaths and exhale - sense the other members of the choir in the room, sense the room itself and be aware of one self in the room.
3. In some choral selections and classroom songs, we get so hung up on teaching the notes and the rhythms that the sense of the text gets lost. During the choir season, try having the text of one or two selections prepared by selected choristers (asked in advance) and “challenge them, where appropriate, to read the text dramatically. In some cases, ask several choristers to prepare the text as a dialogue, or a call and response - depending on and reflecting the nature of text itself.” Questions can be asked of the whole choir how the text relates to the dynamics and melodic movement.
4. Preparatory beats need to be open and energized. Mouth the first vowel and then stop mouthing the words.
5. In conducting, let the heart lead (literally) and not the head!
6. In working on body alignment with choristers, think of the spine as an organ pipe. It starts below the floor and goes through the ceiling.
7. Energy in the conductor’s face (and eyes) can be as important as the conducting gesture.
8. If singers are producing a tense sound, the problem may come from the conductor’s gesture being too tight.
9. Warm-up away from the piano and use lots of physical movement.
10. Food is a great way to build a sense of community with singers!
11. Find a recording of one of the selections that you are working on with your choir and have the choir stretch to the recording - excellent way to help develop a sense of the length and shape of phrases and the amount of breath needed to support the voice through the phrase.

12. On a descending warm-up or passage from a piece, have the choristers slowly raise their arms as the voice descends “so that they are encouraged not to drop the pitch, and to stay in the head register”.

Words in quotation marks are Dr. McCarthy’s in response to my sending her a copy of this material. In reference to #7, if you ever have the opportunity to sing with her, you will be drawn in, inspired and moved by her eyes during performance. It was an incredible example of knowing your score well without your face being buried in the score in performance and communicating with the singers in front of you. It did so much to create a sense of “us together” as opposed to the choristers and the conductor up front.

Dr. McCarthy will be taking part in the regional Kodály conference in Waterloo in January, 2008.



A BOOK REVIEW

A Young Singer’s Journey

An Integrated Approach to Musical Literacy

Eileen Baldwin; Jean Ashworth Bartle; Linda Beaupré

A Review by Malcolm Bradley

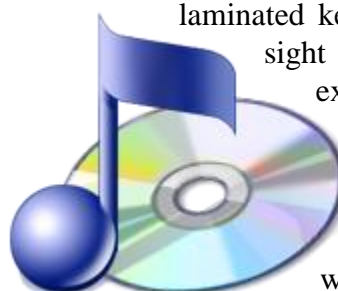
One of the most memorable quotes from Jean Ashworth Bartle’s workshop at ACCC in Edmonton several years ago was the statement that “we are not in the business of training seals”. This statement was made in reference to the need to include music literacy in choir rehearsals rather than teaching entirely by rote. As Kodály inspired teachers, that statement should be near and dear to our hearts, not only for our choral rehearsals with children but very much part of our classroom time as well.

Three internationally renowned Canadian choral conductors working with children’s and youth choirs have put together a series of six books to help with the task of developing musical literacy with young choristers. These books provide an excellent resource for ideas that can be adapted to our own situations, particularly in the elementary music class.

The strategies and materials used are very Kodály friendly and very similar to those strategies that many teachers use in their classroom quest for music literacy.

Solfege is used extensively and one can see the practical application with real music. Absolute note names are used in conjunction with the solfa names. Rather than teaching the absolutes by rote, they are applied immediately to singing well known tunes. The note names have an immediate aural application. This will help students in not only the choral setting but in any instrumental studies that they might undertake. Having used a large laminated paper keyboard in the front of my classroom for many years, it was interesting to see the authors using the printed keyboard in the book in many similar ways (marking intervals, determining the needs for sharps and flats, relating the notes on the staff to the keyboard, etc.). Reading activities are limited to C, F and G major in Book 1, again very much in line with Kodály practice. **I would certainly discourage anyone from even thinking of photocopying from the book**, but it does help to generate many ideas and strategies.

The books also come with an audio CD, a laminated keyboard and a book of sight singing exercises. The exercises require that students read with both solfege and absolute note names. Each section starts with the major scale and then a variety of patterns taken from the notes of the scale follow. The CD is closely related to the work on each page in the large work book,



reinforcing the various activities with a vocal response. Again, many of these ideas and strategies are part of a well thought out Kodály programme and it is exciting to see them used by these three great conductors.

At a cost of \$16.95, it is not likely that you would be able to afford a set of books for each child in your school choir or in your elementary classes. However, they would be tremendously useful if you were working in a private situation where students were not receiving any of this training in the public school music programme. Hopefully, music literacy is not being totally neglected in the music classrooms in Nova Scotia. As a resource for public school teachers and conductors, the volumes are great, both in the ideas presented and in the model for the consistent application of Kodály strategies in the development of musical literacy. The series encourages us to continue with good teaching practices that help students take steps along the road to literacy and provide a “pat on the back” in that, if we are applying the tools and strategies of the Kodály approach, our students should be achieving many of the skills outlined in the series of six books.



The books are published by Hinshaw Music Inc. and the ISBN number is: 0-937276-35-9. Hinshaw is to be congratulated on maintaining some of Canada’s finest choral composers in their catalogue and for publishing quality Canadian choral repertoire for children and youth.



MALCOLM'S GRAB BAG

Submitted by Malcolm Bradley
During the uncertain weather in the month of July, I decided that it

was time to reduce the number of filing cabinets holding choral music and Kodály materials by at least one. That process led to reflection on some favourite classroom activities, providing the inspiration for this article.

My “Prop Grab Box” and “Music Mystery Bag”

Over the years, at large Kodály conferences, in airport gift shops, at railway museums and just looking through “stuff” to be discarded, I managed to collect a large box of props that were very useful for primary to grade two (yes, sometimes even grade six). The most prized possessions are **puppets** from Folkmanis, especially the dog. He/she has held endless



primary and grade one children in total awe with his wonderful eyes, a nose that you are sure must be wet and his/her

incredibly soft hair. These puppets are available from Folkmanis.com at a very reasonable price (US\$). Many classes have been greeted at the door with my wearing a **train engineers cap** from the Kensington Train Station in PEI. That has led right into “The Little Train” and a laughter filled experience of fast/slow as the children (the train) have been led into a circle. **Beat Person** lives in the “Prop Grab Box”. Beat Person is a large wooden spoon with a happy face drawn on the spoon and a purple bow around Beat Person’s neck. Beat Person comes out to play on the drum in a very animated fashion in those early primary days when moving on the beat is a big part of each lesson. When deriving the number of beats in a phrase, Beat Person will sometimes tap the beat on the board under the phrase line as the children sing a well known song. Beat Person is a great help with students who find clapping the rhythm while stepping the beat a challenge. Beat Person

is also a big help in grade five and six when some students still find it a challenge to perform a rhythm with a steady pulse. An old **Nabisco Premium Saltine Cracker tin** is a great prop for introducing Icka Backa Soda Cracker and then the tin, from time to time, has been known to hold an apple early in the year for introducing Apple Tree and any number of small props that the children have to take out of the cracker tin. One of the tackiest props is a large **star** with silver streamers purchased in one of the tackiest toy stores ever. Tacky as it may be, the silvery star has been a huge help in showing the beat for Star Light, Star Bright or a whole host of night songs in primary/grade one. The star can show the beat moving through space and it is also helpful for showing the higher and lower pattern of sounds in s-m and s-m-l songs. There is a bright **red Bristol board crown** adorned with silver staples. This simple prop was great for the leader in Old King Glory and any other song in which a princess, prince, king or queen played a prominent role. Tucked away in various corners of the “Grab Box” are **finger puppets** that are most useful in introducing so many of the songs in the primary/grade one curriculum. These puppets are also a great help in focusing attention for those songs that are “just for listening”, the story songs that play such an important listening role in the lower grades. There is a whole host of these little puppets available at russberrie.com. Other treasures include a plain white envelope that is addressed to “My Love” and bearing a very colorful large stamp. The envelope goes together with an old green and yellow Easter basket that makes a great carrier for the letter. This simple prop adds a whole new dimension to A Tisket, A Tasket. The box also includes various cut outs of many shapes and sizes of dogs. These were most helpful with primary classes in developing a variety of barks - loud barks for the German Shepherd and soft barks for the poodle and low, rough barks for the larger dogs and a higher, yappy pitch for the smaller dogs. Those dogs also played a role in



elementary choir rehearsals as students were asked to create barking sounds appropriate for the size of the dog and thus using abdominal muscles in starting to create pitches. These are some of the props still residing in the “Prop Box”.

Mystery Music Bag

It used to be very common to be given canvas bags at music education workshops and conferences.



Often these bags would have some kind of music symbol on the outside. I used to find it very useful to put two or three props in the “Mystery Music Bag” and then invite children to take a turn reaching in and pulling one of the props out. The class would then identify the song most associated with that particular prop. That might be followed by game, a solfa puzzle (the teacher humming a phrase of the song associated with the prop and asking the children to echo with handsigns and solfa) or a rhythm reading activity. After singing the song associated with the prop or doing the game, students could be asked to read the rhythm from flash cards or to place the rhythm phrases on the board in the correct order that followed the rhythm of the song. One activity the children always loved was the challenge of singing the song associated with the prop, reading the rhythm from flash cards or as notated on the board and then deciding if the rhythm really was the rhythm for that particular song. If it wasn't the correct rhythm, we would take another prop from the Mystery Music Bag and see if the rhythm of that song matched the rhythm on the board. Every once and a while, after recess duty or rushing in from another school at the last minute, the correct prop or a correct rhythm might not end up together. That was always cause for celebration when a student or students would make the connection that none of the props produced songs with the correct rhythm. Celebrate the teacher's goof!

The one day of the year that I really appreciated the Mystery Music Bag was on primary orientation day. Children would be invited to select a prop (the bag being held up high so the student could not see in) and then the song or poem sung or chanted and a game or two introduced. The cat and the monkey were always included on those days so that we could do Naughty Pussy Cat and Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed. The props in the bag certainly stimulated interest and helped to create that sense of play and joy that one wants in all music classes.

A possible sequence using props for a grade one class:

Come and Follow Me

(Greeting song at the door - lead the class to a large circle - F do - vary the dynamics from very loud to very soft)

Individual greetings around the circle

(F do - the last person to sing will be invited to reach into the Music Mystery Bag and pull out something that is hard! If you find something soft, keep it an absolute secret! The hard object is a large plastic dog bone.)

Doggie, Doggie

(? And ! - teacher sings the questions and the students answer - this is a known song. Repeat having the students sing the ? and the teacher responding. Repeat several times with individuals doing the response or the question, their choice! Sing the dog's answers with hand signs and solfa to practice s-m-l. Notate s-m-l in C do on the staff on the board. Echo patterns that the teacher points out from the board (s-l-m; s-m-l;m-l-s). Game! This will be done with C do.

Bow Wow Wow

(Ask the student who took the bone out if they know what the soft thing was in the Mystery Bag. Let's check and see! Ask a second student to take the dog puppet out. The teacher sings the

song several times, using the dog puppet to animate the conversation. Teach the song by rote. This song will be used to prepare and practice the quarter rest and for the game. C do)

Naughty Pussy Cat

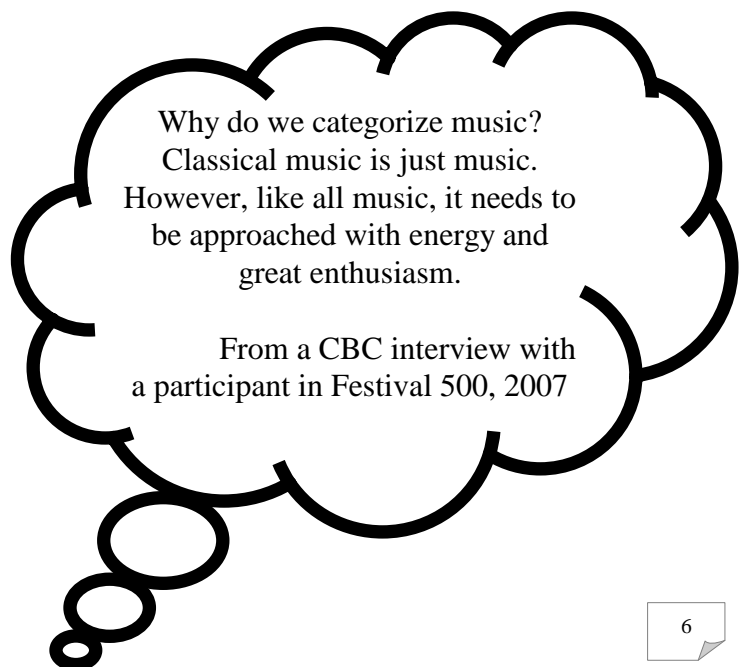


(This song is well known. Teacher hums and students identify or you may want to have the cat puppet in the Mystery Bag. Do the game! F do)

Old Blue

(Song for listening, using the dog puppet. This song is found in The Kodaly Method. Sing in F do.) Quietly sing good-bye grade one and hum Old Blue as the class moves to the door.

Careful attention needs to be paid to the sequence of keys to help develop a sense of tonality. Band and string teachers will appreciate this careful preparation as the students take part in those programmes at the upper elementary.



Why do we categorize music?
Classical music is just music.
However, like all music, it needs to
be approached with energy and
great enthusiasm.

From a CBC interview with
a participant in Festival 500, 2007



Notes From the Editor

A LITTLE MUSIC AMONG FRIENDS

Fall Workshop for KSNS

Saturday, September 22 8:30 am - 3:00 pm

John W. MacLeod School, 153 Purcell's Cove Road, Halifax

Clinicians: Fran Farrell - choral/vocal; Dr. Carol Harris - songs and games for the elementary music class; Anne Cameron - body percussion and mallet techniques for Orff Instruments.

NSMEA FALL CONFERENCE

October 25-27

Baddeck

Check the NSMEA website for the details!

DARTMOUTH MUSIC CENTRE ALL-CITY CHOIRS IN CONCERT

Grace United Church, Dartmouth

December 2, 2:30 pm

Dartmouth All-City Elementary Girls' Choir, Dartmouth All-City Boys' Choir, Dartmouth Intermediate Youth Choir, Dartmouth All-City Halifax County Choir

MUSIC BELONGS TO EVERYONE

35th Anniversary Celebration of Kodály in Canada

January 25 -26, 2008

Wilfred Laurier University, Waterloo, ON

www.kodalysocietyofcanada.ca

It has been a hoot! This issue ends my second round as editor on the KSNS newsletter. In the early 1990's, it was decided by the national board that Alla Breve, the national journal, would take a more scholarly approach to reporting on Kodály news - new research, advocacy and scholarly material and book reviews. It would provide an opportunity for Kodály inspired teachers working at the university level to have an additional place to be published. The provincial newsletters would keep members in touch with provincial and regional news and provide opportunities for sharing curriculum ideas and best practices that would affect teachers directly in their music classes.

It has been fun and at times, challenging, to provide new ideas and approaches that the members might find useful. It has perked my interest in looking at any new Kodály materials or other materials that might be useful in Kodály inspired classes. Since my retirement, it has provided a challenge to remain relevant and in touch with what might be possible in today's music class.

Both terms as editor have also provided an opportunity to pass on some of the passion that many teachers from the Maritimes felt in the 1980's as we headed off to Calgary for three grueling weeks for three summers in a row to study with Lois Choksy, Karen Taylor and a

number of inspiring Hungarian professors. They provided a direct link with Kodály and were so important in the adapting of the approach in North America. Those of us who were in Calgary in those early years are also a third generation link and many still have the vision and passion that was passed to us. Editorial comment has allowed me to express that passion and love of teaching young children, guided by those Kodály principals that still hold so true, if we allow them to do so.

My work as editor has been greatly aided by a parent of a former Halifax County Girls Choir member (the daughter now studying in a prestigious international law programme at the University of Toronto), Colleen Simpson. I type and type and then send the material off to Colleen, via e-mail, and in a matter of not more than a few hours, it returns to my computer in the form in which you see it. To appreciate it even further, check out the newsletter on the national website, www.kodalyofcanada.ca and the link to Nova Scotia. There you will see the graphics in colour. Thank-you Colleen for this twice a year labour of love.

Please encourage your colleagues to come with you on September 22. It should be a wonderful day with three great clinicians and a great deal of variety. For those who received the list of questions on Walt Disney paper, you will not go home disappointed but you do have to be there to enjoy the benefits that the day will bring.

This issue contains a review of a new series of books aimed at teaching musicianship skills to choristers in community choirs. The books are loaded with great ideas that are associated with Kodály practice. There are a few choral ideas selected from a long list of notes from choral sessions that I attended this summer. There is also a look at some of the props that I found so useful in my 29 years as an elementary music educator. There is a bonus packet of three songs associated with the props. Many of you may know these old gems and for some teachers they may be brand new. I hope that you will find one

or two of them useful.

Have a great year and remember, September 22 will be a fun day to be together.

Words of Wisdom

*We are facing a singing crisis!
Every opportunity has to be
taken to teach people in groups
how to sing.*

*From a workshop with Andrew
Donaldson, July 2007
(Reflecting on the absence of
community singing in so much of
today's society)*

*Always be a sponge and you
will be a success. You will
continue to grow!*

*From a lecture on
conducting gesture by Sally
Herman*