

CHILD-FRIENDLY APPROACH TO INSTRUMENTAL EDUCATION

The Colourstrings Violin School

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ABSTRACT

The first years of instrumental education have a huge impact on the relationship between music and a child. The teacher is responsible for building and strengthening this bond. The Colourstrings method, developed by the Hungarian born violin pedagogue Geza Szilvay (b. 1943) aims to help the teacher intrigue the child's interest towards the musical world. Through colour, drawings, fairytales and games the child's attention can be captured and even the most demanding musical and technical issues can be taught. The violin school progresses carefully, step by step, according to the child's developmental cycle, teaching musical, technical and theoretical aspects in this kind of a child friendly manner. The main goal of the method is the all-embracing development of the child in which the physical, intellectual and emotional sides are taken into consideration. This aim is one of the many Colourstrings principals that are based on the thoughts of Zoltan Kodaly.

This thesis gives an overview of Colourstrings and its philosophy focusing on the violin teaching method. Its purpose is to create a comprehensive understanding of the system, initially to strengthen my own personal learning process. Information has been gathered through research and analysis of the Colourstrings material and teacher's handbook, various written works on related subjects and observations made at Colourstrings teachers courses. Personal experience as a former Colourstrings pupil and current teacher has also had an influence.

Key words:

Relative solmization, colour, senses, transposing, integrated teaching

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Instrumenttiopetuksen varhaisvuodet vaikuttavat olennaisesti lapsen musiikillisen suhteen kehittymiseen. Opettaja kantaa vastuun tämän suhteen rakentamisesta. Unkarilaisen viulupedagogi Geza Szilvayn (1943) luoman Colourstrings metodin tavoitteena on auttaa opettajaa herättämään lapsen kiinnostus musiikin maailmaa kohtaan. Värien, piirustusten, satujen ja leikin kautta lapsen mielenkiinto on helposti ylläpidettävissä vaativiakin teknisiä ja musiikillisia taitoja opettaessa. Colourstrings viulukoulu etenee askel askeleelta lapsen kehityskaaren mukaan, opettaen musiikillisia, teknisiä sekä teoreettisia asioita lapsiläheisellä tavalla. Metodien päämääränä on lapsen kokonaisvaltainen kehittyminen, jossa fyysisiä, emotionaalisia ja älyllisiä osa-alueita vahvistetaan tasapuolisesti. Tämä pyrkimys on yksi useista Colourstrings metodin periaatteista, jotka perustuvat Zolta Kodalyn ajatuksiin.

Tämä opinnäyte pyrkii luomaan kokonaiskuvan Colourstrings metodin filosofiasta sekä viulukoulusta. Tavoitteena on muodostaa kokonaisvaltainen kuva menetelmästä, ensisijaisesti kirjoittajan henkilökohtaista oppimisprosessia vahvistamaan. Aineisto on kerätty analysoimalla Colourstrings materiaalia, viulukoulun opettajan opasta sekä tutkimalla erinäisiä opinnäytteitä aiheesta. Osa aineistosta on peräisin Colourstrings opettajien koulutustapahtumista sekä opetustyön observoinneista. Henkilökohtainen kokemus Colourstrings metodista entisenä oppilaana sekä nykyisenä opettajana on vaikuttanut opinnäytteeni sisältöön.

Avainsanat:

Relative solmization, colour, senses, transposing, integrated teaching

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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis gives an overview of the Colourstrings method and highlights the critical issues of the system from the point of view of violin specific instrumental pedagogy. It was initially created for my own professional learning purpose. The aim was to grasp comprehensively each aspect of Colourstrings pedagogy.

The work consists of a short introduction to Colourstrings and its philosophy, a description of the main elements of the system and an analysis of the violin tutor material. In the concluding chapter the strengths and challenges of the method are reviewed.

The content is primarily based on personal experience as a former Colourstrings violin student and current teacher. Information has also been gathered from the Colourstrings teaching material and teacher's guide, articles and theses based on the subject and observations made from Colourstrings teacher courses.

To become a good Colourstrings pedagogue one must be able to attain a full understanding of the method with its various components. This work is a part of my own personal learning process. Hopefully it also inspires my student colleagues to learn more about Colourstrings.

2 COLOURSTRINGS AND ITS PHILSOSOPHY

2.1 The Colourstrings System

Colourstrings is an instrumental method and elementary music educational system created in Finland by the Hungarian born violin pedagogue Geza Szilvay (b.1943). The method started out as violin teaching material for Szilvay's young Finnish violin beginner students in the middle of the 1960's. Not yet able to communicate with the Finnish language, Szilvay tried to develop visual and aural ways of introducing music and the violin and avoided the simplest solution to teach; through imitation. Szilvay was a strong believer in the principals of the Kodaly system emphasizing the holistic musical development of the child. To Szilvay violin teaching should not merely focus on physical movement but become an intellectual and artistic activity. He had been intrigued by the relationship between colour and tone which has become a crucial element of Colourstrings. The system has brought up three generations of Finland's most recognised musicians. It has awoken international interest and is quickly spreading all around the world. The Colourstrings method has been applied to all the bowed instruments: violin, cello, viola and contrabass. Other instrumental groups have also developed their own version of the method.

2.2 The Colourstrings Philosophy

The Colourstrings philosophy is based on Zoltan Kodaly's thoughts about music education. Kodaly believed that music belongs to everyone. With this he meant that the human personality cannot develop fully without the influence of music. Music should be made available to everybody not only the musically gifted. The importance of music in upbringing and general education should not be underestimated. Musical activity develops logic, memory, concentration, improves inner

discipline, physical co-ordination, social skills and - most important of all - enriches one's emotional life. A child who practises music regularly will most likely learn every other activity more easily. Music develops the child "all-embracingly". (Szilvay, 1996, 1.) This is the main aim of Colourstrings; the holistic development of the child.

Often instrumental education creates an image of a strict and demanding activity. In many cultures musical training is practised in a manner that requires the young child to give up play and fun, a joyful childhood. "Colourstrings creates an environment for the child where toys, fairy tales, singing and instruments live side by side serving the happiness of the child" (Szilvay, 1996, 1). The approach is "child friendly". It has been developed to suit the child's needs instead of moulding the child according to the requirements of the instrument. The basic elements of musical and instrumental education are "smuggled" through fairytales, pictures and play with the help of the Colourstrings kindergarten material. The instrumental tutor offers the child an entire "art- package", developing instrumental technique, musical hearing, understanding and musical emotions equally. Many senses are involved when learning a new idea to deepen the learning process. (Szilvay, 1996, 3.) The use of colours, the visual explanation of basic musical terms, the 1 and 2 line staff system, numbered pizzicato, natural harmonics, early shifting and relative solmization serves this child focused way of teaching (Szilvay, 2008, 92).

"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" (Szilvay, 2003, 2). Szilvay first began developing the method for his own children. As his first born started to show a growing interest in music the first pages of the instrumental tutor were created. Slowly it has extended to what now consists of material which goes through the entire development cycle of a child. Starting out from the "Little Rascal" story books, which were conceived as bedtime stories meant for parents and children to enjoy together, to already quite advanced violin material that has as of yet not been published. The method encourages parents to take part in the child's musical learning process; first through reading and singing with and to the child, then by helping the child sus-

tain a regular practice routine and positive attitude towards music. The teacher, student and parents form a triangle which in the best circumstances complements each other. (Szilvay, 1996, 1-6.)

3 THE MAIN ELEMENTS OF COLOURSTRINGS

3.1 Integrated Teaching

Zoltan Kodaly believed it is impossible to become a good musician without training the ear, heart, intelligence and hands equally well. Kodaly states “all four must develop together, in constant equilibrium. As soon as one lags behind or rushes ahead, there is something wrong. So far most of you have met only the requirement of the fourth point: the training of your fingers has left the rest far behind. You would have achieved the same results more quickly and easily, however, if your training in the other three had kept pace.” (Kodaly 1974, 197-198.)

The essential goal of Colourstrings is the holistic musical development of the child. This means that the physical, emotional and intellectual aspects of instrumental learning are treated with equal importance. In other words, solfège, theory, technique and interpretation are being trained simultaneously. (Szilvay, 1996, 3-4.)

According to Kodaly Instrumental training often lacks in the training of the “heart”. Colourstrings aims to be a method which is able to enrich the child’s emotional development (Szilvay, 1996,1). This is important when trying to create and nourish the child’s relationship to music.

The Colourstrings method is developed to advance carefully step by step in order to sustain the balance between musicality, instrumental technique and the understanding of basic musical terms (Szilvay, 2008, 1).

Quality of playing is in focus from the very first lessons on. Even in the simplest tunes played sound, intonation, musical structure, phrasing, character and dynamics are to be looked at. Although, it is important to keep in mind that during the

learning process only one element is being focused on at a time. Consequently, the teacher should also play with the best possible quality when teaching as it influences the child student.

The Colourstrings method allows the child beginner to play music instead of only exercises. The pieces worked on, are being practiced with different techniques: for example with pizzicato or bow, flageolets, open strings or stopped notes and with various tempos and dynamics. Transposing the melodies to different keys is used to develop the inner ear and later on theoretical thinking. Transforming pieces to, for instance, church modes is an effective way to teach the inner ear and mind. One of the new elements of Colourstrings is the use of improvisation. When learning a new technique, rhythm or note, having the child improvise a tune using this new element strengthens the learning process. Children are often encouraged to write their compositions down which then improves theoretical understanding.

As the student progresses, earlier exercises and melodies are repeated to strengthen what has been learned previously (Szilvay, 2008, 6). The second round makes it easier to focus on tone production and musical ideas.

In addition to private lessons, group teaching is used as a significant part of Colourstrings training. Its function is to accustom the child to chamber music and orchestra playing but it also makes instrumental learning into a more social activity. Group teaching provides the students with more controlled practice time. (Szilvay, 1996, 3)

Instrumental group lessons may begin at the same time as private lessons. Beginner group teaching is highly demanding. Each child should be kept active and intrigued during the lesson. This can be achieved with a lively teaching tempo and child like atmosphere, story and play.

When starting with a beginner group the teacher may need to concentrate on a more individualized manner by helping with bow movement or violin hold. As the attention of the teacher is with one student the rest of the group should be partici-

pating in the matter being looked at. Exercises can be carried out with one student playing (with the help of the teacher) and the others showing hand signs, clapping or singing along. Children often enjoy playing the role of the teacher and pointing out from the music which notes are being played. While one child is playing, the others can be asked to “ghost” along which means that the left hand fingers follow along without the use of the bow. There are innumerable ways to practice efficient group teaching. The aim is to keep the teaching tools versatile, activating the different senses (seeing, hearing, feeling), the child’s imagination and intelligence.

3.2 The Use of Senses

In Colourstrings teaching the senses - seeing, hearing and feeling - are used to intensify the learning process. Lesson time is spent not only playing on the instrument but for example by singing, clapping and stamping feet. Basic elements are introduced to the child using movement and play. Many times the student is actually unaware of the real name of the matter being taught. Szilvay calls this way of teaching “smuggling”. Rhythm, tempo, dynamic and interpretation are often taught in this way.

Often foreign teachers who visit Colourstrings lessons are astonished with the amount of touch that is used during teaching. Since the younger students are not yet capable of understanding all technical explanations, it is important that the right feeling of a movement, position or technique can be transferred to the child. This means that the teacher often assists with bow movement or controls that the left hand position is proper and relaxed. For example the feeling of a soft bow hold can best be demonstrated by holding the child’s bow arm with a similar touch and position needed on the bow. In this way the student catches the correct feeling and can apply it to his or her own playing.

Among technical aspects the use of various tempos is first to be introduced through touch. A beginner practicing a left or right hand pizzicato tune can be assigned/given a tempo by gently tapping or squeezing the main beat on the

child's hanging and resting hand. This way the tempo is first felt not heard. Also in this kind of "hand in hand" position any tension in the resting arm or shoulder can be felt and then controlled by the teacher.

It is of high importance that the teacher has the courage to gently mold, correct and better the child's playing positions. Verbal explanation and demonstrations at this point are inadequate. The teacher is not able to teach with good quality from a distance. (Szilvay, 2008, 10.)

3.3 Visual Perception: Colours and Symbols

Colourstrings teaching material is full of color and pictures to intrigue the attention of children towards the musical world. The drawings illustrate pitch, rhythm, intervals, and other basic musical and technical concepts to simplify the often complicated musical grammar and make it understandable to the young students. (Szilvay, 2008, 4.) As the children who start with Colourstrings are often under school age, it is more appropriate to fill the pages with pictures than with words.

The drawings represent the familiar figures of "music land" which appear throughout the Colourstrings kindergarten material and violin books. The most important figures to become acquainted with are the bear, father, mother and bird which represent the strings from low to high. Their function is to nurture the imagination of the students.

"By means of colour and visual perception, all skills and knowledge necessary for basic instrumental education are portrayed" (Szilvay, 2003, 1).

Symbols are used especially when teaching new rhythms. The whole note is illustrated by a snail, half note is shown as a boat, the quarter note is a car and eighth notes are train carts. An airplane represents a group of four sixteenth notes, a boat with three passengers aboard the dotted half note, a camel and its humps the

eighth note two sixteenth note combination, a water snake or “Loch Ness Monster” the syncopated rhythm and a kangaroo with its baby the dotted quarter note.

The colours green, red, blue and yellow represent the strings of the violin from low to high. These were defined according to the fixed colour scale *Musica Colorata* developed by the Hungarian composer-professor Laslo Farkas Kereke. The relation between colour and music has been determined through psychological research. Both sound and colour stimulate emotion. By combining both aspects it is possible to increase the affects on the child’s emotional life and awaken interest towards art and music. (Szilvay, 2008, 4.) Colourstrings children associate sounds with colour which makes their conception of music differ from those learning from the beginning on with traditional “staff and key” –thinking.

Throughout history colours have been connected to scales, keys and notes. Nevertheless research has shown that it is impossible to prove a certain pitch to be tied to a certain colour. Many people do associate colours with pitch but each in a very personal way. (Romu, 2006, 24-25) As stated earlier in Szilvay’s method colour is used primarily to maintain the student’s attention and to activate artistic thinking.

Story, colour and play are elements that belong to a child’s world. In instrumental teaching the attention of a child needs to be grasped by matching the lesson with the child’s developmental stage. The teaching has to go with the child’s mindset.

3.4 Singing and Relative Solmization

“What I see as a note, I hear as a tone; and what I hear as a tone, I see in my mind’s eyes as a note” (Zoltan Kodaly, Suorsa-Rannanmäki 1986, 3). The Kodaly method is based on singing. For musicians the ability to sing is significantly important because it demands the use of the inner ear. In the early years of Colourstrings every piece that will be played is first sung (with solmization names and words if available.) When the piece is then carried out with the instrument, stu-

dents are requested to sing the melody soundlessly, in their mind. This is called inner singing.

Relative solmization uses syllables to indicate the function of notes and their relations rather than absolute pitch. Solfeggio was originally created by Guido di Arezzo (990-1050) and later developed further by Kodaly. Colourstrings uses this so-called “movable do” in which the tonic of all major keys is called “do” and the tonic of all minor keys is called “la”. This way all keys form one common system.

Relative solmization strengthens singing ability and inner hearing which in turn develops clean intonation. It also develops the understanding of harmony, intervals and chords, helps musical memory, instrumental skills and makes transposing easier. (Nemes 1996, 9.) According to Szilvay (2008, 5) the use of absolute names in elementary teaching restricts left hand movement to one finger pattern and position for too long. This causes stiffness and inflexibility to instrumental technique. The use of movable do enables fluent hand movement that covers the whole fingerboard of the violin from the first lessons onward. Absolute pitch and note names are introduced for this reason later, after book D.

Transposing, as stated earlier, becomes easier when learned with relative solmization. Colourstrings children are transposing simple melodies as a preparation exercise for shifting and different finger patterns (Szilvay, 2008, 5). A beginner is acquainted with different positions when asked to play a familiar tune on different places of the fingerboard. Finger patterns are introduced by starting the familiar melody on a different finger or string. This not only develops technical flexibility but demands the use of the inner ear.

Curwen hand signs express even more clearly the relationship and characters of each note. As in the Kodaly method these are used in elementary training in combination with singing.

3.5 Child- friendly Notation

One of the greatest benefits that Colourstrings children obtain is advanced reading ability. To Szilvay (2008, 5), learning to read music makes violin education into an intellectual activity. Teaching through imitation would be the fastest way to achieve brilliant violinistic results but would also make violin playing a purely physical act. Kodaly states that without the understanding of written music, one cannot become an enlightened, sophisticated musician. The goal should be the combination of tone-image and written notation, in a way that either one is able to activate the other. (Kodaly 1974, 196-197.) In other words, one should be able to write down musical images and not only produce music from written material.

Because the Colourstrings beginner material is developed in such a simple and child- attractive way, the pupil is actively reading music from the very first pages on. In Colourstrings traditional note reading is introduced in small steps. In book A, the staff is completely missing and pitch is indicated only by colour or the music land figures. The first two staff lines are added one by one in book B. In book C all five lines are present with the two familiar lines from book B colour coded. Gradually the staff is turned black and conventional notation is achieved.

To make reading music easier the notation in books A-D is written quite large. Songs chosen are very short for the child to be able to perceive each piece as a whole and notice the rhythmical and structural similarities and differences of a melody. Pages are kept uncluttered, only filled with what is absolutely necessary.

Nearly the entire A-book is written with pipe stem notation to make reading and writing music easier for the child. Szilvay (2008, 6) reminds that reading music and writing it go hand in hand and neither should be neglected. Therefore there are pages in the violin book where children are to write their own compositions using the elements that they have already learned.

Bar lines, time signatures, key signatures and other musical signs are added gradually almost in an unnoticeable way. Sharps are first shown with tiny ladder signs only later on key signature is added. The key is shown by the do-key symbol which is then placed on the staff. This symbol replaces the traditional cleff sign. The do-key is imaginatively explained to be owned by the janitor who has this key for all apartments of the house. At first the building has only one floor (1 staff line) where the notes live but later on all five floors appear (traditional staff is achieved).

In some melodies a short scale or group of notes can be found in front of the do-key sign. The function of these “steps” is to help the student prepare the hand with all the tones that will be played in the song. It fixes the left hand into a proper position and ensures that the starting note is in tune. This preparatory exercise can be played as shown but also practiced in mixed order jumping from one note to another. About half way through the D-book this preparatory exercise disappears and pupils are encouraged to prepare a good hand position silently.

The transition to absolute names happens through the scale books 1, 2 and 3 (Szilvay, 2008, 91). At first solfege names and letter names are used side by side. Later on absolute names become dominant. Colourstrings uses the letter names B, B flat, B sharp instead of H, B which are used more commonly in Europe as well as through out Finland. Therefore the scale is built similar to the alphabet A, B, C, D, E, F, G.

For a young child the ability to notice all the various components of notation is limited. For this reason, step by step progress is necessary. Relative solmization and the movable do system make it possible to write notation in this very simple manner. The Colourstrings system was created to avoid reading music becoming a burden to children (Szilvay, 1996, 3). Szilvay points out that the historical development of traditional notation has happened in a very similar way.

3.6 Rhythmic Teaching

The same system of rhythmic names used in Kodaly's approach, are incorporated in the Colourstrings method. The order in which these are first introduced is also similar to that of Kodaly.

Note values are assigned specific syllables to express their durations. For example the quarter note is called "ta" whereas a pair of eighth notes are expressed "ti-ti". Larger note values such as the half note is extended to be "ta-a". The whole note becomes "ta-a-a-a". The dotted quarter note syllables are "tai-ti" and the fast group of 16th notes is called "ti-ri-ti-ri" or "ri-ri-ri-ri".

In the Colourstring method the significance of the rest is emphasised. A rest is not only an indicator of silence, but a part of music. It has a character, tempo and dynamic which should be expressed. During the quarter note rest children are asked to blow (out an imaginary "candle" or a cloud away from blocking the sun) so that they are actively participating in the music even through the rest. In the eighth note rest, the blowing action is replaced by a short "mm" sound which gradually is learned to be done silently mentally. (Szilvay, 2008, 15, 81-82.)

Rhythm is taught with the help of symbols, syllables and also with the use of the body movements introduced in the Kodaly method. Name association games are played by matching the child's name to a rhythm (Szilvay, 2008, 13-14). Rhythms are also practiced by speaking, clapping, stamping feet, marching and, of course, by playing using the various different techniques that have been learned. The ability to follow rhythmic passages is practised not only out loud but also silently. Alternating these two by saying the rhythm names first out loud and then silently is the more advanced exercise which can also be carried out playing. These are used to develop the inner timing and feeling of beat. (Szilvay, 2008, 15.)

3.7 Elementary Musical Training

Szilvay's wish is that children have previous musical experience before beginning with violin lessons (2008, 4). This is in line with Kodaly's concept of singing before playing, and having a thorough background in solfege and rhythmic thinking before attempting to play any instrument (Zoltan Kodaly Pedagogical Institute of Music Website).

Colourstrings acquaints small children with the musical world through fairy tales. The "Little Rascal" stories contain elementary musical elements which are introduced in an entertaining manner. Pitch (high, low), note values (short and long), dynamic (loud and soft), tone colours, emotion and beat, meter, pulse and tempo are the areas covered by the Little Rascal story books which are accompanied by a recording and exercise book. The Little Rascal series was originally designed as bedtime stories for families to enjoy together but can also be used, for example, in kindergartens, pre-schools and musical playschools. Their function is to prepare the child emotionally towards music. (Szilvay, 1996, 2.)

The series *Singing Rascals* encourages singing. Szilvay (1996, 2) describes singing as the utmost artistic form of speech and recommends it should be actively practised in families with children. When developing *Singing Rascals* length, form, range, intervals, rhythm, tempo, melody and suitable text were taken into consideration. The songs start out as two note melodies. One by one a new note is added until the range of the pentatonic, minor and major scales have been reached. The *Rhythm Rascals* then introduces basic rhythms and their combinations. The series consists of books, recordings and exercise books. Through the books and CDs a subconscious level of understanding is achieved which, through the workbooks, can be raised to a semi-conscious level.

As the child then begins his/her instrumental education, he/she will soon realise that many of the melodies and rhythms and Rascal pictures in the instrumental material are already familiar from the *Singing* and *Rhythm Rascal* books. This ensures a seamless continuity between home, kindergarten and music school and

motivates the children to start the instrumental learning process. (Szilvay, 1996, 3.)

4 ANALYSIS OF THE COLOURSTRINGS VIOLIN TUTOR

The following chapters summarise my observations and analysis of the violin tutor material (Books A-D) in view of both general musical and violin technical issues. I have aimed at focusing on the most essential issues from the point of view of teaching small children at the beginning of their instrumental education. Hopefully this paper could also serve as a short introduction to Colourstrings for those interested.

Material:

The appropriate age to begin with the Colourstrings violin tutor is approximately 4-7. It is designed to suit a young child's imagination and is not necessarily interesting to older beginners. Books A-D are divided into 3- 4 chapters. Each chapter actively teaches one new concept while repeating prior elements. The number of components presented in the beginner material is chosen carefully as young children are not able to absorb everything at one time. Also from a musical point of view it is not wise to combine all instrumental/musical issues (such as intonation, rhythm, violin and bow hold issues and notational aspects) right from the very beginning on. Playing often lacks fluency and musicality when too many problems demand the child's focus. Therefore books A-D progress carefully teaching one new element at a time.

4.1 Book A

Book A focuses on fundamental areas of violin playing. It concentrates on developing proper playing positions and introduces basic movements. The problem of intonation is avoided at this stage to assure that good playing posture can be achieved.

The entire Book A is based on the use of open strings and harmonics. Melodies are built first solely from open string fifths. Pentatonic intervals (so-mi, la-so, la-so-mi, so-mi-do, la-so-mi-do) are played with a combination of harmonics and

open strings. The order in which these intervals are introduced is similar to that of the Kodaly method.

The first chapters of book A emphasize the teaching of basic rhythm. After introducing equal rhythm the difference between short and long is established. The quarter note “ta” and the eighth note group “ti-ti” as well as the half note “ta-a” and the quarter rest are taught early on. Although a time signature is not yet present the short open string melodies use 2/4 and 3/4 timing.

Chapter one is often carried out using primarily left and right hand pizzicato. Bow use can also be applied right from the beginning but it is recommended that the teacher helps with his/her own hand first. From chapter two on the child is encouraged to handle the bow more and more independently. Left hand pizzicato is practised often also using a combination of both arco and pizzicato in the exercise.

Octave flageolets which prepare for shifting and vibrato begin in the second chapter of book A. They are used to develop dynamic movement through the fingerboard, activate the thumb and enable it to act independently. (Szilvay, 2008, 20.) For the children flageolets are named magic notes.

In chapter three natural harmonics are used also in the first position. Intonation is developed through these exercises as harmonics simply don't sound when played out of place or without proper bow technique. Immediately when attempting to play a clear harmonic the child learns to search for the correct finger position with slight up and down movements. This action is then easy to transfer to exercises using stopped notes. The soft finger pressure used in harmonics prepares the left hand to play stopped notes in the most comfortable way. Relaxed playing fingers enable the thumb to support the left hand but also prevent it from applying any excess counter pressure. This kind of natural and relaxed hand position and movement is the basis for all left hand technique. (Szilvay, 2008, 31-32).

In the last chapter of book A the pipe stem notation used before is replaced by traditional looking notes. The first staff line appears and the do-key system is explained.

The octave flageolet exercises introduced earlier gave the left hand a feeling of big shifting movement. In the end of book A smaller shifting movement is practiced by changing fingers on a certain octave flageolet. For example, the octave flageolet A on the middle position of the A string is played several times changing the finger on each bow stroke. This exercise prepares shifting movement through neighbouring positions. (Szilvay, 2008, 32)

Book A already includes material for playing together. Simple open string duos (which also appear in books B-D) focus mainly in strengthening rhythmic security. From book B on stopped fingers may be added to make the exercise more melodic. The student may also play the duo solo, playing the first voice with bow and the second with left hand pizzicato or visa versa. This advanced variation develops motor control in both hands as well as note reading.

Each Colourstrings chapter ends with two empty pages which are meant for the teacher to write down tunes from their particular country or region, employing the rhythmic and melodic material learned. Kodaly (Zoltan Kodaly Pedagogical Institute of Music Website) believed that as naturally as a child learns his mother tongue before learning foreign languages, so should he learn his musical mother tongue, that is, the folk music of his native language, before learning foreign music. Colourstrings appreciates this principal and encourages teachers to acquaint their students with the musical culture of their nation. Creative space is also reserved for the student and his/her own compositions. Pages with colouring and notating exercises also appear throughout the instrumental tutor.

4.2 Book B

Once book B is begun, Szilvay recommends that the most important exercises in book A are returned to from time to time. The second time around playing quality should be perfected. Dynamic, tempo and character are now more in focus. (Szilvay, 2008, 35.)

Book B is melodically richer than Book A. Stopped notes are introduced one by one starting from the first finger “re” until the entire pentachord (do-re-mi-fa-so) is reached. The new pitch is practiced first through three steps: the note is sung, it is listened to and only then played. If the played note sounds unlike the sung version, the child will most likely try to correct the intonation of the played note.

Stopped fingers are also practised together with shifting movement to and from octave flageolets. These exercises help eliminate excess finger pressure on the stopped note as flageolets demand a very soft touch. Shifting down from the octave flageolet to the stopped finger develops the child to find the correct hand position and angle of finger so that perfect intonation can be achieved. (Szilvay, 2008, 39)

Instruction begins with the so-called first finger pattern (where the second and third fingers are a half step apart). This pattern corresponds with the natural position of fingers. Independent finger movement is trained with exercises that use the fingerings 0-2, 1-3, 0-3, 0-2-4, 0-4, 1-4. Szilvay emphasizes independent finger action. When playing a melody that uses, for example, the first and third finger, the relaxed angle (curved) of the second finger above the string should be looked after. This prepares the hand for the coming finger pattern where the second finger is low. (Szilvay, 2008, 47.)

In Colourstrings teaching the development of the 4th finger is held extremely important and it is introduced to the children very early compared to other traditional violin methods. According to Szilvay the relationship of the open string, 2nd finger and 4th finger (do-mi-so) is the basis of good intonation (Mitchell, 1994, 55) .

Transposing exercises start in Book B. The child learns to play melodies by ear starting with a different finger or in a higher position on the fingerboard. These transposing tasks require that the short songs are already fairly easy for the child (in their original position) and are learned by heart. Transposing should always be practiced under the teacher’s supervision. As of yet these exercises don’t teach a new position or finger pattern consciously. It is important is to keep in mind that the longer a certain finger pattern or position is practised the more difficult it will be for the child to learn to play with a new pattern or position. (Szilvay, 2008, 44.)

In book B the ladder sign, which symbolises the sharp sign, appears. This is first applied on the E-string first finger f-sharp so that the first finger pattern (do-so) can be taught on each string. When the third finger (fa) is introduced the second staff line is added. The children are explained that the one floor building, where the notes live, has become too small so the second floor needs to be built.

Chapter eight of book B introduces measures, measure lines and time signature in very playful way. The apartments of the building now represent measures. Measure lines are the inner walls which separate the apartments and the double line is then the outer wall of the building. Beside the do-key is a number which shows the amount of “ta” notes which live in one apartment. Through these “ta” notes the idea of equal pulse is explained.

The repetition sign is symbolized by a smiling face which is looking back to the beginning. The eyes of this face represent the repetition dots. The children are told that a very careful music writer or reader notices a similar melody and does not write it twice. The musical structure and form of the Colourstrings songs are thoroughly analysed. Even the youngest child easily learns to notice the similarities and differences of the melody and rhythmical material of these short pieces (Szilvay, 2008, 5). The musical term “Da Capo al Fine” also introduced in chapter eight is demonstrated through picture notation. (Szilvay, 2008, 54.)

At the end of book B there is the appendix which combines the new elements learned in Book B to the techniques used in Book A. The purpose of these additional exercises is to strengthen what has previously been learned. The teaching of this material is optional and doesn't affect the transition to book C. (Szilvay, 2008, 56-57.)

4.3 Book C

Book C begins with the use of the five line staff. The familiar characters of music land settle in the different floors of the house (staff). Mother and father find their place within the five staff lines (father on the open D and mother on the open A). The bear lives in the cellar (open G) and the bird resides in the attic (open E). Children are explained that because the bird lives so high up and the bear so very low, ledger lines are added.

In Books A and B the stems of notes face up. Book C takes a step further towards traditional notation and stems are written both up and down depending of course on the note. The two line staff used in books A and B remains coloured to make reading the five line system easier. Gradually the coloured two line system fades out but the coloured first finger B natural line on the A string remains blue. Although staff lines slowly turn black, notation is still coloured according to string. The ladder sign used earlier is replaced now by the conventional sharp sign.

Book C teaches several new rhythms. Rhythmical value is demonstrated with a picture of a seesaw. For instance the first picture shows a quarter note “ta” on one side of the seesaw and an eighth note group “ti-ti” on the other. This seesaw is in balance because the values of the notes are equal. Once the basic rhythms from book A have been repeated, Book C presents the single eighth note “ti”, the syn-copated rhythm “ti-ta-ti” and the dotted half note “ta-a-a” and dotted quarter note “tai-ti”.

The term tempo has so far been replaced with adjectives that describe speed and character. Children were asked to play for instance quickly, lazily, tiredly or briskly. Book C introduces Moderato, Allegro and Largo as the first tempo markings. (Szilvay, 2008, 58)

The ending primo and secondo are symbolised with a picture of a dice. The first ending shows the dice with one dot, the second with two. (Szilvay, 2008, 69.)

The musical terms forte, piano, crescendo and diminuendo are explained in book C and can be applied to music at this stage. It is up to the teacher to decide

whether the student is ready for the additional dynamical challenges. (Szilvay, 2008, 70.) The understanding of bow technical issues such as point of contact, inclination, weight and speed is required.

Until the last chapter of book C melodies and exercises are built using the notes of the pentachord. The “do” has almost without exception been placed on the open string. Without transposing exercises this often leads to the misconception that “do” is always an open string, “re” first finger and so on (Szilvay, 2008, 70). Chapter 11 adds the note “la” to the previously used do-re-mi-so and creates the pentatonic scale. Melodies are now played using two strings. “do” is no longer necessarily an open string. The movable “do” is explained with changing the place of the do-key sign.

Technically book C focuses mainly on the bow. In chapter nine the circling movements of repeated down or up bow strokes are practised. These retake exercises develop bow control as well as the understanding of direction. Legato playing is learned in this starting chapter of book C. At first the slurred exercises use only neighbouring fingers but gradually wider intervals are practised. When the bow is first taken into use (chapter 2 of book A) bow division is purposely neglected. The same amount of bow is used for quarter and eighth notes where as the speed of the bow needs to be faster for the shorter values. This is in order to avoid stiffening up bow movement which can happen when focusing on bow division. The quick altering of bow speed is trained in book C using all the rhythms learned so far. These open string exercises are practised first using the entire length of the bow but then also using only the upper half, lower half or middle of the bow. The signs for the different parts of the bow are also introduced and bow division exercises begun. Szilvay (2008, 62) reminds that for some students bow division can be too demanding at this stage. Therefore the teacher must decide whether it is smarter to put off these exercises and return to them at a later point.

In chapter 10 preparation exercises for double stops are begun. First neighbouring open strings are played together to acquaint the bow arm to the three new elbow levels needed for double stops. In book A the elevator-like elbow movement needed in the transition between different string levels was explained. For double

stops three additional levels are required in order for both strings to resonate equally. This exercise is then taken a step further when simple melodies are played together with the higher or lower open string. These pages are used to prepare both hands for double stop playing.

The end of Book C practices string crossings using stopped fingers. Now both right arm elbow level and left hand elbow movement is in focus.

4.4 Book D

Book D begins with acquainting the left hand with the new finger pattern of the minor pentachord. The first few pages comprise of sliding exercises of the second finger to prepare the transition from the high second to the low. The flat, natural and sharp signs are put into use. Exercises continue using the familiar rascal melodies starting now from the low second finger slowly progressing to minor pentachord (la-ti-do-re-mi) tunes. Soon both the low and high second finger is combined with the major and minor hexachord melodies (do-la, la-fa). In chapter 14 diatonic major and minor scales are introduced. The minor scale is played natural to avoid confusion. The pentachord, hexachord and diatonic scales may be transposed by starting with a different finger. These transposing suggestions are shown on the scale pages. A student who transposes fluently may also use other possibilities, although this might result in the use of finger patterns that have not yet been taught.

New rhythms such as the “sharp” rhythm “ti-tai” (eighth note-dotted quarter note combination), the “stretched” rhythm “tai-ti” (dotted quarter- eighth note combination) and the eighth note rest are introduced. As well as the whole note “ta-a-a-a”, group of four sixteenth notes “ti-ri-ti-ri”, and the combinations “ti-tiri” (eighth note- two 16th notes) and “tiri-ti” (two 16th notes- eighth note). These new values are practiced with the same open string exercise as explained before in the chapter on Book C. First using the entire length of the bow for each rhythm then using only the upper half, lower half or middle respectively. The main beat remains al-

ways the same when changing to the new value; only bow speed is altered. (Szilvay, 2008, 83-84.) The whole, half, quarter and eighth note rests are shown and symbolised by drawings in chapter 14.

In addition to the rhythmic values the musical terms fermata and the up-beat are explained. The up-beat is demonstrated through a tune notated inside a circle. This picture shows that the up-beat is a part of the ending measure although it heads towards the starting measure. The fermata is illustrated by a picture of an opera singer who, it is explained, enjoys the fermata notes so much that he wants to stretch their value.

Several new aspects of bow technique are taught in book D. Legato string crossings are practised first using open strings moving from the lower string to the higher with a pause in between in which the teacher helps the elbow “elevator” movement to adjust to the proper string level. In the next exercise the pause is eliminated and the elbow must adjust to the new string level as the lower string is still being played. Soon string crossing movement is accelerated to eighth note values. Here the wrist and the fingers of the bow arm are flexibly helping to make the crossing movement smooth and fluent. The exercise is illustrated by a picture of a millipede to symbolise the curved movement. The following pages already combine the legato string crossings with stopped fingers first thorough exercises then with short melodies. (Szilvay, 2008, 77.) The portato bowing is also introduced in chapter thirteen. It is described to both detach and attach notes. Portato is first symbolised with a stop sign to encourage the child to slightly stop with bow movement but then continue the same direction. Later on it is important to explain to the students that portato should actually sound closer to legato than separated notes. (Szilvay, 2008, 78.) Bow division exercises begun in Book C continue in chapter 14 of Book D. The difference between the direction of the bow (up bow, down bow) and the different parts of the bow (tip, frog) should be established latest at this point. Technically teaching of bow division should be the most important goal at this stage of violin teaching. Repeated up and down bow strokes are practised using the upper half, lower half, tip and frog of the bow. These exercises first practised on open strings, later with scales, help the child to notice the small rotating (pronation, supination) movements happening in the bow hand. (Szilvay,

2008, 80.) Chapter 14 of Book D also teaches early spiccato “the bouncing bowing”. First children are instructed to find the balancing point of their bow. Then vertical bouncing movement is practiced first on two strings at a time (G-D) then on one string. After a fluent vertical bouncing movement is achieved a bit of horizontal stroke is added to have what can be called an early form of spiccato. This exercise is based on the teaching of Professor Paul Rolland. (Szilvay, 2008, 85) The bowing is symbolized with a ball that becomes smaller and smaller through the exercise. In the end it transforms into the spiccato dot. Chapter 15, the last chapter of the D Books introduces arpeggios and chord playing. Arpeggios are first practiced through three open strings starting both up and down bow, then with harmonics to enable relaxation in both the right and left hand. Finally stopped fingers are used. The same steps are applied with the four string arpeggios. The picture of a circle drawn with the various colours of the violin strings reflects on the round bow movement of the arpeggio. Chords are first practiced with three open strings then using stopped fingers. Here the goal is to find the proper string level that enables all three strings to be played simultaneously. Four string chords are practiced broken. For the two bottom strings slow speed and a short length of bow is required. For the two higher strings a speedy, long bow is used. Although the chords are marked to start with a down bow, practicing up bow is also useful. (Szilvay, 2008, 90.)

Book D takes a step further towards traditional notation. Colours gradually fade out so that the end of Book D is completely black and white. After Book D it is recommended to begin with the scale books (1, 2, 3) to begin the transition to absolute names (Szilvay 2008, 91).

4.5 Additional Material, Books E-F and the Yellow Pages

The instrumental tutors are accompanied by different chamber music series: “Violin Rascal” series for violin and piano consists of seven volumes. “Chamber Music for Young String Players” (7 volumes) includes music for string trio, quartet

and orchestra. The “Colourstrings Violin Duos”(3 volumes), which are designed for the pupil and teacher to enjoy together, and “Colourful Music for Strings” (5 volumes), where a beginner soloist is accompanied by string orchestra, have been arranged by Laslo Rossa. The volumes are used side by side with the violin books. They progress from level to level using the rhythmical, melody, musical and technical elements that have been taught in the accompanying violin tutor book.

In the near future new material such Books E and F and the so-called Yellow Pages will be published. Books E and F will focus on developing the left hand; using new finger patterns and teaching shifting and positions and double stops. The three volumes of the Yellow Pages will concentrate on right hand technique going through all various bowings but also cover rhythms, time signature and ornaments. Books E and F and the Yellow pages are preferably used side by side. They have been built in a similar way to the previous books A-D: with the introduction of the new element, exercises, folk tunes, fragments from conventional repertoire, chamber music and performance pieces. The new material can easily be used even if the elementary Colourstrings material (Books A-D) is not familiar.

After the Colourstrings instrumental material, one can easily progress to conventional material i.e. studies, performance pieces, concertinos and sonatas. The Colourstrings material may also be taught as independent units but the use of all stages (Little Rascals, Singing Rascals, Instrumental Rascals) is recommended as the different levels complement each other. (Szilvay, 1996, 3-4).

5 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work was to create a holistic overview of the Colourstrings method focusing on the violin teaching system. It is based on my own observations as a former Colourstrings pupil and current teacher. In addition to personal experience this information has been gathered from several Colourstrings teacher courses led by the developer Geza Szilvay, articles and theses based on the subject, analysis of the Colourstrings instrumental material and teacher's guide and through observing Szilvay's lessons and substituting his violin class.

Based on a wider review of information sources regarding the theme I have been able to grasp a deeper understanding of the Kodaly based Colourstrings philosophy. I am now able to see the rationale behind all of the detailed elements of colourstrings teaching. I have also compared the nuances between the application of the method in different countries.

This process has also resulted in a thorough analysis of the violin methodology in which I have learned of the strengths as well as the challenges. Prior Colourstrings teaching experience has convinced me of what the method can offer at its best.

Szilvay lists the strengths of the method in the article Colourstrings in General. These comprise of fine intonation, sophisticated technique of both hands, developed musical intellect, fluent note reading, artistic aptitude for musical colours, shades, details and phrasing and rich creativity developed through transposing, transforming, improvising and composing.

What is most impressive is just how systematic the approach is. Each new area of violin playing has been very carefully considered to advance and be introduced according to the developmental cycle of the child. Technique, theoretical and mu-

sical challenges are taught through play and games. Each aspect is introduced in a childlike manner raising the interest of the child and his/her will to learn.

All Colourstrings material has been tested through several generations of Colourstrings students before publishing. The method has come together piece by piece to what it is today. As no method is without gaps, perfectly suitable for every pupil and teacher, Szilvay wishes that each teacher develops the material further according to the individual needs of the pupil.

The use of the Colourstrings School requires a full understanding of the method. Therefore the teacher must first become familiar with the ideology and all aspects of the method before starting to teach. This learning process demands time, perhaps more than other (traditional) methods. To reach the ideal of child centred teaching, a full commitment and genuine interest in the development of a child is a must.

To attain this knowledge attending a teacher training course is a requisite. Although these courses are organised in various places around the world, they are unfortunately not easily accessible to all those who are interested.

One of the major challenges from a methodological point of view would be the necessity of the use of relative solfege. The elementary phase is entirely built on this aspect and only a teacher who is willing to study the use of the movable do-system can become an expert of Colourstrings. Those who use the fixed do system have difficulty transferring from a traditional violin school to Colourstrings.

As during the first half year of the Colourstrings violin tutor (book A) uses solely open strings and harmonics, it may cause some children, those who yearn to play melodically richer material, to become impatient. This “slow” progression of the first book has an important purpose in the development of proper playing positions and movements, rhythmical stability and intonation. Actually once having achieved a good foundation through book A, the violin tutor advances fairly quickly. It is possible that book B (which introduces stopped fingers) is used in combination with book A but recommended that the material is used according to

the recommended order. As stated before, the teacher is invited to creatively apply the Colourstrings system to suit the pupil.

“There are very few Colourstrings children who will give up their instrument prematurely, while almost every second pupil becomes a professional, concert master, orchestra member, chamber musician, teacher, or internationally renowned soloist. The other half becomes serious connoisseurs of music.” (Szilvay, Colourstrings in General) Szilvay’s biggest wish is that through Colourstrings, music has a positive influence on each little person’s life. According to my personal experience Colourstrings offers an ideal atmosphere for enjoyable, child friendly musical education.

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