

THE KODÁLY MUSIC TEACHER

2026
Issue 2

Changing
LIVES

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KSSA

Kodály Society
of South Africa

THE KODÁLY CONCEPT

PART 2: MUSIC LITERACY

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This is the second part of the series exploring the principles of the Kodály concept. The first part can be read in the first issue of The Kodály Music Teacher magazine on the KSSA website. In the first part of this series, we established that the Kodály concept is not a rigid, one-size-fits-all method confined to a method book. Instead, it is a vast collection of principles derived from Kodály's philosophy on music education.

When teachers fall into the trap of isolating one of Kodály's principles, it results in an over-simplification of the approach which, according to James Cuskelly, "undermines the inherent humanistic, educational, and musical value of the Kodály concept" [1]. This reduced version, commonly called the "Kodály method", has evoked worldwide criticism. The outcome is that the music lesson cannot be adapted to the context and may feel like a series of chores rather than music-making [2].

Instead, Kodály's philosophy should empower teachers to make autonomous decisions about the most effective way to teach musical concepts in their specific context [3].

One of Kodály's pupils and master educator, Katalin Forrai, stressed that the sequences in the Kodály concept should be flexible: "Kodály was never rigid; he was a very bright, clear-thinking person, who could see things very broadly" [4]. In classrooms where the essential characteristics of Kodály's philosophy have been deeply understood, adapted, and implemented, it creates "powerful music teaching and learning" [1]. This is what we are striving for in South Africa – to truly understand Kodály's philosophy so that we can effectively adapt it in our unique and diverse context.

For this purpose, we will dive deeper into the five principles identified by Lois Choksy [5], starting with the first of these principles in the current issue of the Kodály Music Teacher:

PRINCIPLE 1: MUSICAL LITERACY IS THE RIGHT OF EVERY HUMAN BEING

Kodály believed that music is spiritual nourishment that should be accessible to everyone [6]. Consequently, he aimed to broaden the audience for what he termed "serious music", specifically classical music [6]. He started this endeavour in primary schools where he found to his disappointment that music education had nearly vanished because children were not taught to understand music. This led him to focus his efforts and studies on solving this problem and making "good quality music" more accessible to all [6].

Some scholars regard Kodály as one of the earliest and most articulate advocates of music literacy [7]. For Kodály, music literacy – the ability to read, write and think music – is more than a mere skill; he believed it is a fundamental right akin to the right to read [8]. Therefore, developing musical literacy that is age- and develop-

mentally appropriate is central to the Kodály concept [9]. The foundation for Kodály-based musical literacy includes the relative solmization or movable do system where 'do' is the tonic in major keys, while 'la' is the tonic in minor keys; Curwen hand signs to represent the notes of the scale; rhythm syllables to illustrate durational relationships between notes; and the pentatonic scale [10].

It is, however, important to understand that Kodály-based music literacy goes beyond merely reading music and sight singing, which many can do without Kodály training. It encompasses the ability to truly comprehend notation, hear melodies and harmonies internally, and effectively communicate what is heard.

Therefore, it is not music literacy for the sake of reading music alone, but for the purpose of becoming an active and joyful music-maker. Kodály regarded music literacy as a means to unlock the treasures music offers, allowing them to be enjoyed by all for a lifetime [10].

References:

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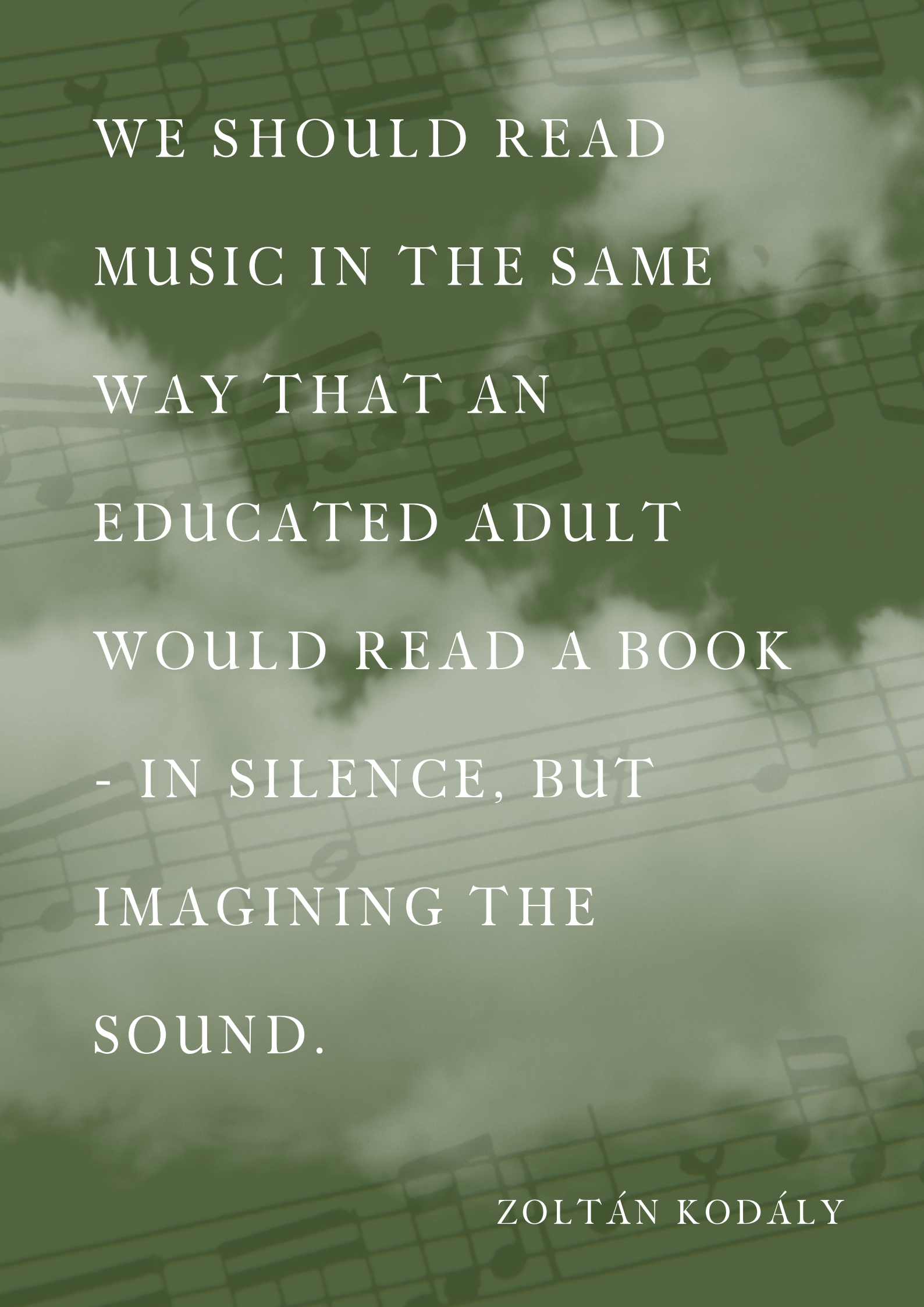
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MINUTE, AND WE NEED YOUR HELP.**

You can volunteer for:

- the Kodály Library project
- organise Kodály socials
- help at in-person workshops
- or let us know if you have new ideas

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The background of the image features a series of musical staves with notes, rendered in a dark, muted green color. The staves are arranged in a slightly overlapping, diagonal pattern across the frame. The text is overlaid on this background in a white, serif font.

WE SHOULD READ
MUSIC IN THE SAME
WAY THAT AN
EDUCATED ADULT
WOULD READ A BOOK
- IN SILENCE, BUT
IMAGINING THE
SOUND.

ZOLTÁN KODÁLY