

# A Study of the Ward Method of Teaching Music

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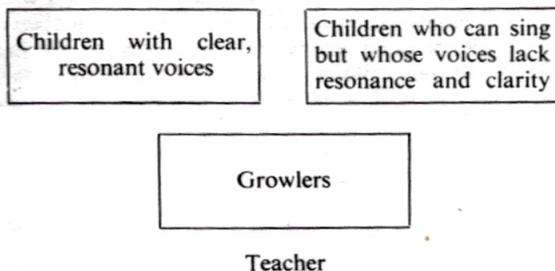
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A child of six is capable of feeling and understanding a great deal more about music than is generally believed. More often than not the results of this underestimation of his capacity are two-fold: he is presented with only the most meagre of musical fare; he receives little or no methodical and progressive initiation into musical techniques as such. The first year's training by the Ward Method offers a practical solution to this problem: it claims to be able to introduce the child into the world of music in a way suited to his present needs and one which will lay a solid foundation for his future musical development. The present article proposes to take a typical twenty-minute period in a normal class of Upper Infants as a starting-point for a detailed discussion of the various technical features involved. These will include vocal training, rhythmic training, staff-notation and creative work.

## Early Stages of Vocal Training

Class plan:



'I had thirty-one Growlers in September. Now there are only six and two of those have almost found their voices.'

It was mid-January. The teacher opened the door of the classroom and I counted forty-four six-year-olds who chorused a greeting as we went in.

'Nightingales, listen please.'

The teacher sang a prolonged note (A $\flat$ ) to the syllable NU (pronounced as in 'noon'). She accompanied it with a wide expressive gesture to help the children to feel the



Vocal Training: First attempts at matching pitch and placing the voice

sound forward and high in the head. A group of children on her left echoed the note after her. The sound was light and pleasing, well in tune. Two more notes followed (C, E $\flat$ ) and were immediately imitated by the Nightingales, while the others listened and commented upon the results.

'Peter, will you come and make the Blackbirds sing?'

A sturdy child of six and a half came to the front and took the teacher's place. She blew the notes softly on her pitch-pipe (low E $\flat$ , G, B $\flat$ ) and he sang them with pure, flute-like tone to the group on the right of the teacher. It was stimulating for the children to hear a model from a child's voice, similar in timbre and range to their own. They responded with enthusiasm. Then the teacher played pitch-matching games with the Growlers, who were grouped close to her so that she could help each one individually. She tried to trick them into producing a high sound and holding it:

Teacher: (on E $\flat$ -C) 'Cuckoo! Now you try!' (E $\flat$ ).

Betty: 'Cuckoo!' (down in her boots).

Teacher: 'Cuckoo!' (E $\flat$ -C).

Betty: 'Cuckoo!' (approximately B $\flat$ -G)

Teacher: (on B $\flat$ ) 'That's better! Can you sing NU?'

Betty: (on B $\flat$ ) 'Yes I can: NU!'

Later in the year the sound would be slightly opened: NU - O - A. Other vocal exercises for the children who had found their singing voices combined melody and rhythm with sustained sounds.

## Pitch-Training

The children now sat for a pitch-training exercise. They had been building up the major scale from one note to two notes, *Doh* and *Ray*, then *Me* was added, then *Fah* and *Soh*, and so on. They used a measuring gesture to show higher and lower notes and the teacher carefully controlled the pitch, especially at danger



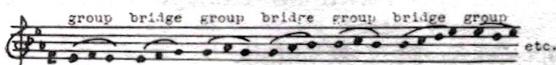
Pitch Training: A measuring gesture is used to show higher and lower notes, here top *Doh*.

points such as semitones. By now, they could move at ease by conjunct motion within the whole of the authentic range. The next step was to lead them to pick out the notes of the common chord and to dis-

cover the relationship between these notes and the others, for example, the semitone attraction of the 4th degree towards the 3rd, or of the 7th degree towards the tonic:



The exercise consisted of singing alternately 'groups'—the notes of the common chord with their adjacent notes—and 'bridges'—successions of notes leading from one note of the chord to another:



The exercise was repeated with the children singing the 'groups' and softly humming the 'bridges'. Eventually the 'bridges' would be omitted altogether. One of the Growlers showed the notes with the teacher's pointer. In fact, these children had their full share in every activity except that they were never allowed to drone along underneath the others when the Nightingales and Blackbirds were singing; otherwise nobody would ever have heard a pure note, perfectly in tune.

This exercise only lasted about two and a half minutes, but it exacted full concentration on the part of the children. They needed some activity now which would relax them, so they rose for rhythmic gestures.

### Rhythm

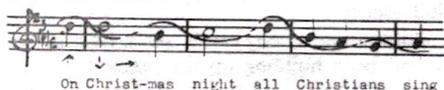
Their rhythmic training since September had all grown from a single germ, a rise and fall relationship between two crotchet beats in 2/4 time:



A succession of these tiny rhythms could produce, for example, the first line of Tallis's Canon. Instead of beating time—a practice that quickly becomes rigid and mechanical in the hands of small children—they used, during this first year of musical training a more flexible gesture, up and down, lightly and rhythmically, bringing the larger muscles into play:

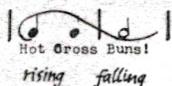


The next step had been to lengthen the 'down', resulting in the discovery of 3/4 time beginning on the up-beat. A succession of these little ternary rhythms would give a phrase such as this:



On Christ-mas night all Christians sing

The gesture for triple time beginning on the up-beat was a dance movement. As the months passed the children were led, through movement and gesture, to experience for themselves a rise and fall relationship—a departure and an arrival—between whole bars in 2/4 time beginning on the down-beat:

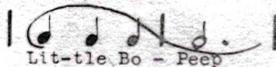


Hot Cross Buns!

Linking up two of these, we can obtain:



It was an easy step to pass from this to 3/4 time beginning on the down-beat:



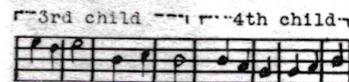
Lit-tle Bo - Peep

which developed into:



Lit-tle Bo - Peep Has lost her sheep

In today's lesson, the children were using gestures with the Hot Cross Buns pattern, and they began to play an improvisation game of 'musical conversation', using the melodic material of the pitch-training exercise. Each child sang the pattern twice, choosing freely the notes he wanted, and he tried to avoid bringing the 'conversation' to a close, by steering clear of bottom *Doh*. Here is an example of the kind of creative work they produced during this game:



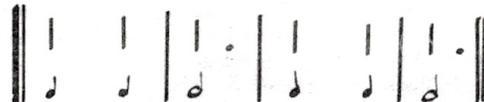
They soon discovered how to keep the ball rolling and excitement ran high as they dodged to avoid making a cadence on bottom *Doh*. One child finally ended the 'conversation' by singing:



### 'Guessing Games': Ear- and Eye-Tests

They were now ready for some more concentration. The teacher sang a little phrase, using the syllable NU for each note instead of its name. The children listened intently and 'guessed' which notes the teacher had sung. They sang the phrase back with the names of the notes. Then the teacher produced her special pointer with its 'traffic lights'—red and green ends. The children knew that when she pointed with the green end they were to sing the notes but that when she pointed to them with the red end they were to *think* them in their heads. She pointed to a succession of notes with the red end, and the children sang them back from memory. There were many variations of these 'guessing games'. The teacher would sometimes write a short phrase on the board, make the children observe it in silence (after giving them the pitch of the first note) and then rubbing it out before they sang it back with the names of the notes. One of the Growlers could 'help' the teacher by rubbing out the phrase.

There were also guessing games to be played with rhythm. The children were shown two or three patterns and then the teacher sang one to see if they could point to which one it was and sing it back correctly. The children learnt to come and write the patterns on the board from dictation, *without slowing up the tempo*, and to make this possible they used simplified symbols which were subsequently transcribed to and from the staff:



### Performance

The lesson finally led up to a little song, which had been prepared all along through the various activities. One of the children was invited to come to the front and conduct the class. He assumed this responsibility eagerly and gave the words of command in clear tones.

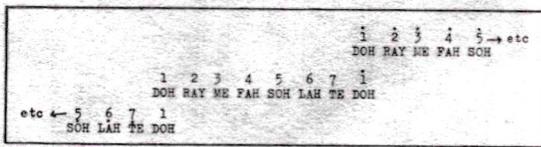
During the whole lesson, the children's attention had not flagged for an instant. By alternating exercises and games requiring great concentration with others that were relaxing or semi-relaxing, the teacher had succeeded in making every member of a large class an active participant in collective group-work. The result, going well beyond mere participation, was the individual progress of each child in the class, from the duller and most scatter-brained to the most musically sensitive and intelligent.

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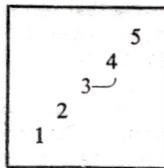
In the first part of this study, a typical twenty-minute music period with a class of Upper Infants was taken as the starting-point of a discussion of a number of technical features. Three of these are worth selecting for more detailed consideration, namely: notation, progressive rhythmic aural training and creative work.

### Notation

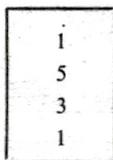
Mrs Ward insists that a sound should be associated at once with a written symbol, and so firmly united to it that the sound will automatically bring into the mind the image of the written symbol, as if the ear could see and the eye hear. To obtain this result, the symbols used must be simple, easy to recognize, easy to write. Number notation possesses these qualities, and has the further advantage of giving small children a sense of pitch intervals. The seven notes of the central scale beginning on *Doh* are represented by the first seven numbers. For notes above or below, dots are used above or below the numbers:



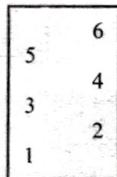
There is nothing babyish about the use of numbers; figured harmony makes use of a somewhat similar system. Representing in the present instance the first, second, third, etc, degree of the scale, they show a logical progression of tones and semitones and can be invaluable in the teaching of modality. They can be arranged in diagrams to represent scale progression;



the notes of the common chord,

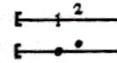


contrasts between these notes and the others, for example:



and many other combinations. A child using number notation can show on his fingers the degrees of the scale: he holds up the little finger of his left hand for *Doh*, two fingers for *Ray*, three for *Me*, four for *Fah* (with the forefinger and the middle-finger close together to show the semitone), and so on. With his eyes shut, so as not to be influenced by the others, he can show on his fingers the answer to an ear-test, and the teacher can control at a glance the work of every individual child in a large class. When he begins to learn a keyboard instrument, his hand will lie naturally over the keys of the first major scales he will be studying.

The child will begin to study *staff-notation* after the first few weeks of preparation with the numbers. The five-lined staff is built up progressively from a single line



to two lines,



then three,



and finally to the full five-lined staff. The child discovers for himself the necessity of adding each successive line to the staff. In the first year, the children study two different positions of the *Doh* Clef (major tonic), corresponding to the two ranges of the major mode, authentic and plagal. When the treble clef is present, the children will sing in absolute pitch, in the keys of E or E $\flat$  major, for the authentic range, and G or G $\flat$  major for the plagal range, these keys being well suited to the natural range of the children's voices.

### Progressive Rhythmic Aural Training

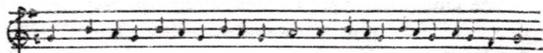
In the last weeks of his first year's training the young child is taught, step by step, how to recognize rhythm with no other guide but the ear. He knows already four basic types of rhythm: 2/4 beginning on the up-beat or the down-beat, and 3/4 beginning on the up-beat or the down-beat. The first new step will be for him to learn to feel whether a succession of short notes, in duple or triple time, begin on the up-beat or the down-beat. He will next discover the need for length at the cadence, and experience for himself the effect of length in the middle of the phrase. At this early stage in his training long notes will always occur on first beats: we are working in 2/4 and 3/4 and syncopation is excluded for the present, for it is important to establish what is normal before teaching what is exceptional.

These are 'guessing games' of a new and exciting kind. The teacher will draw on nursery rhymes, fragments of simple folksongs, or straightforward themes from classical composers, as examples for this kind of work. The children will be told to *listen carefully* and find out if the melody begins on the first part of the bar or the last, if it has two beats or three beats in a bar. The teacher sings the phrase once or twice. Soon the majority of the class will be able to make the appropriate gesture while the teacher continues to sing the phrase over and over again, and finally the children will be ready to sing it themselves with the gesture.

The third step is to make the class examine the melodic line. They will discover that the rhythmic grouping of the notes can sometimes be determined by repeated notes:



sometimes by the repetition of a little motif, or by its melodic inversion. At the Annual Conference of the Music Advisers' National Association, in July 1965, a class of Ward-trained infants was invited to give a demonstration. The lesson was based on a short song the children had never seen before, *The Mill-Wheel*. The teacher had written the first line on the board, using staff-notation, and she had purposely omitted to put in the bar-lines:



No sooner did the children see it than Jane, just turned six, was jumping up and down on her seat with excitement. 'Three in a bar!' she cried triumphantly. She had spotted the little three-note motif that determined the rhythmic grouping of the notes:



The second line contained another surprise for the children, for the tiny motif kept on repeating itself, now in this direction, now in that, by melodic inversion:



Now, the average age of those children at the beginning of the school year had been five plus.

**Creative Work**

In the earlier part of this study some account was given of 'musical conversation' in connection with the children's rhythmic training. Creative work is taught and encouraged from the very first, and the child's growing musical vocabulary is progressively incorporated into these efforts.

The *pitch-calls* for the Growlers already offer examples of miniature conversations which are an excellent preparation for musical improvisation. First the teacher tries to obtain a collective answer from the whole class:

1 1 1 1 6

Question: 'What are you do-ing?'

1 1 1 6

Answer: 'We are sing-ing.'

Next: individual answers. The same question is asked to each child in the class, but using a different pitch-call for each child. The teacher expects an answer that is identical with the question from the musical point of view:

1 1 1 6

Teacher: 'What is your name?'

1 1 1 6 6

1st child: 'My name is Ma-ry.'

5 5 5 1

Teacher: 'What is your name?'

5 5 5 1

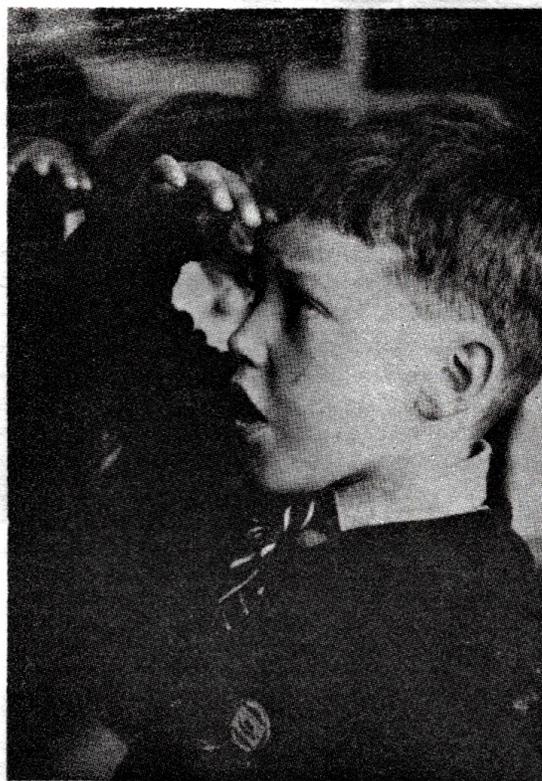
2nd Child: 'My name is John.'

The next step will be to try to get the children to give a reply that is different, musically, from the question. To help the children to grasp the idea of a different melodic reply, the teacher gets *them* to ask the question, and demonstrates the possibility of a change of melody. In these examples, well within the capacity of six-year-olds, lie the germs of two fundamental principles of musical composition: repetition and contrast.

At this point, the child's imagination may be freely encouraged to create a whole musical world in which people and animals, trees and flowers, all sing to one another. The Ward Method trains the teacher to see in detail how to vary and develop this sort of creative work. After that, she will pass on to *written composition*. This has been prepared all along by getting the children into the habit of analysing little songs of four-lines, etc, to be found in every chapter of the first year's work. For example, she can ask the children:

'How many people have been singing?'

In a four-lined song, there may be two, perhaps, or four: father and mother, or two children butting into their parents' conversation. Then she divides the class into groups representing the different 'actors'. Each



'Soh'

group knows its own phrase and sings it by heart. The children will love doing this. Their interest will have been stimulated, the music made to live, and they will have been given a concrete example of how music is put together. Their attention may be drawn to the repetition or alternation of rhythmic patterns, or to the melodic line. *Immediately after this*, the children are invited to compose a song of their own, using rhythmic patterns studied during that day's lesson, or the lesson of the previous day, as they will:

'Who has an idea for the first line, what the father says?'

This work will take very little time if the children have been taught to examine the songs they sing *before singing them*, the habit having been formed from the first week onwards. Here is an example of a simple four-lined tune using two alternating rhythmic patterns. It was composed collectively by six-year-olds during the local inspector's visit:



Results such as we have been describing, which, in the words of Mrs Ward, will 'astonish and delight' the teacher, are not exceptional. They can be obtained in any average class of six-year-olds by the *ordinary non-specialist class teacher* provided that he or she has a good ear and has previously qualified on a Ward Method Vacation Training Course and applies the training regularly, if possible in a daily twenty-minute lesson. The motto of success is 'a little, very well done, every day'. Leading the children from the known to the related unknown, the teacher inspires a climate of confidence and a feeling of pride in achievement while laying solid foundations for future discovery and development.

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