

Teaching music through the body and the voice



Nikhil Dally's Stepping Notes Music School training day for teachers of infants and primary school children inspires Jane Gillie.

What attracts me to teaching, amongst other things, is planning the structure of a lesson. The beauty, skill and knowledge imparted and learned, unfold like an opening flower, and the fulfilment of the perfect bloom towards the end of the lesson is a most satisfying moment. This skill is taught by teacher trainers in the fields of Dalcroze or Kodály but can also be striven for in one to one instrumental teaching. It is a goal I am constantly seeking and rarely or never achieving, but I have observed it in other teachers.

Nikhil Dally has invested thought, intelligence, imagination and wide exploration of many methods in his



Stepping Notes Music School. Like many of us, he recognises that the accomplishment necessary to perform music effectively is built on foundations that go far back into early childhood and even before.

In his one day demonstration of his method he drew a picture of a tree with three roots: physical, emotional and aural, including singing. He likened ground level with the appropriate age to start musicianship training between the ages of five and eight. Without the roots the tree will not prosper. The trunk and branches represent the gradual attainment of the musicianship necessary to succeed at an instrument. The foliage and flowers are the final product of instrumental performance and cannot exist without the trunk, branches and roots. But music is not only for those who learn to perform on an instrument with skill; it is an essential and deep part of being human and no child should be deprived of the foundations which make the enjoyment of and response to music, singing and eventual application of musical skills possible.

Nikhil acknowledges his debt to Kodály, Dalcroze, Colourstrings, Margaret Morris Movement, dance teacher Maureen Murphy, and many others. One Dalcrozean influence derives from the idea that each aspect of living has a musical counterpart. The heart beats, giving us pulse;



we walk, run, skip, jump and leap giving us different kinds of metre and a concept of physical preparation (anacrusis), arrival (crusis) and after effect (metacrusis). The language of different countries reflects the movement and culture of that country and is mirrored in that country's music. Linguistic accent and anacrusis will be reflected in its songs. Rhymes are used as well as songs to teach various musical elements. The Kodály inspiration that the voice is the seed from which all musicianship develops is strong in his philosophy. We have all sorts of different voices: speaking voices, whispering, sad, happy, angry and singing. Our voices come from the inside of us and express our deepest emotions as well as our culture.

Learning from the inside out certainly seems to make sense and is strengthened by the physical aspect of Dally's teaching. It had not occurred to me that the kind of education that ticks boxes is not always acknowledging this more organic approach. Nikhil loves timeless values of beauty, quality and poetry as opposed to trendy cheap, plastic gimmicky aids to music education. He introduces percussion instruments relatively late and they are beautiful and exotic, imported from the East; gongs and chimes that one might associate with a gamelan orchestra.

Nikhil's Stepping Notes music education classes prepare the child thoroughly and systematically for learning an instrument. First they will enjoy songs, rhymes and games and unconsciously absorb the elements that will then be made conscious so that by the time they learn an instrument they understand the basics of pulse, rhythm, pitch and written notation. Parents are actively invited to attend classes and must take part and learn with the children. This is a resonance from Suzuki and reflects the fact that parents who understand and share in what the children are learning will be far more supportive than those who just drop the children off.

Nikhil runs his classes in Englefield Green, Egham, Surrey, and I would recommend these classes highly for children as pre-instrumental musicianship training. I also suggest that teachers of music and instruments attend any training days or weekends that he may offer. They will be inspired with ideas, songs, games, fun and joy. Nikhil is keen to extend the Stepping Notes concept more widely, so this could be an interesting opening into a new career. ■

For further information about the Stepping Notes Music School, please go to www.dally.org.uk/steppingnotes e-mail nikhil@dally.org.uk or telephone 01932 241196.

