

A FEW REMARKS ON MUSIC TEACHING; I.

By W. H. LESLIE.

JUST as when we enter one of our great architectural masterpieces our eye is often distracted from the beauties of its form and proportions by the multiplicity of statues, monuments, and unimportant personalities, so in a way our vision in music is almost hampered by the various plans, methods, systems and lessons which have been written for our learning.

I think we can with advantage take a "cast" backwards and by eliminating unessentials perhaps simplify problems, which to many of us have become rather overloaded with side issues, like a high road which is crammed with sign-posts to unimportant places and fails to tell us the quickest way to the all-important destination.

Of the teaching of music there is no end, but in the learning of it we very often fail even to make a successful beginning.

When it is considered for a moment that here is the language in which many things can be said which would otherwise remain unsaid and that we are as a nation very shy of saying serious things, the importance of the language of music will not be underrated by educationists.

The few suggestions which I am putting forward are not in any way in text-book form, but more as an effort to try and obtain the co-operation of all who are trained to teach, by looking upon what we call "singing" viz., speaking in musical sounds merely as a subject to be taught like any other subject, embracing as it does both reading, writing and arithmetic.

Combine these three in their very simplest form and you have music.

In the alphabet there are but seven letters and you rarely have to count up to more than six or, at the outside, eight in order to discipline its sounds and rhythm. The signs used for singing have in this language exactly the same function as those used for speakers.

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In all matters connected with music we are apt to make very "heavy weather" of theory and detail, which, however necessary for those who aspire to the higher realms of the art, are not in any way essential to the enjoyment of comparative ease in reading at sight and taking a place in the singing meetings and choirs which should form a valuable adjunct to other amusements.

If we take full advantage of the receptiveness of quite young children, and carry their instruction a step or two further than has been generally done, the rest follows quite naturally and adds an asset, not only to the enjoyment of life, but also to the mental alertness, which is difficult to obtain in like proportion from any other study.

Think of music as a language and teach it as far as you can like any other language.

"Music is the art of thinking in sound." Its grammar consists of correlating its three component parts, eliminating for the time being all question of "harmony."

Time, Tune and Tone,

viz., Rhythm. Melody and pleasing sound.

What we have to cultivate is the art of *thinking* in rhythm, melody and pleasing sounds.

It has been said by a cynic that language is given us to conceal our thoughts.

That is most untrue of the musical language, and many people can convey the most lovely thoughts through the intermediary of music, whereas they would often blush deeply if they found themselves saying the same things in ordinary language. At the same time we all

know instances where the efforts to conceal thoughts are so successful that you cannot tell even in what language a singer is singing. But that, as Kipling would say, is another story.

Now how soon can we begin to teach this language?

RHYTHM.

Time. A baby, almost directly it is born, is amenable to the discipline of rhythm [sic]. The rocking of a baby is the staple soothing medicine of all mothers or nurses.

But the orthodoxy of nursing now prescribes that such extraneous methods of inducing sleep are pandering to weakness. So the influence of rhythm [sic] is abandoned and the baby is trained to go to sleep on its own initiative.

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The same with the singing voice. A baby can sing long before it can talk, but the efforts of its whole entourage are concentrated on inducing it to talk. Once this is accomplished, the training is “switched off” to a life-long effort to make *it* keep silent.

Thus the tendency is to squash the forms of music instead of developing them at any rate equally with the development of other necessary accomplishments.

The foundations of rhythm are found in movements, marching-steps, and other quasi-drill actions and are soon systematized and known by children, emphasised as you always teach by the clapping of hands, stamping the feet and any other definite action selected for the purpose.

When this is familiarized, divide the class into two parts and let one part march to the treble part and the other to the bass, and so on with even three or four parts.

This entails the listening to the different component parts of a composition which is in itself an important affair when we realize to what an extent the harmonized melody has enslaved us all to the “top line only.”

TUNE.

The natural means of communication in all nature is by sound. Sounds are the real Esperanto. A so-called musical sound consists of sounds produced by regular and comparatively slow vibrations as compared to squeaks, bangs, explosions, etc., the sound of which is the result of irregular and very violent vibrations.

We know a child can produce the squeaks and explosions, but a child very early in life understands a musical sound, and even expresses one long before it can articulate in any other language.

I have in mind a baby who, when asked on Sundays where his nurse had gone, invariably answered: **m.r.d.** = the village church bells, and it thoroughly understood the temporary freedom from discipline which he was about to enjoy—and very well he expressed it in those three notes.

You can see anywhere dogs, especially sheep-dogs, worked entirely by various sounding whistles.

In France the art of forest hunting is carried on by a highly-developed system of Time and Tune played on the hunting horns used in that country.

Now, as to the application.

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Music is the art of thinking in sound. If the animal world can think in sounds, surely it should not be difficult for. . . ! Perhaps the ice is getting thin. How many of us do any thinking

in sound? Are not the statues and monuments, the pianos, the gramophones and singing by ear, etc., getting in the line of sight?

Children soon get to understand what you mean when you talk to them in ordinary language. Later, you show them the letters and signs which enable them to read what they have hitherto understood by ear.

Children start with a football, and kick it about from one to the other. Later someone comes along and says, "Why don't you learn the rules?" And then their operations are gradually disciplined and regulated, until what was a romp becomes a game, and eventually the game becomes very nearly a science.

Supposing we did the same with musical sounds. Let children kick them about and learn little songs by ear—which is really only romping in music—little action songs, etc., and then when they are old enough, show them how these songs are written down, spelt and read, and learn the rules, etc.

Supposing we sometimes talked to them in music. For instance, with a class of children: Take a Key note or **DOH** for the sitting position.

"Stand"	= me soh
"Outside the seat"	= soh lah
"Stand easy"	= soh
"Inside the seat"	= soh me
"Sit"	= doh

If a teacher is unable to sing, use a penny trumpet or whistle, or even a mouth organ.

Teach them to answer such a question as this: What is the music for "Stand easy"? And later on, when suitable, the teaching of how to write "Stand easy" in music. It is not nearly so hard to write such a sentence in music as the actual words to spell or write in English or other language. This starts *thinking* in sound.

The Musical Alphabet. Many hundreds of years ago a teacher of music was faced with the same difficulties which confront us, viz., how to convey the musical sounds which we employ for our so-called scale to his pupils. What did he do? He found a hymn tune of which each line began on

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successive notes of the scale. He asked his pupils to connect the word and the sound in their minds, and worked from that basis of mental effect.

Here is the tune:—

Musical Notation Here

If you look at the first syllable, you will recognise our old friends, the sol-fa syllables, being the commencement of the Latin word which is the syllable sung at the beginning of each line.

"Ut" has been changed to **DOH** as being a more solid and

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more singable syllable, representing as it does the pivot or keynote, and when the seventh note had to be added to the Scale the initial letters of Sancte Johannes were taken and the note was called **SI** (or **TE**).

I quote this interesting bit of history to remind us that there is no real magic in these syllables. Their original merit lay in the fact that they carried with them a required musical

sound for the purpose of the relative notes required for the scale, and the association of the words suggested the sound required.

This is how our Tonic Sol-fa syllables originated, and I feel sure we could, by conferring together, adapt the principle involved to help us over the initial difficulties of talking and thinking in sounds.

We can make use of the little songs infants learn, or the songs used in singing games, etc., to give the first impressions of the notes and intervals in the same way, instead of making the Tonic Sol-fa syllables arbitrary. Here are fairly simple examples of tunes that are probably known to the children by ear before they begin to read notes.

Musical Notation Here

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Many songs will suggest themselves to teachers out of which to make examples to children and enable them to reduce their ear knowledge, as it were, to the £ s. d. of musical notation—

It is quite advisable at the commencement not to use the full scale, but only the Five-note, or Pentatonic scale—

Musical Notation Here

on which many tunes are built, such as “Ye Banks and Braes.” When this source of notes is fully mastered, the tonal effect of the **FA** and the **TE** are more readily grasped, and come more or less as a matter of course.

Musical phrases depend on relative pitch and not on absolute pitch. The important thing to recognise is not the name of any one note when sounded but its relation to a given keynote. We can adopt the principle and so to speak de-code any music phrases that we may select from the songs the children know to use for ordinary everyday purposes of starting to learn the scale intervals, until we become as familiar with the sounds conveyed by the signs as we do with the signs that tell us that **C A T** sounds Cat.

We have not much to deal with in reading intervals; if anyone can read fairly accurately a third, fourth, fifth and sixth up and down, they have a very solid groundwork to go upon, but any series of sounds used by teachers can be made pegs on which to hang mental efforts, and ear tests are the natural outcome, and in the form of question and answer become an amusing game instead of a somewhat laboured exercise.

We can evolve quite nice musical phrases to express ideas. Supposing anyone asked you, “What is the music for a fine day?” would not

Musical Notation Here

give you some idea of a blue sky that couldn't have a cloud in it? May or may not as far as any individual is concerned, but at any rate you would soon find a phrase that would do so. *Music is the art of thinking and expressing thoughts in sound.*

Now we are getting somewhere near learning the musical

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alphabet. There are only the seven letters (five at first, and then **FA** and **TE** added) with a clear idea of their relation to the fixed sound **DOH**.

The modulator need not be really inordinately dull. Get a fixed idea of the **DOH** as the pivot on which all the other sounds were.

The mental effect of each note more or less speaks for itself when a musical phrase is in

hand in the way of question and answer.

Ask a child:

Musical Notation Here

If the answer is given **LAH**, you can tell at once that the child is going to loiter about.

If the answer is **ME**, you can see the child pretending to go home, but playing about if it gets the chance, and so on with any other note but **DOH**.

If the answer is given straight out

DOH

you feel that all uncertainty and responsibility is removed.

D

Home!

Sample of a conversation showing the effect of various cadences:—

Musical Notation Here

A simple musical cadence follows about the same sequence of sounds as the spoken one, and the character given to each degree of the scale in the text-books is really arbitrary; whereas the real effect is apparent if connected with an ordinary conversational idea.

This idea develops as we get on in later stages, when the singing voice assimilates and finds itself on the functions of the speaking voice.

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Perhaps we can invent a kind of phrase-book such as you get when travelling in a foreign country, but instead of "What is the French, German or Italian for such and such a question," we must say "What is the music for?" etc., etc.

So we begin to think in sound.

THE USE OF THE MODULATOR.

The modulator can be used in many ways besides that of merely denoting intervals. The effect of the different sounds and their effect on a sentence or description of incident can add greatly to what is otherwise only a mechanical exercise. Children are full of imagination, as one learns by the keen interest they take in "pretending," and the romances they can weave round the most unattractive dolls and playthings. Such feelings are invaluable if translated into music and utilised as the foundation of a sense of artistic imagination.

If you invent scenes and incidents of any quite simple and elementary kind, or ask the children to invent them and illustrate them in notes, it incites the mind to take interest even in a modulator exercise.

As soon as possible get exercises sung without using syllables. Let the children "use the syllables but keep their mouths shut," is an excellent first step to acquiring the mental effect without actually hanging on to the syllable, and get the exercises *horizontal* on a blackboard as soon as you can get away from the *perpendicular* modulator.

It is a good plan not to make modulator exercises too long-drawn out. The sense of keynote is apt to wander if the intervals are allowed to get too detached from the **DOH**.

Music is the art of thinking in sound.

These ideas do not carry us beyond Grade 1, with possibly the addition of more advanced infants' classes.

The remarks are not intended as any kind of rule for teaching, but in the hope that you

will turn them over in your minds—possibly make some trials—and that a little later we may have a conference when an interchange of results will mutually help us all.

We cannot make music supersede or infringe upon the time-table, but if the ground is well and truly prepared in the earlier days of school attendance, full advantage can be taken of the opportunities available as the children progress through the school.

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I should like, with your assistance, to evolve a syllabus, which would be common to all our schools.

I shall follow this up by a letter dealing with some suggestions for the music in the higher grades, but I am sure you will agree that, as a start, the foundations must be well and truly laid.

We do not aspire to developing performances to complete [sic] with Cathedral Choir Schools.

Music is the art of thinking in sound. If we can achieve even a small measure of success in teaching this, we shall open to our children a wonderful field of enjoyment either as performers or listeners.

NOTE. Action songs. Breathing exercises. Vowel exercises.

Singing games and such like songs are obviously excellent for combining time and tune.

As soon as children can write, the use of slates is very helpful. The children are very interested in writing down their own signs. The actual writing is easier in the staff than in the sol-fa; at the same time, as soon as they can form the letters the latter notation is within their reach.

In Class I. an exercise of about this difficulty should be readable at first sight without the use of the Sol-fa syllables—

Musical Notation Here

or the equivalent in Sol-fa notation.

By giving everyone the power to read musical signs with the same facility as they read ordinary letters and words we give them a language in which the most beautiful thoughts can be expressed.

It is not the notes—but what is in the mind behind the notes that really matters—and the language of Music will express the thoughts which we are too shy to say.

“Sounds without thoughts never get to Heaven.”

[To be continued.]