

## Introduction to Grade 1

In 1923 Rudolf Steiner gave two lectures to the teachers of the Waldorf school in Stuttgart and the students of the Eurythmy school: “The Human Being’s Experience of Tone” (published in English in *Art in the Light of Mystery Wisdom*). Properly speaking it should be: “The Experience of Tone *in* the Human Being”, when translated literally from the German. For that is what the contents of these lectures are about, the fact that man and music are a unity and can not be considered separately, with the development of music running parallel to that of man.

Hence we cannot enter a first grade classroom and just sing there a nice children’s song: we have to be aware of the stage of development first grade children are in and put that knowledge into an adequate musical language. Here one might feel in an awkward position because we are all educated with some sort of music, according to our place of birth and education that has conditioned us in body and soul. One really has to widen one’s horizon in this respect, which might be difficult for many teachers.

In the lectures cited above Rudolf Steiner states that the child, until his ninth year, “lives in the mood of the fifth”. “...We may not want to acknowledge the fact, but the child still lives essentially in the mood of the fifth interval. Naturally for teaching purposes, compositions can be used which also contain intervals of a third. But if we really want to reach the child, the cultivation of his musical understanding must commence with an understanding of the fifth. This is the really important point. And then we can give great benefit to the child if we approach him with the major and minor moods . . . when he has passed the ninth year...” (*Art in the Light ...* p. 127).

To be able to understand this statement, we will have to consider it in a wider perspective and place it in the whole of Rudolf Steiner’s conception of human experience of intervals. In the same lecture he speaks about the totally different experience of music by ancient mankind in far bygone times.

Man in those times was not able to hear anything within such wide intervals as the seventh, the none and even the decime, moreover, hearing them, he was immediately lifted into the supersensible world with his consciousness. He could say equally well either “I am experiencing music “ or “I feel myself to be in the spiritual world”.

Only very gradually, with man’s descent into the physical body, it became possible to hear music and at the same time not to lose oneself. For a long time, throughout millennia after the Flood, man took pleasure in experiencing the fifth, after the seventh “had become painful”, as Rudolf Steiner expresses it. He was now so far descended that not only the fifth as such but also a sequence consisting of tones related to each other by the fifth was now generally experienced. In *Art in the Light...* p.119 we read : “For long ages during post-atlantean times, a scala, elaborated according to our present tonal sequence would, for example, have been:  $d - e - g - a - b$ , and again  $d - e$ . There would have been no  $f$  and no  $c$ . This scale, in notation, looks as follows :



A shows the sequence as it is mentioned, B shows the fifth's relations of which it has been formed. A shows the closed, B shows the outspread fan. A is the narrowed form of B. A good picture to show how man's consciousness gradually descended, evaluating from airy forms to more solid ones!

Reconsider the sequence Rudolf Steiner suggested: most of our intervals appear, with the exception of the major seventh and the minor second or semi-tone. Especially the lack of the latter gives to a pentatonic song that special flavour. Could it be that the child until his ninth year is not yet naturally inclined to that narrow interval? In music, the process of the descending ego into the physical body is expressed by a narrowing of the intervals mankind is able to experience. This process is repeated in the individual development of every human being, hence we have to deal with it in education.

In his very valuable little book *The development of music in the course of development of tone systems (Die Entwicklung der Musik im Wandel der Tonsysteme, Oda Verlag, Köln)* Hans Erhard Lauer states that in many places in the world, where Greek thinking did not penetrate, five tone music was preserved. Songs of the Hebrides, Irish and Scottish folk-songs brought to the American continent by settlers (Appalachians, Nova Scotia), folksongs of North American Indians, from South America, from remote places in Eastern Europe and many more, seem to confirm H. E. Lauer's statement. In all those places the mood of the fifth lived on, long after in Western and Middle Europe the musical development of the New Time took place.

Similarly the young child might need some time to grow into later forms of music; he might need some remoteness in order to be able to develop his musical faculties in an adequate way. That nowadays he is surrounded by music that does not take this into consideration is not really the point. The point is that we, by Rudolf Steiner's indications, should now be able to observe how far a first grade child is advanced in his musical development. His experience of the world is still very much in his environment ... parents, brothers and sisters, teacher...they all are part of the child's "ego world" that is not yet an inner world. It is typical for first graders that they do not really want to end a song on the tonic, being the expression of the feeling that we live in a physical body (*Art in the Light ... p.27*). It is this growing feeling in the child we have to deal with in the lower grades. In grade 1 they are often quite happy to end a song on what we would feel would be the fifth or the third.

Example:

not!



Then I will go home!



Then I will go home!

Considering such things, one might make a very inconvenient discovery: in the light of the preceding thoughts there are quite a few children's songs which one should drop or . . . change! For example the widespread nursery song about Briar Rose, "The princess was a lov'ly child" (Dornröschen war ein Königskind), emphasizes the tonic in a way that does not seem adequate in connection with a fairy tale!

The prin-cess was a lov' - ly child lov' - ly child, lov' - ly child, the  
 5 prin-cess was a lov' - ly child, long a - go!

This could be changed in the sequence indicated by Rudolf Steiner:

The prin-cess was a lov' - ly child, lov' - ly child, lov' - ly child, the  
 6 prin-cess was a lov' - ly child, long a - go!

On the other hand one might find in Irish, Scottish, Canadian and American song-books the most beautiful pentatonic melodies, but with wholly unsuitable texts. For example:

### Building a Slide

It's ho der - ry, ho der-ry ho der - ry down, give a  
 5 shan - ty boy grog and there's no-thing goes wrong!

And a third category presents songs that apparently are made up in a neat and pure five tone scale, however they emphasize the tonic so much that they have lost the pentatonic character: Old Mac Donald had a farm ... The farmer in the dell ... All this beautiful pentatonic material is a remnant of bygone times, which in one way or another has grown with the consciousness of the people of its origin. For reasons just mentioned it cannot serve our need of five tone songs for grade 1 and 2. However we should not forget or ignore the influence of the sound children are exposed to nowadays. Therefore, in our attitude we should try to reconcile the contradiction as much as possible.

If we use five tone music — all right! But not fanatically excluding all other sound. That is why in this book one will find other material as well.

The following songs for Grade 1 do not seem to have any apparent connection to each other; however, in the course of practical work they are kept together by a story which, throughout the seasons, is told during the music lessons. It creates a similar atmosphere to that of the main lesson (fairy tales!). The pictures of the story lead quite naturally to the little songs Rudolf Steiner prescribed for grade 1. (The Kingdom of Childhood, Torquay, 1924, p. 112 . . . singing little songs, but they should be well sung!) The songs are made up or found in connection with the story of a shepherd living in a small house near “the woodland meadow”. His life with the flock and with Rover, the dog, is the subject of an endless narrative to which every week some small thing is added. Rickydouse, the goblin, the shepherd’s grandson visiting his grandfather every week, and many other side-motives partly drawn from suitable little songs, keep up the attention.

In this way, along with the pictures, a healthy balance between listening and inner experience on the one side, and singing and playing on the other side, can be established. The mood we are in during the experience of sound is of the utmost importance. We should not try to impart faculties right away; those have to develop “as by themselves” in course of time. And they do!

In the same way the instrumental part of the music lesson can be handled. As Rudolf Steiner recommended a blowing instrument, most of the Waldorf schools use soprano recorders tuned in C. Played by 6 year olds they do not naturally produce the nicest sound, but they have the advantage that they can be used for pentatonic songs as well as for songs in the C major scale. If only one golden rule could be followed by teachers — namely, that playing loudly should be prevented from the very first moment — the result can be quite satisfactory.

This can be handled in the following way: Among the material for Grade 1 one will find a little song which has been called “Gate into recorder playing”. This is the very simplest song — one could even call it a “sing-song”— meant to wrap, as it were, the children’s consciousness in that special mood of listening, and at the same time it appeals to their natural capacity for imitation. The child is simply shown what he has to do. This saves a lot of explanations about left and right, names of fingers and the like. First graders really do not yet know their “body geography”.

The last two lines of the song are meant to be played, but at first they should be sung for some time, being an exercise for “tonguing”. Not until every child has his left hand on top of the recorder (and nobody is squeaking on his own!) has the great moment come for playing the “doo” tone together! In the case of a soprano recorder this has to be the b .

In this way the instrumental part of the music lesson, which, according to Rudolf Steiner, is just a question of authority, is made into a social happening right away! Everything that is going to be played should have been sung first and has to be well known. The reason for this is that **the finger movements should operate on hearing**, the visual help we give on our recorder being only a substitute. That is why the material for recorder playing should be of the utmost simplicity: a two tone song in Grade 1 can cause deepest satisfaction when the children hear that they produce a beautiful sound. Let us see to it that our students listen actively, as a counterbalance to all those sounds they are surrounded by and exposed to during daily life.

Our way of teaching music is not meant to restrain the child's musical development, but to let him, as it were, gently down on a parachute. As a result, towards his ninth year he might be properly prepared to find his own basic tone or tonic as the expression of his deepest being.

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On page 136 f. in "Art in the Light of Mystery Wisdom" Rudolf Steiner gives us a keynote on how to deal in the music lessons with the soul-elements thinking, feeling and willing. The unprepared teacher very easily lands into unpleasant situations if he has no idea of how to handle thinking, feeling and willing in music. In the above mentioned lecture we are given a clear concept of the relation between the soul-elements, represented in music by melody, harmony and rhythm.

".....The peculiarity of music is, that it should neither ascend completely into the realm of ideas, nor should it descend entirely into the realm of will."

This means that we constantly have to seek a balance between thinking and willing, between melody and rhythm. Melody should not ascend into the world of concepts, rhythm should not "drown" in the element of will. The feeling element, being the heart of the matter should balance between dream and activity. We recommend to study these ideas very carefully, they might prevent a lot of difficulties.

## The Shepherd

This song creates that peaceful, placid mood, sensitive to sound, that can serve as a starting point for other (very gradually!) more lively material. The melody nearly moves all along the pentatonic scale. The iambus of the 6/8 measure rock the will-impulses to sleep, but the faster rhythms in between just prevent this. Thus we enter the land of peace where the shepherd is living, far from the noise of the outer world. There we relate to nature, to the seasons, to plants and animals. In this way we lay a foundation for the inner experience of all that "sounds" in the world.

## Shepherd's Breakfast

This song illustrates the way the shepherd usually starts his day, lighting the stove, cooking a porridge...For the teacher the song might be more difficult than for the children to whom the pentatonic sound is still natural; it might ask for some effort to really penetrate it with feeling. Of course we should stir the pot, using every opportunity to move while singing.