Stephanie L. Standerfer

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Progressive Staff Method Arrangements for Elementary Music Literacy

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To all music teachers who have inspired children to be musical.

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PREFACE

This book stems from my passion for crafting musical experience in which my students were transformed into musicians with independent musical skills and a certain amount of autonomy to make musical decisions. I found that as students learned more about the "how" and "why" of music, the more musical they became in their thinking and performance.

My public school experience included positions at high school, middle school, and elementary levels. With each new position, I began with eager, bright students willing to dive into musical experiences, but they had little to no musical skill or knowledge. At all grade levels, I started with the basic concept of sound and silence, and sequentially added high and low pitch on two horizontal lines, introducing one new concept at a time at an age-appropriate pace. Through this process, my middle and high school choirs achieved high ratings for both performance and sight-reading in state assessments. The sixth-grade students at the elementary level were able to read and perform their band, string, and three-part choral repertoire successfully. A majority of these students continued with music in middle school.

Along with the technical aspects of music notation, I also included the meaning behind the music we performed. Why is "Pease Porridge Hot" spelled that way? What might it have been like to be "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground" during the Civil War? Every song has meaning, be it concrete or abstract. Some serious, some silly. This brings not only a deeper music literacy, but also a relationship with the music.

These arrangements provide a foundation for meaningful music literacy. Add to them. Teach them alongside *Peer Gynt* and the scary Mountain King, the Schottische, and those wonderful "Fossils" in *Carnival of the Animals*. Those experiences help students become musical in their singing, playing, and listening—in their musicking.[1]

The introductory material provides necessary explanation of the origins and methodology including pedagogy, skill development over time, and curriculum planning elements. There are four sections of song arrangements. Each arrangement provides a sequence of musical experiences with a related set of outcomes for knowledge and skill development. A companion website available from the publisher provides additional resources for teachers to use in preparing materials for classroom use.

This book is for music teachers at all career stages who value music literacy that includes notation, but goes beyond notes to develop deeper musical experiences. Pre-service or new teachers may find the detailed teaching process helpful in developing teaching habits that encourage individual musicianship and skill development. Experienced teachers may reflect on their own teaching habits and make improvements to their language and processes. Long-term planning of musical skill development over time is very different from teaching one new concept in each class period. The complexity of overlapping or spiraling lessons may be new to many teachers, as well as teaching note literacy along with meaning, feeling, and movement. Whomever the teacher, I hope this resource allows you to become a better teacher who designs the best musical experiences possible for your students.

ABOUT THE COMPANION WEBSITE

www.oup.com/us/linebyline

Oxford has created a website to accompany *Line by Line: Progressive Staff Method Arrangements for Elementary Music Literacy*. Readers are encouraged to consult this resource in conjunction with each chapter of the book.

Line by Line

1

Introduction

What Comes Before

Historically, pedagogy for teaching musical notation has rarely varied from the presentation of a five-line staff and recitation of note names with little, if any, explanation of *why* these things exist. In addition, many people find it difficult to see negative space in terms of the space in between the five horizontal lines of a staff. Eloise Ristad[1] worked with several beginning musicians for whom turning the staff to a vertical position and reading music from top to bottom rather than left to right allowed them to see the space in between the lines. Her students could finally process what they were seeing in terms of the black lines and the negative space in between them.

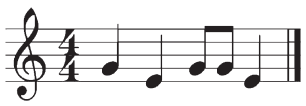


Figure 1.1
How many symbols do you see?

What we are learning through neuroscience research is that every brain processes information and creates neural pathways in unique ways. Teachers who pay attention to how students behave and react in the teaching-learning process know that every student learns differently. Yet many music educators continue with one-size-fits-all pedagogy, or more aptly one-staff-fits-all. Consider how many symbols are represented in Figure 1.1.

Did you see a clef, time signature, staff, three quarter notes, two eighth notes, and a double bar line? Next consider how many symbols are identified in Figure 1.2.

For many people, visually processing all five horizontal lines at the beginning of a journey into music literacy is simply too much information. Compounding the problem are clefs, time signatures, note heads, stems, beams, and bar lines; each adds to the number of symbols to be decoded. Introducing the separate components of the staff in a progressive sequence, beginning with the staff itself, allows the student to process each new concept and assimilate new symbols to existing structures of knowledge. The sequenced concepts in these arrangements are aimed to address *what comes before* reading all five lines of a staff.

The idea of teaching the staff progressively is not new. American music educator George Loomis introduced his Progressive Staff Method in the late nineteenth century for the Indianapolis Public Schools.[2] In Boston, however, the more popular materials by Lowell Mason[3] and others were based on teaching a full five-line staff. Use of a progressive staff method has appeared only sporadically in various resources through the decades,[4] but never within a consistent, sequential, and focused curriculum guide that includes both vocal music and arrangements for classroom instruments.

We are learning much about how the brain processes visual information in addition to how those processes can vary. Reading specialists recommend teaching reading by

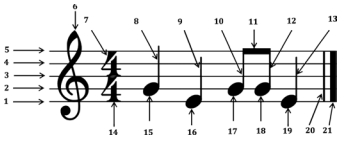


Figure 1.2
Individual symbols to be decoded.

developing phonological awareness (identifying sounds in language), phonemic awareness (manipulating individual phonemes), and graphophonemic awareness (matching sound to symbol).[5] The process first develops the sounds in the ear and then the child imitates the sounds, names them, and manipulates them before being introduced to the symbol—one letter at a time.[6] Music pedagogues Suzuki[7] and Gordon[8] have applied similar processes in their music teaching methods with success; however, there is still a great deal of possibility and support from research for new applications in typical music classrooms.

There is much to learn with regard to how the brain processes musical notation. Not every student learns to decipher and understand it when presented as a whole. In light of recent neuroscience research, it is time we revisit the progressive staff as an avenue to all the pieces that come *before* reading full staff notation.

Pedagogy

The embedded pedagogy for these arrangements favors the use of a sound before sight process with takadimi and solfège systems for rhythm and pitch. One system new, one very old, but both assist students to make sense of and create meaning for the music they are learning.

VIGNETTE 1.1 Imagine a Musical Classroom

Ms. Beattie greets her second grade class at the door, and as they enter they all sing "Music Time." The simple song uses the pentatonic scale and students do the simple actions on the beat as they take their places, swaying, tapping, and singing together. With everyone in place, Ms. Beattie begins lightly tapping a steady beat on her hips for each beat. Her hands raise slightly to divide the beat. Her body is fluid and subtly swaying to the macro-beat, and the students move musically with her.

Ms. Beattie modulates the pitch center up a whole step and begins leading the class in echo singing four-beat tonal patterns in solfège using *do, re, mi, fa, sol*, and *la*. After singing four patterns with *mi, fa, sol* and *sol, fa, mi*, she stops and asks what new syllable they are using. The students show her the hand sign they learned last time and now label it enthusiastically as *fa*. Ms. Beattie continues with patterns including *fa*, then switches to patterns without *fa*, singing them all with the syllable "bum." Students echo them with the solfège syllables. A beach ball is rolled to one student who improvises a pattern that the class echoes as the ball is rolled to someone new.

The notation for "Bow Wow Wow" is projected on the board and Ms. Beattie sets the new tempo and tonal center by singing the patterns *do-mi-sol-la-sol* and *sol-mi-re-do*. She seamlessly guides students to look at the notation projected on the board that they sing with the words and shows the hand signs that they have learned in prior classes. The slide changes to show a new instrument part to accompany the song. It includes *re*, which they have recently added to their tonal patterns with this song. The rhythm is eighth notes and quarter notes that they are proficient in

reading. Ms. Beattie asks students to identify the starting and ending pitches, then has them think-sing the part showing the hand signs. Starting them with "Ready sing," on *do* to *mi* (tonic to the starting pitch), the students sing the part with the hand signs. Ms. Beattie asks them what makes the new part easy or difficult. Three students offer opinions. Ms. Beattie starts the students again and the accuracy improves. She asks students to think about how they would play the part on the xylophones (highest pitch *mi* with the right hand, lowest *do* and *re* with the left). The students sing and pat the part on their legs. Ms. Beattie starts sending students to play the part on the instruments three and four at a time as she sings the song. As students leave the instrument they join her in singing the song while continuing the instrument pattern on their legs. Once everyone has practiced the part at least twice on an instrument, she starts the class in singing "Sur la Pont D'Avignon" and demonstrating the dance movements that they will be adding to it. The students seamlessly follow her into the movement experience to continue the class period.

Sound Before Sight

Ms. Beattie (see Vignette 1.1) started her students with rote experiences in which she introduced tonal patterns that included *fa* to her students' ears. In the next few class periods, she will include varied experiences with *fa* to ensure that students can hear how it functions in the tonal set. They will become musically conversant with it before she introduces the symbol. This is the essence of sound before sight pedagogy.

Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, the nineteenth-century educator, developed schools in Switzerland based on the idea of introducing concepts by verbal and contextual association before introducing the symbol for the concept.[9] Lowell Mason also applied the idea of developing the "musical ear" in his music manuals for the Boston Academy of Music.[10] Developing a musical ear before introducing the symbols and theory can be found in the seminal elementary music methods including the Kodály method[11] and Suzuki's talent education.[12] Contemporary music educators have refined sound before sight processes in various ways.[13] Some of the seminal educators and their contributions are listed in Sidebar 1.

Of course, a focus on the musical ear as a starting point for music literacy is logical. Processing musical sound is a physiological process of sensing sound waves within the ear and then translating them to sound.[14] The electrical impulses that carry sound information activate neural networks in various parts of the brain that store what we know about sound. Specifically, research in temporal lobe surgery indicates that melodic processing occurs in the right temporal lobe and rhythmic processing in the left.[15]

It is important to understand how the ear is involved in the musical learning process, as well as the rest of the body. What neuroscience is able to help us understand today is that music philosophers such as John Dewey[16] and Bennett Reimer[17] were correct in that music is not only experienced through the ear, but also *felt* emotionally and physically. An emotional stimulus, such as music, is processed cognitively in areas of the prefrontal cortex as well as through the internal limbic system from where emotional and physiological responses stem.[18]

Swiss educator Émile Jaques-Dalcroze based his methods on what he felt when experiencing music. He discussed developing "awareness of sound" through not only the ear, but also "by repeated experiences of movements of the whole body."[19] Sound awareness is still a highly recommended starting point, as music educators Mills and McPherson state: "Being aware of the sound of the music and also of being able to link this auditory perception with the visual perception, however, is especially important if the child is to be able to develop the repertoire of musical patterns."[20]

SIDEBAR 1.1 Timeline of Influential Educators and Their Specialties

1746–1827	Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi	Sound before sight pedagogy
1785–1867	Sarah Glover	Norwich Sol-Fa System with hand signs
1792–1872	Lowell Mason	Boston Academy of Music; public school music
1816–1880	John Curwen	Adapted Glover's Sol-Fa System with hand signs
1859–1952	John Dewey	Progressive and aesthetic education
1865–1950	Émile Jaques-Dalcroze	Eurythmic/musical movement
1882–1967	Zoltán Kodály	Singing literacy method
1895–1982	Carl Orff	Child-friendly instruments
1898–1998	Shinichi Suzuki	Language-based string pedagogy
1927–2016	Edwin Gordon	Music Learning Theory
1932–2013	Bennett Reimer	Aesthetic music education

Just as Ms. Beattie prepares her students' ears and bodies for the next concept in her curriculum, the teaching processes for these arrangements place an emphasis on developing both a musical ear as well as involving the whole body in complete musical experiences taught through carefully sequenced lessons. The lessons are developed using sound before sight pedagogy so that new concepts are internalized by students before the notation is introduced. The experiences included in the arrangements embed this process (see Sidebar 1.2). The steps are purposeful and necessary in the music literacy process.

The first stage of the teaching process is enactive or action-oriented.[21] Musically, this allows students to experience music physically through movement and physiological responses. Once musical sounds have been experienced and internalized, iconic representations can be introduced to begin matching images to sounds. Changes of high and low, for example, may be shown with a simple line representing melodic contour.

The songs in Part I of the present volume focus primarily on preparing the musical ear and body through several rote and iconic experiences. The skill of listening purposefully and thinking musically must be taught and developed over time. Folk songs, taught by rote, are used for development of the singing voice and internalization of musical concepts.

Once the concept of the sound–image relationship is established, the more detailed musical symbols can be introduced. Musical symbols are first presented in terms of beat in preparation for the many symbols to be taught and experienced in sequence through the songs in Parts II, III, and IV.

SIDEBAR 1.2 Experiences in the Arrangements

The experiences in the arrangements entail:

- Preparation of the ear and body to internalize sounds before naming symbols
- Creative manipulation of sounds with improvisation and composition
- Only one new symbol for each song in the sequence
- Application and synthesis of new sounds and symbols in complete musical experiences
- Consistency of process

In these songs, students learn to read the notation by a consistent process of singing the song then singing each instrument part from notation before playing the part as accompaniment. The typical complement of melodic barred instruments found in many music classrooms offers a logical avenue by which to apply notational concepts. The collection of glockenspiels, xylophones, and metallophones refined and popularized by Carl Orff in the 1930s and 1940s allows students of all ages to have authentic musical experiences.[22] Their size is easily accessible and adaptable for a variety of student needs, and their timbre is complementary to the child's voice.

Takadimi Rhythm System

Rhythm systems help the learner-musician decode musical notation into sound through time. Although there are several systems that teachers may use successfully in elementary music contexts, the arrangements in this resource will utilize the takadimi system.[23] This system provides consistency of syllables to label beat function or place within the beat and measure. It allows students to associate a syllable to the number of sounds they hear.[24] Each beat and its parts have a specific label in terms of a syllable. The beat, regardless of meter, is labeled "ta." The division of the beat in simple meter is "di." The subdivisions of the beat are labeled "ka" and "mi" respectively. Therefore, a full beat and its sub-division in simple meter is labeled "ta-ka-di-mi." In common time, this would label four sixteenth notes. In cut time, it would label four eighth notes.

In compound meter, the beat of a dotted-quarter note is labeled "ta." The division of that beat would be "ta-ki-du," and the subdivision would be "ta-va-ki-di-du-mu."[25] Notice that for each subdivision, the vowels match, which further helps to distinguish what part of the beat is represented. Regardless of the meter, the function of the note within the beat is consistently represented. Half notes in simple meter and dotted half notes in compound meter are labeled "ta-a" or "ta-a-a" in this resource.[26] The syllables are shown in Figure 1.3 and their application to note values is shown in Figure 1.4. The system can be used at this pre-reading and novice stage of music literacy through advanced levels that include syncopation, borrowed beats, and mixed or odd meters.[27] As a result of learning this system early in the development of music reading skills and the audiation skills to hear the syllables in one's head while performing, students will have a musical system with which to read new music throughout their musical lives.

Figure 1.3
Takadimi syllables in simple and compound meter.

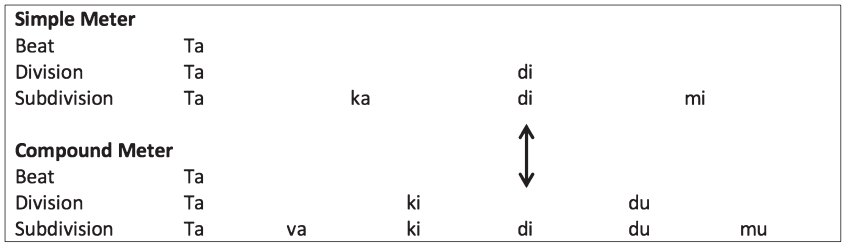
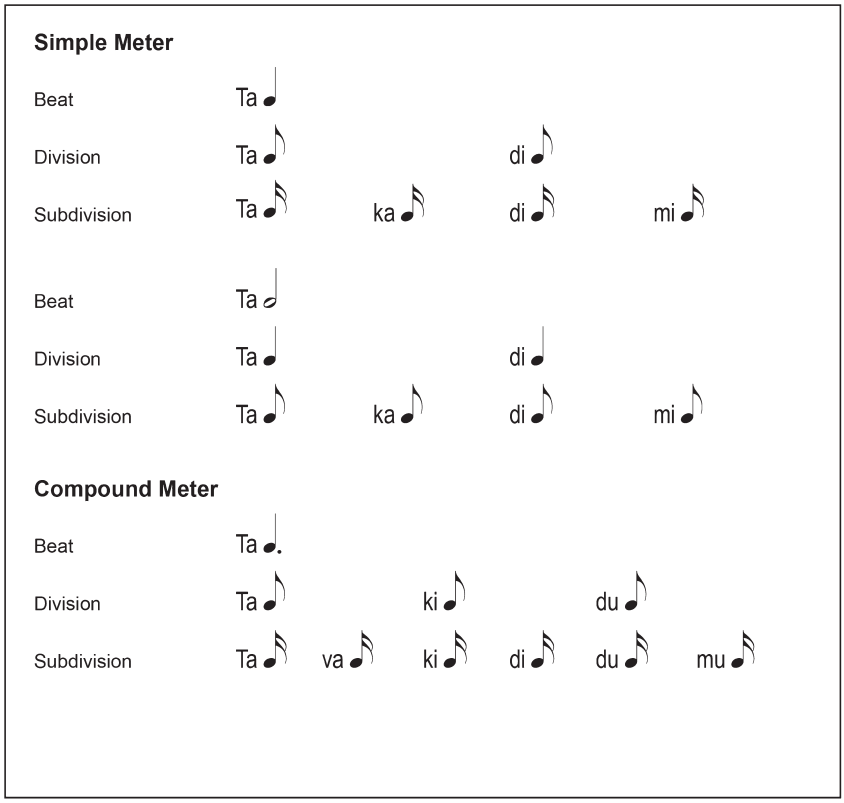


Figure 1.4
Takadimi syllables and note values.



A key element in the process used in these arrangements is internalizing sound so that music is felt and experienced physiologically. When leading students in rhythm patterns, it is important to make the experience musical instead of a non-musical means to what should be a musical end. Performing rhythms in this process requires the body to feel the pulse, division, and subdivision while the rhythm is performed vocally. The goal should be to make this part of the process as musical as it can be. When rhythm is the first element experienced with each song, the musicality must begin at that point.

In Ms. Beattie's teaching of rhythm, she is cognizant of physically representing the musicality she wants to foster within her students. Her body is not stiff, but rather fluid and moving slightly. Weight is on the front of the foot so that the body can bounce or sway easily. Both hands are used to show the beat and divisions. Hands are held vertically with fingers pointed away from the body as one would in preparing to clap. The beat is a patsch[28] of the pinky finger and outside of the hand to the thigh if sitting or the hip if standing. The physical tap on the downbeat is important for students to feel where the pulse is in time. The division of the beat is an upward movement of the hands, once to create the second beat in a division of two or twice in a division of three.

For teachers who are not familiar with the takadimi system, there may be questions about why to change from other practiced and comfortable methods such as counting and other syllable systems. First, there is a difference between counting beats (e.g., one and, two and-a . . .) and a rhythm reading system. Counting the beats in a measure assumes a great deal of knowledge and skill. First, there is an assumption that the student understands beat, meter, division, and subdivision. These must be mastered in order to know where the beats fall among notes and rests in a measure so that they can be counted. Often when students are asked to write the counts above or below a line of music, those who have not yet developed a conceptual understanding of sound-in-time represented in symbols will simply count the symbols they see. The conceptual understanding must be in place, and a fluency in reading, audiating, and performing rhythms musically before learner-musicians can discern where the beats are in order to count them. Once students are able to perform a complex rhythm with takadimi syllables, replacing the ta's with numbers is not difficult. This skill, however, is complex and beyond the skills on which this resource will focus.

What if you use a different rhythm system? Many teachers are highly skilled in ta's, ti's, and ti-ri-ti-ri's. The Chêve rhythm system used in the Kodály approach has been used and adapted for more than a century. The transition to the takadimi system is quite easy for students. Once they hear it and echo it, following the aural–oral process, they recognize that "ta-ti" becomes "ta-di." "Ti-ri-ti-ri" becomes "ta-ka-di-mi," which makes decoding more complex sixteenth note patterns such as a dotted eighth-sixteenth or a two-sixteenth and eighth pattern easy to hear as "ta - - mi," and "ta-ka-di." It is easier because the syllables for division and subdivision of the beat are consistent. The change is harder for the teacher, but because the takadimi system is beat-function oriented and consistent, most teachers are surprised at how easy it is to change for themselves and their students.

Solfège Tonal System

Solfège syllables are used to help learner-musicians to develop sensitivities to melodic and harmonic patterns in Western music. With consistent use of solfège as a means to label pitch, students' ears are trained to hear tonal functions and patterns.[29] By using a movable-do system, each syllable has a consistent function within the tonal set. This includes tonal functions when using modes, including Aeolian (natural minor), or harmonic and melodic minor scales. Therefore, a *la*-based minor process is embedded in the arrangements whereby *la* becomes the tonal center for natural, harmonic, and melodic minor tonalities. With consistent use of moveable-*do* solfege, the concept of hearing the tonic in any key becomes automatic.

Hand signs have been used in many ways over the centuries to represent pitch. Sarah Glover designed a hand sign system as an element in her *Norwich Sol-Fa System* in the early nineteenth century.[30] Her work was later modified and popularized by John Curwen whose name has been associated with what has become the traditional hand signs for solfège.[31] This resource will recognize the contributions of both pedagogues by referencing the Glover-Curwen hand signs.

The use of hand signs represented in Figure 1.5 allows for the kinesthetic visual representation of pitch by the learner-musician. It impacts tonal recall by associating physical distance to tonal distance. Using hand signs in the elementary music classroom

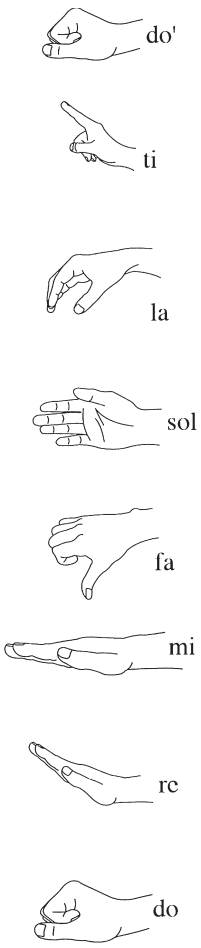


Figure 1.5
Solfège hand signs for the major scale (used with permission).

also provides a means for the teacher to informally assess to a limited extent the progress and proficiency of students as they perform during instruction. For students who have difficulty with vocalizing the correct pitch(es) or students who are ill and cannot sing, having them show the hand signs will demonstrate their conceptual understanding even if their voices cannot.

The arrangements presented here have a limited range and will require only the seven diatonic scale degrees with high *do* an octave above. The processes for teaching the songs and each instrument part include singing with moveable-*do* solfège and hand signs. This is important not only when a new tonal concept is being taught, but also when rhythmic concepts are taught, as it allows for reinforcement of tonal knowledge and skills. The combination of the moveable-*do* solfège and takadimi systems for developing music notation reading skills will help students develop musical skills over time.[32]

Processing from Ear and Voice to Instrument

Although all of the songs in this resource are arranged for traditional classroom instruments, the experiences are intended to process the new concept through the ear, the body, and the voice before being applied to the instrument. Internalizing the sounds and re-creating them in the preparatory steps is critical for students to understand the sounds before they see the symbols.[33]

Steps for each arrangement begin with auditory preparation. For many of the concepts, this preparation needs to be sequenced in very short experiences over two or three class periods (or more). The first experience with a new sound, rhythmic or tonal, does not need any label, but instead a neutral syllable such as "bum" or "bim." Have students echo your sounds while keeping a pulse if it is rhythmic or showing pitch contour if it is tonal. The second experience labels the new concept through call and response with takadimi syllables for rhythm patterns or solfège syllables for tonal patterns. The third experience moves from the echoing of syllables to the teacher singing or chanting the neutral syllables and the students responding with the labeling syllables. Attention to the whole-body involvement in the sound will foster musical sensitivity over time. This is difficult when sitting. Standing and moving musically with relaxed knees, hips, and arms will assist in this process.

Once students demonstrate a proficiency with the new sounds, the new song may be introduced. At this step, the sound–symbol association can be taught. It is important to always go from the known to the unknown. Reviewing the labels and meanings of symbols learned prior is important before addressing the new symbol and its meaning in the context of what is already known. For example, the concept of a tie is introduced very early in the sequence (first appearing in Part II, "Cats and Dogs" to tie quarter notes together). Once students can perform rhythms with tied quarter notes, the tie is used to teach half notes and dotted quarter notes later in the sequence.