

# A Brief Comparison of Rhythm Pedagogy Systems

by Judith W. Cole

*While Carl Orff did not prescribe a method for developing literacy or suggest a system of vocables or mnemonics to be used, he did base his pedagogy on the fundamental principle that rhythmic concepts are inherent to one's own language.*

## To "Ti" or Not to "Ti"

That is the question. Rhythm syllables or mnemonics are used in many cultures throughout the world to teach the sound of rhythm, time values and rhythmic literacy. Most of us in the United States grew up counting rhythms using the familiar "one-e-and-a, two-e-and-a" numerical counting system that is popular among instrumental music educators. Many of us chanted "ta ta ti-ti ta" syllables used by Kodály-inspired educators or "Mis-sis-sip-pi hot-dog" used in Suzuki classes. Some of us may be old enough to recall using in our college music theory classes a hybrid system devised in the mid-1900s by Eastman School of Music theory professors Allen Irvine McHose and Ruth Northrup Tibbs. This system combined the traditional numbering system with the French Time-Names system and resulted in "one-ta-te-ta, two-ta-te-ta." Regardless of your experience, it is worthwhile to examine a variety of systems to determine their pedagogical value and to determine which one is aligned with your curricular goals.

One of the earliest to emerge was the French Time-Names system, often referred to as the Galin-Paris-Chevé Method, which incorporated the chanting of rhythmic syllables with conducting gestures. Originated in the early 19th century by Pierre Galin, the system was further developed by brother and sister Aimé and Nanine Paris and Nanine's husband, Émile Chev . Congregational minister and music publisher John Curwen, influenced by Chev , adapted the French syllables for use in English singing schools in the mid-1800s. The system was further adapted for use in the United States by Lowell Mason and in Hungary by

Zoltán Kodály, both of whom understood the significance of using rhythm syllables but devised their own time value names. Mason's adaptation was complex and challenging even for highly skilled musicians and soon fell out of favor. Kodály's adaptation now appears in several similar versions.

The French Time-Names system does not use numbers. Instead, the beat is named "ta" and even divisions and subdivisions in duple meter are named "ta-te" and "ta-fe-te-fe." In compound meter, "ta-te-ti" and "ta-fe-te-fe-ti-fe" are used to identify divisions and subdivisions. This system is based on the rhythmic function of the beat and its divisions and is not bound to specific note values or beat placement within a measure. It is not dependent on symbolic association or notation and, therefore, can be utilized at an aural/oral level.

In the Kodály Method, syllable names are associated with duration of the various notes. The syllable for the quarter note is "ta," the eighth note is "ti" and the sixteenth note is "ri." Today, many teachers prefer using Pierre Perron's adaptation of "ka" instead of "ri" for the sixteenth note because it is easier to articulate. "Too," "toe" and "tay" are used for half, dotted half and whole notes in simple meters. With musical literacy as a primary goal of this method, it should be no surprise that this system is meaningless without notational symbols.

Edwin Gordon based his system on aural/oral rhythm patterns instead of theoretical note values or placement within barlines. Syllables were selected with attention to ease in articulation and because they work regardless of meter. The beat is consistently named

"du." The micro beats in duple meter are "du-de" and in compound meter are "du-da-di." When the micro beats are subdivided, the syllables used are "du-te-de-te" and "du-te-da-te-di-te."

During the past decade, another aural/oral rhythm mnemonic system has emerged and is receiving serious consideration by many educators. Takadimi was designed by theorists Richard Hoffman, William Pelto and John W. White. In this system, the beat consistently is named "ta" regardless of meter. In duple meter, even divisions of the beat are "ta-di" and "ta-ka-di-mi." In compound meter, divisions are called "ta-ki-da" and "ta-va-ki-di-da-ma." These syllables are remarkably similar to the rhythm vocables chanted by musicians in India.

### Comparing Aural/Oral Beat-Oriented Systems and Notation-Based Systems

Each of the systems mentioned thus far can be aligned with one of two basic pedagogical principles. Systems that are based on time values, note placement within the measure

and symbolic association are the traditional numerical counting system developed by and for instrumental music educators here in the United States—the hybrid system developed by McHose and Tibbs combines traditional numerical counting with the French Time-Names and the Kodály system. These systems involve interpreting or decoding notational symbols by chanting specific syllables associated with the various symbols. Even with its ultimate goal of literacy, the Kodály Method does include much experiential preparation leading up to the reading and writing of rhythmic patterns. The systems that are oriented to beat and rhythmic function and do not require theoretical understanding of time values are the French Time-Names, Gordon Learning Theory and Takadimi systems. These systems are deeply rooted in the "sound before symbol" philosophies of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi and Jerome Bruner and connect patterns learned aurally and experientially with symbolic representation.

### Rhythmic Literacy in Orff Schulwerk


How are the sound of rhythm, time values and rhythmic literacy addressed in Orff Schulwerk? While Carl Orff did not prescribe a method for developing literacy or suggest a system of vocables or mnemonics to be used, he did base his pedagogy on the fundamental principle that rhythmic concepts—pulse, patterns of longer and shorter durations, accents and metric organizations—are inherent to one's own language. Therefore, the road to rhythmic understanding begins with speech. There are many indications that literacy was considered by Orff and his colleagues to be a natural and expected part of one's musical development. However, it is the individual teacher who should decide how best to proceed in guiding students toward reading and writing musical notation.

Children pick up rhythmic patterns through imitation and immersion in experience. They practice rhythmic patterns through countless repetitions and mutations. They extend patterns and explore new ones in the relaxed

Figure 1

<u>Aural/Oral Beat-oriented Systems</u>	
French Time-Names	ta ta - te ta - fe - te - fe ta - te - fe ta - te - te ta
Gordon Learning Theory	du du - de du - te - de - te du - de - te du - de - de du
Takadimi	ta ta - di ta - ka - di - mi ta di - mi ta - di - di ta
<u>Notation-based Systems</u>	
Kodaly Method	ta ti - ti ti - ri - ti - ri ti - ti - ri ti - ta - ti too
McHose/Tibbs	1 2 - te 1 - ta - te - ta 2 - te - ta 1 - ta - ta 1 2
Traditional Numerical Counting	1 2 - & 1 - e - & - a 2 - & - a 1 - &(2) - & 1 2

Figure 2

<u>Aural/Oral Beat-oriented Systems</u>	
	
French Time-Names	ta ta - te - ti ta - fe - te - fe - ti - fe ta ti ta
Gordon Learning Theory	du du - da - di tu - te - da - te - di - te du di du
Takadimi	ta ta - ki - da ta - va - ki - di - da - ma ta da ta
<u>Notation-based Systems</u>	
Kodaly Method	tum ti - ti - ti ti - ri - ti - ri - ti - ri ta ti tum
McHose/Tibbs	1 2 - la - lee 1 te - la - te - lee - te 2 lee 1 2
Traditional Numerical Counting	1 (2 3) 4 5 6 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 (5) 6 1 (2 3 4 5 6)

atmosphere of play. In the same way they learn language, they acquire and build a vocabulary of rhythmic possibilities at the aural/oral level long before there is a need to encode or decode the experience. Indeed, this type of exploration is the heart of Orff Schulwerk process.

**Dilemma**

Working with natural pulsation, patterns and flow of spoken language and syllabication of words, children begin to acquire a foundation for understanding basic rhythmic concepts. Gunild Keetman identified five "rhythmic building bricks" that can be extracted from the rhymes and songs of children. Suitable words can be

associated with the five rhythmic patterns and "this is the moment to introduce children to the notation of the rhythms that are now familiar, and to start clapping from notation and writing rhythms in notation for themselves," she said. She goes on to say, "it is left to the teacher to decide how to set about this" (Keetman 24-26).






No doubt, difficulties can arise when children are asked to associate syllabic divisions of words with notational symbols before sufficient experience has occurred at the aural/oral stage. But also, using word rhythms in association with notational symbols inevitably will lead to inconsistencies. For example, the rhythm of the word "apple" could be notated using two

quarter notes or two eighth notes. The same two quarter or eighth notes just as easily could be connected with "monkey," "daisy," or "blue bird."

**A Solution**

While many teachers report success in using word rhythms in association with notational symbols, many others avoid potential problems by incorporating one of the mnemonic systems to accomplish literacy goals. If you are inclined to inject one of the mnemonic systems into your Orff practices and procedures, consider the compatibility features of one that emphasizes beat and rhythmic function at the aural/oral level instead of one that is notation dependent.

Figure 3

				
mon - key dai - sy	el - e - phant mar - i - gold	ant - eat - er snap - dra - gon	al - li - ga - tor mor - ning - glo - ry	snake rose

Examples from Gunild Keetman: *Elementaria*, p. 25 and AOSA *Guidelines for Orff Schulwerk Teaching Courses*, p. 8 - 2.

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