

EARLY CHILDHOOD MUSIC EDUCATION  
BASED ON THE CONCEPTS OF  
ZOLTÁN KODÁLY AND KATALIN FORRAI

ILONA GRÓH

# Ringató

## METHODOLOGY



**ILONA GRÓH**  
**RINGATÓ METHODOLOGY**

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## Introduction

I'd always wanted to teach, to pass on the experiences I'd had as a student through teaching singing and music. I started my career in the countryside of Hungary in 1979. I was very happy when I was charged with the task to teach singing and methodology for singing in kindergarten for future kindergarten<sup>1</sup> teachers in Szekszárd, Hungary, at the Teachers' College, but I also started to think about it. I'd already taught singing and solfège classes. I'd worked with children's choir, I'd led folk music camps and folk singing classes. I hadn't before dealt with the methodology of music education in kindergarten in details, although I knew there was excellent literature on the subject. Everything can be learnt from these books. I still felt it wasn't enough. I wanted to get close to practise, too. Besides my classes at the college – on Katalin Forrai's advice, from whom I got a tremendous amount of help for over 20 years –, I visited kindergartens, attended singing sessions, and I also started to work with kindergarten students. I was very fond of these sessions, they've given me plenty of experience. It also meant I could show my college students how to realise in practice what they read in the textbooks.

After one of the sessions, one of the mothers asked me if she could bring along her one and a half years old younger child next time. My answer was, of course, that, unfortunately, she couldn't. There are huge differences between a five years old and a one and a half years old child in every respect. I couldn't have done the session with the older ones if there'd been a toddler around them.

Then I started to think about the mother's request. I knew about music education in nurseries, as a matter of fact, I often substituted Katalin Forrai in an outstanding institution, which has now long closed, in the National Methodology Institute for Nurseries. I taught there nursery teachers. Thus, I knew what happened in music education before kindergarten, what kind of music education took place in nurseries. But do those children who don't go to nursery hear nursery rhymes<sup>2</sup> and songs in their families?

Well-known is the thought that music education should start at birth or even earlier, maybe downright with the mother's music education – as Kodály quipped in 1948 in Paris, at a conference on art education. So, it's best if the mother already has some knowledge about the subject. I already had two children at the time, and I believed in

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<sup>1</sup> [Translator's note.] Since the Ringató method was developed in Hungary, this document also focuses on the Hungarian system of education. Children between the ages of 3–6/7 years go to pre-primary schools that are called *kindergarten* in this translation. Before the age of 3, parents may choose to have their children go to *nurseries*, institutions which provide daily care for the youngest. Children who don't yet go to kindergartens are sometimes called *preschoolers* in this document.

<sup>2</sup> [Translator's note.] In Hungarian, there are different genre names which all fall under the category of *nursery rhymes* in English. These are: *mondóka* (~ 'little saying', a rhyming, rhythmic, non-sung poem for children, usually of folk origin), *gyerekdal* ('children's song', like the previous one, but with melody), and a category of games which either an adult plays with one child (cf. lap games – "ölbéli játék") or children play together ("gyermekjáték"). Since their translation falls under the same term in English, I've always added a note to indicate which one is intended at a given place, if it is unclear from the context. Admittedly, certain segments of the text following each other may have a weird feeling when this very term is used in two different meanings – this, unfortunately, could not be helped.

Kodály's words both as a mother and as a music teacher. I also knew that teaching children under the age of three is out of the question. What we can do is provide stimuli to them, in measure, since overstimulation can be as harmful as understimulation. It slowly dawned on me that the music education of the youngest, of preschoolers, means helping the mothers, the parents.

Next time I met the mother who wanted to bring her smaller child along, I asked her to come a week later. If a couple more parents with toddlers and babies came, we would sing and play something together. This is how it started. Six of them showed up next time, and it didn't take long until we were too many for the room (even though it was a large one). I hadn't even named these sessions, I just ran whenever I had a free period at the college to the "mummy-child". This is how I called it to myself. We got the name *Ringató* some years later. It was the title of a series about us made by Ilona Bartalus, the internationally acclaimed, outstanding music educator who was the musical editor for Duna TV. We worked with director Ágnes Méth and production manager Sára Szentmiklósi, among others. I got to like them, it was great to work together and a fond memory. And the parents from Szekszárd were proud of themselves, as was I of them, too. This three times half an hour long documentary was titled *Ringató* (1998).

I also recall another, earlier film on the subject of music education of infants and toddlers. We made rudimentary video recordings of my younger child's vocalisations and musical development through our musical playing together from her age of one to almost four years. I made them with the purpose to use them in the training of kindergarten teachers. In the end, we analysed the raw material, which was several hours long, with dr. Júlia Kádár at the Department of Developmental Psychology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. We made two films with the recordings. The first one is about the mother-child relationship and speech development (*Én is pisze, te is pisze*, 1992), the other one about musical education. They both worked out very nicely. I played the one on music (*Csip, csip, csóka – Ének a családban*, 1992) at several conferences, too, but, then, I felt it was so personal, so intimate that I couldn't show it to the public.

It's a commonplace – and, as all commonplaces, it's true – that media rules all. After the programme *Ringató* on Duna TV, I got countless letters and phone calls. Who I am, where I am, what it is exactly I do. It was considered brand new, there hadn't been anything like it before. In the meanwhile, I was coming to Budapest to teach. We wrote bilingual, English-Hungarian songbooks with a fantastic colleague of mine, Katalin Kismartony; I did trainings and courses for nursery and kindergarten teachers, and, in 2004, I launched my *Ringató* sessions in the capital, too. After a while, I got invited to many places across the country, and there was interest from abroad as well. Countless teachers and musicians who wanted to have a closer look at what I was doing contacted me. All this directed me to organise the first *Ringató* methodology course in 2006. Katalin Forrai would often say to me to have successors as soon as possible. I was guided by this advice and Zoltán Kodály's thought about training good teachers. As he says in the *Hundred Years Plan*, "It's much more important who the music teacher in Kisvárd is than who the director of the Opera is. The bad director will instantly fall. (Sometimes even the good one, too.) But a bad teacher over thirty years will kill the love of music in thirty years' worth of children."

Ringató has grown a lot since the first course, many say it has become a movement in Hungary and abroad. In a journalist's words: a new genre was born. The sessions found their way into Hungarian communities in faraway lands. Through the long series of the courses, I found outstanding colleagues and successors, who do an excellent job in using and representing the method, which is now called art pedagogy and has been awarded the Hungarian Heritage Award.

## 1. Kodály's principles in the music education of infants and toddlers

A number of Zoltán Kodály's guidelines relate to infants and toddlers, too; they can be found in the *music education in nurseries and kindergartens*, but also in the *Ringató method*. They are foundations of music education of preschoolers to which we can always look for orientation.

What are these principles?

- Music education should start *very early* – advises Kodály –, the *mother*, the *family* play a key role in this.
- He also emphasised that the basis for music education should be the children's *own* folk music tradition supplemented by songs from *other people's folk music* and *composed children's songs* of artistic quality.
- He also thought it was similarly important that the youngest children listen to *live performance* of music, not recordings.
- Thus, *personal connection* is indispensable.
- Kodály often wrote about *quality music*. We need to take care about what we give to children.
- He advises to *centre music education in singing*. Even playing an instrument should be preceded by a lot of singing and playing with songs.
- Preschoolers and kindergarten students should sing *pentatonic songs* (melodies in the anhemitonic five-note scale).
- Naturally, the *caregiver's personality* is of utmost importance – they can create real experience for children with art and music.
- Kodály often talked about the *formative power* of music education in personality development. This is the so-called *musical transfer effect*.

We could say that the Kodály Concept is a *philosophy of education* centred in singing; it is built on the Hungarian tradition of music, and it offers education for the masses. Thus, the Kodály Concept is not the same as solmisation, nor does it mean the handsigns or the challenges of reading exercises.

Zoltán Kodály's ideas about music education were really transformed into methods by his students. Thus, the methodology of music education for preschoolers was developed by *Katalin Forrai*, and so she became an internationally acclaimed scholar of the field. Katalin Forrai started to work with kindergarten students on Zoltán Kodály's encouragement. From her field experience and wide theoretical knowledge, the standard work *Songs in Kindergarten* was born at the beginning of the 1950s. In

teacher training, this book – translated into several languages – is the acknowledged methodology of music education in kindergarten. She started observing the vocalisation of preschoolers at the middle of the 1960s, then she soon published *Music in Preschool*. No other similar, well thought-through, high standard, internationally acknowledged music methodology for nurseries and kindergartens has ever been written in Hungary or abroad. Katalin Forrai published several books and countless publications; she also taught tirelessly, and worked for children's and adults' music education both in Hungary and abroad.

### **1.1 Music education in nursery and kindergarten**

In Hungarian nurseries and kindergartens, there is methodical music education even though there is no strict schedule. This is why *nursery and kindergarten teachers* can do a lot for art education: with singing every day, and relying on the Kodály Concept and Katalin Forrai's teaching.

Music education for preschoolers aims at *piquing their curiosity*. Singing and nursery rhymes (or lap games), the latter of which is always directed to one or two children, stimulates them to move. Singing sessions in nurseries have no scheduled time or length, they are never organised. The songs whose only purpose is to be sung and heard and to create an atmosphere are the beginning of learning to listen to music. We can sing to children while looking at picture books, playing with toys, or "just for fun". Lap game is a one-on-one, intimate connection between the caregiver and the child, and it is a real source of joy for the little ones. The participation of children in these situations is always voluntary. It's a lucky group in nurseries whose teachers can play an instrument. Children don't have to do exercises in nurseries, there is no didactics nor expectations, but music education has to be planned. If children coo – as Forrai Katalin would say – a lot, if they try singing and saying nursery rhymes, even if in their own babbling, it's a sign of the right musical and pedagogical environment. If this is the teacher's experience, they surely do their job right.

A child who went to nursery has an easier job to fit into a new, *kindergarten community*. The songs, games, nursery rhymes learnt earlier help a lot in this process, since the child will meet the same sessions in the kindergarten. The music education of the oldest preschoolers is very similar to the singing sessions of the first -year kindergarten students. They also participate voluntarily in these situations. Lap game is, however, gradually replaced by circle games. Taking age into consideration, organised, incremental musical skill development begins in several areas: singing ability, musical hearing, sense of rhythm, sense of form, creativity development, learning to listen to music. *Singing games* play the main role in kindergarten music education. The basis of all development is a well-known song or circle game. Katalin Forrai said that there's no merit in a music session where we haven't had a good play, and there was no awe or free laughter. Music education is art education, which primarily focuses on emotions and feelings. The experience, the joy of singing and playing are top priority.



## 1.2 The Ringató method and the Kodály Concept

The *Ringató method* owes a lot to Zoltán Kodály's and Katalin Forrai's teaching. Every single one of the above -mentioned educational principles is realised in the Ringató method. In our sessions, we facilitate music education in the *family*. We also follow Kodály's advice about the selection of the *musical material*, and we always *sing* and *play the instrument live* in our sessions. *Singing together* has an important role. This is the experience we would like to give to as many families as possible. Our *facilitators* are excellent and dedicated professionals, who widen their knowledge in rich workshops, and participate in training courses regularly.

Katalin Forrai recommended, in connection with the music education of the youngest, not to give the children even the simplest percussion instruments in a nursery group. Their sense of rhythm is still undeveloped, they can't use the snare drum, the finger cymbals, the triangle, the sticks and snares as instruments yet. If we gave them these instruments, they would only rattle them, adding to the already existing background noise. Any instrument can only be the teacher's instrument in the nursery. We follow the same principle in the Ringató method, we *don't give instruments* to the children. It's true that the parents are there, and we could ask them to help their child play eg. a drum, but we don't do that, either. It would make the situation too guided, the children have much more freedom than that. They participate voluntarily in everything, *we respect their age*. These objects and dealing with them would take time and attention away from what we want to realise in our sessions. Naturally, children can "play music" on anything at home.

## 2. The goals and tasks of Ringató sessions

### 2.1 Art education

Those who haven't yet been to a Ringató session might not be able to even imagine what happens there. This beautiful name doesn't allude to how the session unfolds, nor to whom we expect to come. We might simply say that Ringató is a programme for family music education. We sing together with mums, dads, often grandparents, and we play with little children who don't even go to kindergarten yet. With babies and toddlers. Maybe our motto can say something more about Ringató sessions: "*Hold them, cradle them, sing to them!*" It's not an instruction, but a request, a kind encouragement. It's addressed to all who have small children or have a child trusted to their care. It's a particular sort of a music class where adults and children participate together. We don't distribute music, there's no assessment, we don't use solmisation (which is, in fact, a great tool for another place and time), and, mainly, it's a place where they don't have to be afraid of singing. A Ringató session is an opportunity for those who are shy or inexperienced with singing to try themselves. "*However you sing is right, just come and join us!*", we might say to mums who come a little shy.

The session of half an hour is led by *one* facilitator. The children, if they so want, sit in their parents' lap, but they can crawl or toddle around. For them, nothing is compulsory.

Parents often report they have never dared to sing before. They were sitting with their mouths closed at school or they just mouthed there. This inhibition seems to stop somehow in the Ringató sessions.

Our *goals* take many directions:

- It's important to *provide musical experience* so that the participating adults and children can enjoy singing and playing together. Music education is aesthetic education at the same time. Beauty and many types of atmospheres, moods have to be created in the sessions. We mostly affect emotions and feelings.
- We *model* to parents how to start the music education of the youngest in the family.
- It's also our goal to teach the adults *a body of songs which are easy to sing*. We *inspire them to sing*, we encourage them, we help them. We show them that singing together is good, that folk songs are beautiful, not didactic degenerates, but joy. We'd like to see singing and playing become part of the everyday of families, and that they carry on at home what they learn in the sessions.
- Respecting Kodály's advice, we carefully select what to use in Ringató sessions. Participants should only meet valuable music or literature. *Shaping taste* is a priority task for us. We avoid kitsch, and less valuable songs. Small children haven't yet formed their own taste, it depends on us what they will find beautiful. The formation of children's taste is the responsibility of their parents, and of course of other caregivers and teachers.
- For the participating children, we follow the same goal that Katalin Forrai formulated for the music education of preschoolers. We want to *pique children's interest*, we want to sensitise them for music and singing. We show singing games, songs, nursery rhymes to them, but *not with the intention of instruction*. Singing and instrument playing inspires children to move freely, which is a joy for all of us. The many types of musical stimuli, of course, inspires them to vocalise in many ways. The little ones start to sing in their own manner. *We don't develop, but development does take place in countless areas through the indirect effect of music*. Art education thus influences the entire personality.

All we want is, therefore, that adults sing with us and find happiness in it. Children, in turn, be there in that environment where many sing together. Where they are surrounded by valuable music, diverse timbres, musical stimuli and instruments. They can participate in lap games if they so want, or they can just sit in their mum's or dad's lap. If they want to crawl or walk about, it's also okay. We don't expect visibly active participation and attention from them (since they aren't able to focus their attention yet), neither do we expect any sort of production. Parents can come with even only a couple of months old babies. A lot of things – important for their development – happen in small children even when we can't see it in the moment.

Since little children participate in our sessions, it's only natural that there's a little background noise sometimes. Usually, it isn't disturbing. If the facilitator leads and works skillfully, silence will be born as if by magic. We usually give it time to work so that we all can marvel at the moment.

## 2.2 Values, tastes

What children's music and songs can we come across today? What makes something a children's song? Is it a short piece whose topic is close to children? Funny, playful, light? Where do we find so-called children's music? Is it something played by different bands at concerts, and then learnt and sung by parents and children? Browsing on the internet, we can find countless performers who play for children. Do we know how to select between them? Do we call children's attention to music we think is good? Or does just something play in the background? There are countless questions. Opinions differ on children's music, if we think about the question at all. Differing opinions aren't a problem. There are many choices. We should never forget, however, that *it depends on us what children will like*. And not only in music.

We often choose according to our own taste, and thus we say this is good, that isn't. Our taste is shaped by our upbringing, parents, teachers, education, experience, peers, fashion, and so on. It's not easy to find those pieces in contemporary children's music which truly excels and will be listened to, sung, or taught even in decades (centuries?). We must thoroughly scrutinise a song's musical characteristics, originality, the craft of its text, the fineness of its prosody. According to Kodály, "No one is too great to compose for the little ones; quite on the contrary, everyone must strive to be great enough to do it." (*Children's choirs*, 1929) Good musicians, trained educators or sophisticated collections can help a lot in determining the questions above, but individual taste can always play a role in these choices.

We have to find that *valuable music* which is suitable for the age of the children (see Chapter 1 on Kodály's principles). Songs whose length and mood preschoolers and kindergarten students can comprehend. A longer piece played by many instruments (eg. "classical music" or a work from another genre which we consider good) might be valuable, but, if the musical texture is too thick and the sound is too rich, the youngest children may not be able to follow. We select from music just as from literature: which tale or poem goes best with children of this or that age and developmental stage. In the case of the youngest, preschoolers and kindergarten students, it is important to play live music. Because of the characteristics of their age, real experience comes from the singing or playing of an adult whom they know and to whom they are emotionally close, not music played from a recording (see Chapter 1).

The majority of children participating in Ringató sessions don't yet sing, they just listen to us as much as they can. Those close to kindergarten age may well try their voices in many different ways. You can find countless songs in our collection *Ringató – Purple book* (Ringató Publishing, 2021) which parents, caregivers, teachers can sing to children. In the case of kindergarten students, we can even teach them these songs if the range and note set makes it possible, and the melodic motifs aren't too difficult. (I'm not speaking about lap game with melodies, because they aren't songs, they're games. I'll discuss them in detail in the following, see Chapter 3.2).

## 2.3 Goals beyond art education

Well-organised, regular meetings, the experience of singing together makes a *community* of the families who come back to us. Parents can realise that they aren't alone with their troubles, but they can also share their joys and experiences. Singing has a peculiar effect: we sing when we're happy, but songs can also console and heal our souls in time of need.

Ringató sessions have now spread all over Hungary and the Carpathian Basin, in several European countries, and overseas, too. In these places, our own culture gets a special emphasis. A beautiful Hungarian folk song, Hungarian nursery rhymes, lap games in our own language may all mean *keeping our Hungarian heritage*<sup>3</sup>.

What we do in the sessions goes well beyond a music education method. We teach singing and playing, and finding happiness in beauty. It helps us find each other and recognise the wonderful feeling of belonging. *Art, music is a tool for bringing up human beings*. I don't think it's the only or the best way, but I believe it's surely a good one.

## 2.4 The practical aspects of the Ringató sessions

The Ringató method has some characteristics which are the result of the fact that it's not institutional, and that we work with adults and children together. Children have access to a lot of toys and other objects in nurseries and kindergartens. Now, however strange it may sound, no toys are used in Ringató sessions. To be more precise: it's characterised by *the absence of material tools*. There aren't any puppets, toy instruments, or anything else which, otherwise, would surely be very interesting for children. But, in the Ringató method, we primarily inspire and motivate parents, not children. Different great-looking toys would be beautiful, but they would make our job more difficult, and they might be a source of conflict between children. We only have half an hour, we don't spend as much time together with the group as children do in their nurseries or kindergartens. We have just this much time to achieve all our goals we've set for ourselves. We can't sing the song or do the lap game a little later or in the afternoon. In a nursery, all this can be done. Therefore, we're really goal-oriented in Ringató sessions. We avoid everything that would take time away or direct our attention elsewhere. We usually ask the parents not to bring in toys, not to feed the children, and not to offer anything to each other.

Visually, a Ringató session seems very simple at first glance: in a relatively empty room, we put chairs for adults around a large mat. We need nothing else, except maybe a table for the instruments of the facilitator. The ideal room has no stage, podium, stairs, mirrors, children's furniture, wall bars, sport equipment, toys – not even covered. It's not ideal if the participants sit on a lot of pillows, beanbags, on small and thin mats, polifoam, blankets instead of a large, single-piece mat. Benches instead of chairs aren't adequate, either.

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<sup>3</sup> [Translator's note.] This principle, of course, also applies for any other minority culture.

What we want to achieve is to make sounds the primary stimuli, we want them to have the most important role in the session. So, the only material tools in the Ringató method are the facilitator's instruments. Everything else in our method are artistic, musical tools, not material ones. The *facilitator's person* is also extremely important, if not the most important. The experience during a Ringató session will be created by the combination of the facilitator's preparation and personality.

### **3. The musical material of Ringató sessions**

#### **3.1 Songs**

The songs in the sessions are selected from *the folk songs of the participants' culture*<sup>4</sup>, *other peoples' folk songs*, and *composed children's songs*. *Quality* is an important selection criterion in all three cases. The so-far published Ringató song collections also follow this principle. In the books, we can see that well-known songs which parents like to sing in the sessions, too, are also included.

##### **3.1.1 The folk songs of the participants' culture**

The musical material of the Ringató sessions is founded, in a larger part, in the *folklore of the participants' culture*. (In about 70-80%.) We draw the songs and the *nursery rhymes*, *lap games* – discussed later – “from the clearest source”<sup>5</sup>. They've stood the test of time. (It's rarely mentioned that sometimes a not entirely authentic, so-called defective melody might find its way into folklore. It's not necessarily true that something is good just because an old village lady sang it. Of course, it's an exception if we have some emotional ties to a song we know doesn't really represent high musical quality: “my granny/dad sang it to me...” They always remain good memories and a source of beauty, without professional critique, but we don't teach them in sessions.)

The *folk songs of the participants' culture* are expressly meant for the adults to learn (see the goals in Chapter 2.1), and for the children to listen to. Both adults and children have to connect to the many different feelings and moods conveyed by the folk songs. I emphasise the many different feelings. If we only sing happy songs along the reasoning “This child is still so young!”, we paint a false picture of the world. Thus, their emotional education would become one-sided. The songs we sing in our sessions are diverse not only in their mood, but their tempo and style, too. They are *songs not connected to an occasion*, we can sing them wherever and whenever. By contrast, we rarely use the *songs of custom* in activities. It would be improper to separate them from their traditional form of appearance: St. Lucy's customs, Christmas pageants, other

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<sup>4</sup> [Translator's note.] The original Hungarian refers to Hungarian folk songs and Hungarian folklore. Through Kodály's inspiration, teaching, and legacy, it is a strong foundation in the Hungarian system of music education to use and teach Hungarian folk music as a basis of learning. It was thought an extremely important principle to be applied and adapted into every Ringató session, regardless of the language and the culture of the participants: all should have access to their own cultural heritage and learn music through it. Of course, this way, the English translation may seem somewhat cumbersome.

<sup>5</sup> [Translator's note.] A reference to Béla Bartók's *Cantata profana*, which ends with the words “from the clearest springs” (in Hungarian, the word ‘forrás’ means both source and spring). In the Hungarian music scene, these words are often used – half seriously, half as a gentle, kind joke – as a metaphor for Hungarian, and, indeed, any kind of folk music, completely in line with Kodály and Bartók's teachings and ideas.

Christmastide or end-of-winter customs<sup>6</sup>. These songs become complete and relevant together with the customs, characters, dialogues belonging to them.

### 3.1.2 Other peoples' folk songs

The folk songs of *neighbouring peoples* or even *more distant nations* can't be missing from our musical material (see Kodály's principles in Chapter 1). Learning them is exciting, since these songs may have a different pulse or rhythm, peculiar melodic motifs. They are songs of many different moods and subjects. We should look for ones with tasteful translations. According to Robert Schumann, we should consider folk songs a treasure chest of the most beautiful melodies, through which we can get to know peoples' characters. If we sing and listen to other peoples' folk songs, we can compare them to our own folk music and really have a feeling of what it's like.

### 3.1.3 Composed children's songs

Besides folklore – according to Zoltán Kodály and Katalin Forrai's thoughts –, *composed children's songs of artistic quality* should also have a place in the musical education of small children. The first publication of valuable Hungarian art songs intended for children was Zoltán Kodály's *Kis emberek dalai* (Universal Music Publishing Editio Musica Budapest, 1962)<sup>7</sup>. They are melodies with simple rhythm, which use only a couple of notes extending only to the pentatonic scale. Their pulse/metre is usually 2/4, mostly two bars form a motif (bipodic structure). *The motif is the smallest musical form*. We can, rarely, find a song in this small collection in which the smallest unit is of three measures (tripodic structure). Their music is both similar and different to the Hungarian folk songs. Every melody in *Kis emberek dalai* was originally a reading exercise. They became children's songs equipped with Sándor Weöres's, Amy Károlyi's, István Csukás's, Erzsi Gazdag's<sup>8</sup> uniquely beautiful texts. True gems were created from the meeting of ingenious creators. These texts aren't better or worse than folk texts, they're simply different. They're poetry. Kodály states in the foreword of this publication that, for the texts, he turned to poets who could speak "the children's language without baby talk". Naturally, even in our times, new children's songs are written which are valuable and we like to sing them. Still, I believe we should give priority to this collection of Kodály's in the musical education of preschoolers. These songs appear in nursery and kindergarten musical education, and, of course, in Ringató sessions.

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<sup>6</sup> [Translator's note.] In the Hungarian original, "regölés" (a type of folklore magic of blessings and good wishes related to Christmas and New Year performed by a group going from house to house and singing the appropriate songs) and "kiszehajtás" (an effigy of the spirit of winter is made from straw or other flammable material, carried around, and then drowned or burned, all accompanied by the appropriate songs) are mentioned. They do not have exact equivalents in English, although "kiszehajtás" is paralleled in the pagan Slavic traditions related to Morana/Marzanna, the goddess of winter's death.

<sup>7</sup> [Translator's note.] Lit. *Songs of little people*. – This section is mostly devoted to this publication of Kodály's, which, to my knowledge, does not have any English translations yet. It was still felt that the underlined characteristics of the collection are instructive and informative to anyone wishing to select composed children's songs for non-Hungarian Ringató sessions, therefore, the section is translated as it is.

<sup>8</sup> [Translator's note.] They are all renowned Hungarian poets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 3.2 Lap games

If we say that a lap game is *an adult playing with the child*, then we've grasped one of its important characteristics. They are *one-on-one games of trust* which *foster connection*, they bear witness to the memories and knowledge of centuries. Their older name is: *nursery rhymes*<sup>9</sup>. We mostly play them in the first years of life (preschool age), but younger kindergarten students also often take pleasure in these impish games. Today, parents and grandparents may only know these nursery rhymes if they look for them and learn them consciously. They are also built of pairs of bars in 2/4 time, and they often *consist of repeating motifs, too*. The *motif*, this *small musical unit*, will have an important role in our method later. In Hungarian folk nursery rhymes, a motif is worth four beats, that is, four quarter<sup>10</sup> notes. They have a rhyming, rhythmic text to recite without a melody, or with a melody for other games. Sung lap games cannot be called songs, even though they have a melody, they can be notated etc.: in every case, the emphasis is on *playing*. They aren't sorted as songs due to their musical characteristics, either.

Movements or, better to say, *motion* is connected to these games, since the adult touches and moves the child sitting in their lap. We can distinguish between games with *gross motion* and *fine motion*:

- the following use *fine motion*: caressing, tickling, hugging games etc.
- the following use *gross motion*: riding, bouncing, dancing, swaying games etc.

The movements connected to the games also mean touch, physical connection in every case. This isn't about translating the text into movements and having the child imitate it without touch, as if signing. This is intentionally avoided in Ringató sessions. I advise against it even in nursery and kindergarten education.

Lap games have always served the entertainment and comforting of children, while they're also getting familiar with themselves and the world around them. This is needed today even more than ever before.

### 3.3 Nursery rhymes<sup>11</sup>

There's no sharp line between nursery rhymes and lap games, but they are still different. Nursery rhymes are always *connected to an occasion or situation*, lap games never. Lap games are always one-on-one, nursery rhymes not necessarily. Adults don't have such an integral role here as in lap games. There are counting games, call-to-play rhymes, whistlemakers. Nursery rhymes about or to nature are eg.: suncallers, raincallers, swallow- or stork greeting, snail luring, ladybird flying, butterfly catching games, and so on. They are rhythmically recited, but often sung to simple melodies

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<sup>9</sup> [Translator's note.] On the terminology question, see Footnote 2.

<sup>10</sup> [Translator's note.] Although, generally, British conventions are adopted in this document, for the sake of clarity and simplicity, I chose to use the American style note value names – they reflect more closely the Hungarian system (they also come more naturally to me because of this parallel), and they seem to be more approachable than the British expressions of crotchet and quaver (quarter and eighth, respectively).

<sup>11</sup> [Translator's note.] Mondóka-type: little poems without melody. See Footnote 2 & Chapter 4.3.

with repeating motifs. Our predecessors believed in magic and that they can affect nature with their chanting. Ancient forms of behaviour are evoked in these rhymes, small melodic fragments, in which musical pulse plays an important role. Childrens moved, turned, swang their arms. They played and they discovered the world.

## **4. Teaching according to the Ringató method**

### **4.1 Teaching folk songs**

We always teach (Hungarian) folk songs after listening, its melody and text together, and we never teach them line by line. Presenting them line by line and having them repeated would be didactic and create a feeling of exercise. By chopping it up, the song loses some of its beauty. Our methods are always subordinate to aesthetics. We begin teaching the song by singing it many times, but only the first stanza. We continuously present the song three, four, sometimes even five times. The number of times we repeat it depends on the length, difficulty, but also on the *entire situation*. These aren't mechanical repetitions. We make a short comment with which we direct the parents' attention to the song and raise their interest. Then the song is sung again. We engage the group in singing together with our movements, signs without words. Later – maybe in the very same session, or, perhaps, next time – we learn the other stanzas, too. It's easier to teach those folk songs in which the melody or the text or both repeat the same way. In this case, more stanzas can be sung already for the first time. *We don't use music or books in a Ringató session.* It wouldn't make learning the songs as easy as many difficulties would come out of it. When they already know the melody a little bit, and they also know the text somewhat – even if a little uncertainly –, we can help by saying the beginning of the next line at the right time (at the end of the previous one). The song flows on more easily this way.

If we teach a folk song that's unknown for the group, we sing it *at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end* of the session. We can come back to the same melody for weeks, while a new song can also appear. We don't have to be afraid that the repetition makes the song boring. Parents participate in Ringató sessions with their attention divided between their children and the facilitator. It's best if they can come continuously to the sessions for weeks, but it's not always the case. Sometimes they miss one or two weeks, then they come again. This is why we have to repeat each song in multiple sessions. Even the families who come regularly don't get bored with the many repetitions, since the structure of the sessions, the sequence of the games and other musical materials can be very diverse. Therefore, singing the song again isn't annoying at all, in fact, it even intensifies what we want to achieve. It's great joy when the group sings together boldly, no one feels awkward.

Facilitators have great freedom in choosing the folk songs. Our fundamental starting point is valuable music. We take into account the season, the weather, major holidays, but also the assembled group's mood, willingness to take challenges, abilities, and even what the facilitator likes, or prefers teaching.

We always teach some songs for greeting someone on their birthday, or eg. *Christmas songs* – we hope that the family will sing together at home. We begin teaching Christmas songs in the middle of November so that they'll have learnt it by the holiday.



To so-called beginner groups – when they don't yet know our sessions, or they're perhaps uncertain about singing or the songs –, we present better-known, easier songs. This way, the group is bolder, success and the experience of singing together come more easily. *Eg.: XXX - Examples from your folk songs*

Singing *folk song canons* or *rounds* is a special joy for the group if the facilitator helps beginnings and closing well. It's important that the participants can sing the song in unison stably, then can the canon begin. If the group is smaller, the facilitator can sing the second voice alone. Later, we can try dividing the participants equally. We must always sing the canon together in unison, then, at the next round, the canon can begin. It's enough if the facilitator gives a cue or helps with their glance. The pace of the session and the joy of singing is more important than perfect direction and flawless choir singing. The first voice has an easier job than the second one. A simple way to finish canons is if the voices stop one by one in a sequence. Another way is to stop every voice at once at a certain point. We usually sing canons in two voices, three voices rarely occur. Singing canons is neither a goal nor an expectation. We only try it in a group where bold singing has become a habit.

After better-known folk songs, we also teach songs which the parents don't know or which are more difficult. The facilitator's job is to win over the participants with a little explanation, preferably with singing and conveying pure emotions. Natural, simple singing is important, we mustn't overperform. There's no dynamics, softer or louder lines when singing folk songs. We sing the majority of the songs with flexible rhythm. The rhythm should, wherever possible, align to the text. There are no restrictions on key or range. We should sing the song at a pitch which is comfortable for the group and where they can sing it beautifully. If we play the song on an instrument, we have to pay attention to whether they can sing the song in our key, or if we can play the song in a key which is easy to sing. It can happen that we play a song on eg. a soprano recorder (Blockflöte) in a certain key, and then we sing the song together in a different key, without the instrument.

It's best to sing a folk song with at least two stanzas, we teach even more if possible. For many songs, the order of the stanzas is flexible, there's no point in arguing about it. There are, however, some songs where the order of the stanzas is important for the content of the text.

*Eg.: XXX - Examples from your folk songs*

*Don't direct the songs too much.* There's no need to beat the time, just follow the musical form, the breaths, beginnings and endings with simple movements. It's especially relevant to songs sung freely, in a speech-like fashion (*parlando*, *rubato*). We don't use verbal commands at the beginning of singing, we don't count 'one-two-three-four'. We just start naturally, and the participants join. We can teach the song – not only the folk songs of the participants' culture – and inspire the audience only if we've worked for it on our own. This isn't primarily about memorisation, although it's doubtlessly important. It's not a great idea to bring a song we've just learnt to an session. The important point isn't the analysis of the folk song and establishing structure, key, style etc., but something else. We have to find sensitivity, beauty, playfulness, tenderness, humour, gentle mockery, banter, or sorrow in the song. We have to fall into love with it first so that we can *present it without mannerisms*. This needs time and we have to have the song grow mature in us.

Part of the session can be the facilitator sing a song for the participants to *listen*. In Ringató, this doesn't mean a music played from a recording, but the facilitator sings on their own to the participants, or accompanies themselves with an instrument, or sings the song then plays it on the recorder. They might do so to show what song comes next time. This way, it'll be more familiar for everyone. A listening session can be about performing more difficult songs which we won't teach to the group later. For instance, richly ornamented songs, or those whose melody, rhythm causes difficulty to parents who are inexperienced in singing. We still want mums, dads, children to hear them. So that they listen to and like a lot of things. The time might come that they'll even sing it. Eg.: XXX - *Examples from your culture's songs*.

## **4.2 Teaching lap games according to the Ringató method**

Kodály's words come to my mind, who said about teaching songs that we should teach them so that they aren't pain but joy. In Ringató sessions, we want to teach everything to the parents so that it's joy and pleasure. Songs, lap games, everything else. As I wrote about our goals, we give models to the adults so that a lot of singing and rhythmic games, and singing for fun can take place in the everyday at home.

We teach lap games *together with their text, movements*, and, if available, *melody* to the parents. We explain them with only a few words, rather demonstrate them, as if we had a child sitting in our lap. Since children take part in the games voluntarily, we ask the parents not to force connection, only play with the young one who is willing to take part. Maybe this is the most difficult for parents to accept. Many mums and dads think it's a problem if their child "doesn't pay attention", doesn't take part in something. Naturally, this isn't the case. They hear and listen to us even when they crawl or toddle away from the parents' lap. The children will recall the memories of the session, and they'll play when they want to. They're still very small, they can't hold their attention, and can't follow rules. We expect nothing spectacular of the children. A lot of things happen in a small child even invisibly.

In the case of the majority of the games, if possible, *the child should sit in the lap of the adult, the two facing each other*, eye contact is important. It's not always possible to realise in the sessions, because children like looking at each other as they're all sliding down or being lifted up in the air. It's an interesting community experience to watch others from the safety of the parents' arms. The facilitator presents games with gross motion to the parents as if they were playing with someone, as if they were holding a child in their lap. In the case of games with fine motion, we show the movements in our own palm or on our own arm, and the parents play with the child in the meanwhile: we say what to do, and immediately play, sing, show, repeat.

In our sessions, we *don't divide children into different groups by age*. The oldest are about three years old, the youngest a couple of months. With the youngest of four-, five-, six months, we play in a different way. We adapt to their stage of motoric development. Parents simply touch, caress, gently rock these babies while looking at them, singing or rhythmically repeating the text of the game to them. So we don't do the movements with the smallest children who can't yet sit, stand, or walk that we can do with the older ones. Parents sort it out quite simply and naturally in the sessions.

Lap games in the books are dead on the pages. We have to give life to them: with playfulness, impishness, with the tools of artistic and musical education. We have to get to like them and help others to this the same as I wrote about songs above. We have to find the way to the games so that later we can lead others there. Again, it's not about memorisation only, but about the question why that little game – a couple of notes, a little rhythm – is beautiful. What makes it interesting, exciting? Its sound, its constant, repeating pulse, the jingling words, and, of course, the many gentle, playful touches, the “conspiratory” connection between adult and child.

Katalin Forrai taught that lap games are *the sprouts of art education*. Every single little game is a small *drama*. It begins, something is happening in it, it's progressing, tension is building, and then, at the end, there is the punchline, the resolution. The punchline may be tickling, embracing, kissing, patting the palm, tousling the hair, playful touching of the ear, nose, dropping, sliding down, lifting up... Without tension and resolution, there's no lap game. It's about art education, which primarily affects emotions. A child experiences the same thing during these games as an adult at a theatre performance, when reading a poem, short story, or novel, listening to music at a concert, or marvelling long at a picture or building. Catharsis can be born when an adult and a child play together.

Lap games appear with musical colours in Ringató sessions: with *different tempi* (slower – faster, gradually accelerating from slow tempo), *different pitches* (higher – lower), *different timbres* (darker – brighter), *different loudness* (softer – louder), with *repetitions*, and *contrasts* in tempo or mood created through repetition.

Special attention should be paid to the ideal *tempo*, the *pitch* of the lap games connected to a melody, and the multiple *repetitions* of the games.

*Tempo*: it's a frequent mistake of beginner facilitators that the tempo of the games is rushed. We consciously have to slow down for small children. The session won't be more charming or happier if we rush a riding or tickling game. A more comfortable tempo is much easier both for adults and children. We have to pay attention to the group, the playing of parents and children in order to create the ideally slower or faster tempo. Katalin Forrai, having been observing the tempo of the movements of first year kindergarten students, wrote that their average tempo of movement would be a quarter = 66-80 on the metronome. It means we measure this many quarter notes in a minute. I think we can also take this into consideration in general in Ringató sessions (that is, before the age of 3). Naturally, it may well happen that we are more animated for some reason. We're taken by the atmosphere. We mustn't treat anything rigidly!

*Pitch*: we don't teach children sing in Ringató, but we strive to show good example in everything. If we're playing a lap game moving within the range of a couple of notes, it's advised to sing these little melodies at about *the middle of the one-line octave*, a' and g'<sup>12</sup> should be the “axial notes”. If children once start singing – it fluctuates a lot at

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<sup>12</sup> [Translator's note.] The Helmholtz notation is used here to indicate the octaves. The one-line octave (from c' to b') is the same as octave 4 (C<sub>4</sub> to B<sub>4</sub>) in the scientific notation; both start from the middle C on the piano (first ledger line below the stave in treble clef or first ledger line above in bass clef). The small octave (from c to b) is the same as octave 3 (C<sub>3</sub> to B<sub>3</sub>), and it is an octave lower than the one-line.

what age, but, say, at around the age of 4 –, they can copy what they hear at this pitch (range) the best. The reason for this is their short, taut vocal cords. If we sing low, they can't come with us, even though it would be nice one day! The easiest they can sing is the so-mi interval (XXX - *Examples from your folk tradition's lap games*). It's best to start from a' or g'. The melodic motifs of so-la-so-mi (YYY - *Examples from your folk tradition's lap games*) should start from g', the motifs mi-re-do also from g' or a'. (ZZZ- *Examples from your folk tradition's lap games*). It might seem high to inexperienced singers, participating parents or adults with lower voices, but a trained facilitator should, nevertheless, try to set a good example. In a short time, the group will also be able to sing in this pitch (range), but even if not, it's not a problem. There'll be something else that's easier. In Ringató, we can't and we don't even have to create the sound of a trained choir. It's a mistake to believe that fathers can't sing with us because they have "low" voices. Men, of course, don't sing in the one-line octave, but they can join in their own range. It won't bother anyone that their voices sing an octave lower, we can sing together with them. (They sing the above -mentioned games from a and g not in the one-line octave but in the small one.) Remember, this all concerns the melodies of lap games, and the pentatonic songs of small range. It's okay for the facilitator to use a tuning fork.

*Repetition:* lap games are very short. The majority of them finishes in under a minute. If we didn't start over and over again, its effect would be missing. The stable atmosphere affecting the entire personality and leading to catharsis forms from the series of games. We create a sort of 'garland' out of these games of gross or fine motion. We repeat them four-five times or even more, and it won't become dull if we ourselves lead the playful situation with fondness and joy. Children will often react, 'Once more!'. *Contrast* is born out of the repetitions in the case of many games. After a slower beginning, as we're heading towards the end of the game, the tempo can accelerate, or the direction may change, and, at the end, there's the punchline. Then it starts again in a neat, ordinary fashion, which may be completely different in atmosphere and tempo to the ending a couple of moments before. It's easy to follow in the case of riding games like e.g. XXX or YYY (*Examples from your folk tradition's lap games*.) Similarly, a contrast with powerful emotional effect can be born in a tickling game, too, if we slow down or accelerate the tempo during the game, e.g. ZZZ. (*Examples from your folk tradition's lap games*.) There are countless examples.

We show different types of games in an session, and we repeat each of them as long as the situation, the atmosphere allows. If different lap games kept coming one after the other without repetition fairly quickly – perhaps out of a fear that the session might become boring otherwise –, it would only result in a full-blown chaos, the effect would be missing, and the parents wouldn't remember anything in the end. Neither would the children like to participate. We also return to some of the games in the following sessions, just as it was discussed about folk songs above.

It may happen that we *have the children "ride" for certain songs*, because the tight pulse of the song sort of expects moving, and its tempo allows the bouncing, since it's neither too fast nor too slow. We know it's not a lap game as described above, we don't have to repeat it, one round can be enough. It's a really natural situation, the close connection between music and movement is tangible. We may later sing the song again or learn it, we can accompany it with an instrument, but it's not imperative. Dance starts somewhere here, too.

Eg. XXX - *Examples from your folk songs*

### 4.3 Teaching nursery rhymes<sup>13</sup>

Nursery rhymes can also play a role in Ringató, and in such a fashion that *we play them similarly to lap games*. Originally, these small rhymes don't have such movements connected to them like to lap games, but it's not forbidden to transform them for the sake of playing.

A simple game with a nursery rhyme can be if we take the child in our arms and slowly swing them left and right while reciting the text. We start very slowly, then the tempo accelerates a little. Of course, it's important to repeat them many times during which the contrast in the tempo can be created. We can use e.g.: sun callers, rain callers, or other types, too, while we're holding and moving the children.

A nursery rhyme can transform into a riding game if we bounce the child on our knees, and make up some sort of "punchline" for the end: a hug, a kiss, sliding down, tickling, lifting up etc. We can do this even if the text doesn't refer to a horse, to riding, or to a carriage. We can change the tempo here, too, or the direction of the movement from the middle of the rhyme: bouncing up and down can be changed into swinging left and right.

Any kind of fine movement-game can be created for the text of the nursery rhymes. Caressing, drawing on the palm, on the soles of the feet, or on the back, other types of touches, whose end might be e.g. tickling, little pinches, patting etc. It's not a problem here, either, if the text doesn't exactly refer to the movement.

The pulse of the text and the rhyming ends of the verses have a strong musical feeling. Therefore, the pulsing nursery rhymes brought to life with impishness and playful movement can be transformed into a lap game as described above.

E.g.: XXX - *Examples from your tradition's rhymes*

Only our creativity can put a limit to how we transform nursery rhymes into games with movement. However, good measure is important!

Nursery rhymes can be used in a session when we're walking around rhythmically. These will be the so-called *walking games*, and *clapping echo* is also built on nursery rhymes (see Chapters 5.1, 5.2).

## 5. Other musical elements in the sessions

Though these musical games are part of the material of the sessions, but they all will be either familiar for the parents, or they are easy to teach and learn. Thinking about

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<sup>13</sup> [Translator's note.] Mondóka-type: little poems without melody. See Footnote 2 & Chapter 3.3.

*walking games, clapping echo, or instrumental music*, they are all built on the songs and nursery rhymes mentioned before. In the following, I'll introduce them, and show how they appear in Ringat6 sessions.

### **5.1 Rhythmic walking – walking games**

This element of the sessions is tightly connected to the musical material in the previous chapter. *We're walking for nursery rhymes, sometimes sung games, songs, poems*, while possibly singing or listening to an instrument. (The instrument is not necessary.) It's not a circle holding hands, but an adult and a child walking together, this is how the group moves about. The mum or the dad *is holding* the child *in their arms*. Those children who can stably and safely walk *can do so while holding the adult's hand*. The older ones sometimes try to imitate the even steps of the adults. Avoid the kind of "walking" when a baby can make some steps but is able to walk only when holding on to an adult's hand. (Both arms of the child raised above their head and the adult holding their hand from above. This is undesirable.)

We have no other *goals* with walking games than, again, *to connect music to movement*, and find a playful joy in it. This part of the session is great for repeating nursery rhymes and songs in a diverse way. We return to e.g. a song in a way we haven't sung it before: while walking. I repeat again that this is already *the beginning of dance*, and the child's first dancing partner is their mother or father. There's another, quite practical goal to walk around a bit: we may have been sitting a little too long.

It's also valid in this case that children join in voluntarily. If they don't want to walk, or an older one wants to walk on their own, it's all right. It can happen that one or two toddlers are standing in the middle of the circle, and looking in awe at the events around them. It's also okay!

The facilitator also goes together with the group when we're going around, a little more toward the centre of the circle, and in the same direction. They show everything the way the parents should do. We have to ask the parents to step evenly, because it's important for the children to see – or feel with their whole body in their parents' arms – the beautiful, uniform movement. The facilitator leads with firm movements, steps, gestures. However, a military attitude, commands, counting, or the chatter of castanets I don't think are right. Music education is aesthetic education, as I've mentioned. We always strive to make something beautiful together with the group which brings joy to all.

The proper tempo is especially important. It's a general mistake to do e.g. the walking games too fast (see 4.2), but too slow is also undesirable, because it's difficult to walk to. Nevertheless, I've only rarely seen an unreasonably slow tempo in practice; by contrast, a hasty one many times.

One or two walking games are done in an session, and we repeat all of them three or four times, but it isn't a rigid rule, of course. We can always have a reason to do it differently: e.g. if the group seems tired. If the first walking game ended up being longer, because the mood needed more repetitions, we don't need another one. The

facilitator may have other reasons to spare time, so they plan only one walking game for the session. If we have two walking games in an session, then we change directions for the second one, and it's best if it's different in something else, too, from the first one. We can change things in many ways in the following aspects, too:

- one is *with melody*, the other one is *a nursery rhyme* or *poem*,
- both are *nursery rhymes*, but we crouch at the end of one or pretend to drop, and we *step for the rhythm* of the last bar of the other one. Stepping for the rhythm makes sense when the rhythm is varied at the end of the nursery rhyme, e.g.: ti-ti ta; or, if there isn't any rhythm at the end, it's best to crouch or "drop" the child in the arms a bit.
- we *sing with instrument accompaniment* for one, and the other one may be *sung* or *a nursery rhyme*, but we *crouch* at the end or *bend our knees*, "drop" *the babies in our arms*, etc.

Walking games can have an interesting effect. The thumps of continuous, even steps, and the rhythmic speech together have great power.

Walking games don't have such a tension as lap games, and they rarely have a punchline. It's not always necessary to make them more colourful – it isn't easy to lead them in the following ways –, but there are small tricks to do that.

- At the second, third round, *we repeat a short section* from the song or nursery rhyme. This way we can make the musical form more diverse, and we help the participants remember the text. In this case, the facilitator has to give the instruction on time and in a rhythmical fashion (*From the top!*, *Once more!*, or say the beginning of the repeated section etc.) in such a way that both movement and sound stay continuous.
- With a little preparation, we can *hide the text of the nursery rhyme* e.g. for the length of one or two *motifs*. In this case, the facilitator will instruct *Silently!*, then, later, *Out loud!* Be careful, we can only do this with a *well-known* nursery rhyme. The instruction (*silently, out loud*) must be clear to hear and understand, and should always be used at the end of a motif. This way, what we want – the "hiding", when we don't speak out loudly, then do it again –, takes place from the next motif on. If the facilitator leads deftly, an exciting game can be created. In music education, we also hide the melody – as a tool for developing inner hearing –, but I don't recommend doing it in Ringató. It's worth more if we do something simple successfully with the parents.

Usually, this part of the session doesn't last long, because it's not easy to rhythmically walk with the child in the arms and sing along or recite a rhyme. In the chapter on the planning of the sessions, this will be discussed in more detail.

*What can we use for walking games?* Every nursery rhyme, poem, game with melody, song, that has an even pulse, a *beat*. E.g.: XXX - *Examples from your culture's poems, nursery rhymes, and lap games with melody*

Walking games also work for songs with a tight rhythm (*tempo giusto*). Be careful! A

tight rhythm doesn't necessarily mean a fast tempo! I emphasise again that choosing the ideal tempo is vital for walking games. E.g.: XXX - *Examples from your folk songs*

We select short poems not only from folk poetry, but art poetry, too – poems to which we can walk; we can also choose from other peoples' folk songs or composed children's songs. You can find examples for them in the *Ringató – Lila könyv – Hetvenhét gyerekdal* (Ringató Publishing, 2021), and the *Jöjj ki, napocska – Ringató bölcsődéseknek* (Kolibri Publishing, 2018) <sup>14</sup>.

## 5.2 Clapping echo

We play with the motifs of nursery rhymes and folk poems, or the text of songs. During clapping echo, we clap to the *beat*, the *rhythm*, or the *downbeat* (the first beat in the measure), and we recite the text along. It's always the facilitator who starts with one or two motifs, and the echo comes as a response from the adults. We can play with songs in such a way that we don't sing them, we only recite the text while clapping, always changing the smaller musical units. An *exception* to this is the *Hungarian folk song*, and, generally, the *participants' own folk songs*, whose text we never separate from their melody.

It depends on the text's characteristics (length, more or less diverse rhythm) and the facilitator's expert decision if we clap to the beats, the rhythm, or the downbeats at the end of the measures. *We can alternate them within the same piece, too*. If the rhyme has a fairly diverse rhythm, pairs of eighth notes and quarter notes alternate (Eg.: XXX - *Examples from your tradition's rhymes*), clapping to the rhythm can work very well. However, if there are a lot of quavers/eighth notes one after the other in the rhyme (Eg.: YYY - *Examples from your tradition's rhymes*), or every motif has the same rhythm, we would split up the text too much. It wouldn't be beautiful. In such cases, the beat and the downbeat can alternate. We often play with the loudness in clapping echo. One motif is softer, the other is louder. Or, perhaps, we can make it more interesting by changing the tempo with slower and faster sections. Connecting these musical colours can be exciting: pairing slow and loud or soft and fast, and their different combinations will all evoke different atmospheres. Gradually becoming softer, repeating the final motif or the last bar many times ever more softly can be a powerful ending. We have to pay attention to nice diction and correct articulation.

We can recite a nursery rhyme twice or even three times, depending on its length, more is not necessary. Good measure is important here, too. A constant flow of ideas, an extremely creative facilitator can confuse the parents in clapping echo. We mustn't overdo diversity, either!

If we choose an art poem for this game, we have to look closely at its form to see how it's structured. Here, not always four beats are a motif. (Eg.: XXX - Example from the poetry of your culture.) The poem shouldn't be too long, choose one which has four to six lines, motifs. We make music from these ringing lines with clapping echo;

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<sup>14</sup> [Translator's note.] Possible translations of the titles: "Ringató – Purple book, Seventy-seven children's songs" and "Come out, little sun – Ringató for preschoolers".



hopefully, poets won't be angry for it. In the literary chapter of *Jöjj ki, napocska – Ringató bölcsődéseknek* (Kolibri Publishing, 2018), we can find countless children's poems to use for clapping echo.

What would we like to achieve with this echo game? We can say it's like a soloist and the orchestra responding to each other. An exciting sound can be created this way, which is not easy to achieve at home, unless the family is quite populous. Another goal can be to repeat a nursery rhyme or to teach it to the parents in this fashion.

In clapping echo, there are a lot of interesting possibilities, and the facilitator has great freedom in doing it. The first important step is to help the parents understand this is a task for them, but they will also be a little bit on their own. They have to be prepared to immediately copy, say, clap what the facilitator shows them. Adults shouldn't make children clap here. The children's small hands don't make a sound, so we rely on the adults' hands to clap. It's helpful if this simple request is made: *'First I, then you.'* The facilitator should signal with a firm gesture when the group comes. This is like the direction of the conductor (*cue*). It doesn't take too much time until they get the hang of the given musical form, and they can follow soon. This can be easiest achieved with simple folk rhymes.

E.g.: XXX - *Examples from your tradition's rhymes*

*Melodic echo* is also used in music education as a tool for ear-training. It doesn't usually show up in Ringató sessions, or only very rarely. Even then only with the simplest pentatonic melodies. If the group is smaller, maybe less courageous, their musical hearing, singing skills, musical memory are undeveloped, this type of echo game can be difficult for them.

### 5.3 Improvisation

There isn't often improvisation in the sessions, but when there is, we can create some quite nice moments with it. In this case, too, the smallest building block of music, the motif is the protagonist, and it appears with *clapping echo* or *melodic echo*. The facilitator leads, they are the soloist, the adult participants imitate, echo what they hear. We let the group know with a short, clear request that a sort of echo game comes. *'First I'll clap (sing), then you do the same'*, says the facilitator, and does it right away: claps, then *leads with a gesture*, asks to group to imitate. There isn't too much time to explain, we mostly present something, and then we begin to do it together.

We usually *greet children* on their birthday or nameday<sup>15</sup> with an improvised clapping echo or singing echo.

We try to comfort the child who breaks into tears with improvisation, but the result of this is always unpredictable, unfortunately. We clap or sing to the little one's name with

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<sup>15</sup> [Translator's note.] In Hungary – and in several other countries over the world –, every given name is assigned a day in the calendar and people bearing the name of the day are celebrated according to custom in a similar way as on their birthday, although not necessarily to the same degree (eg. there might not be cake, they are given fewer and smaller presents or none at all, but they are, nevertheless, greeted in some fashion).

echo. The facilitator begins, then we address them together in the group. They probably haven't heard anything like that, and it might catch their attention and draw it away from their sorrow. I repeat again that it's not necessarily always successful. In such cases, we rely on the mum or dad to resolve the situation, and we reassure the parents, that this is okay to happen in the session, no one will judge them.

Improvised clapping echo should always be made of quarters and eighths, and the melodic echo should always use the simplest, most natural melodic motifs: *sol-mi*, *sol-la-sol-mi*, *mi-re-do*, *sol-mi-re-do*, *sol-mi-do* etc., and their simple variations which are easy to follow.

E.g.: we can clap motifs like these, and try to be diverse with the alternation of ti-ti-s and ta-s. (Don't do this many all at once!)

These little musical forms can be sung without clapping to the melodic motifs mentioned above. Remember to always connect them with an echo, and to lead well. We signal to the group with a gesture or a facial expression that it's their turn. Those experienced in conducting may give a *cue* in this case, too, but you don't have to carry on conducting any further.

Besides echo games, greeting songs can also be sung.

We can do it just for fun to *sing the children's names together in the group* to a *known melody* instead of its original text. We can sing the song with one, two, or three names as well, them being like the text. (We can point each time to the child whose name comes, this will help singing together.)

E.g.: XXX - *Improvised rhythmic motifs in your language. Greetings, introductions, names, good wishes etc.*

In the Ringat6 methodology, parents never get impossible tasks, and the facilitator is always there to help them. Everything happens in the group. If something doesn't work out, perhaps an echo game, it's not a problem. We go on with a funny remark. We might have a good laugh about ourselves. If time allows, we might try it again, but never, not in one moment of the session can mechanical repetition, practising, or a negative comment, judgement take place.

*Is it possible to improvise not only these echo games, but the complete half-hour Ringat6 session?* This question often arises in the participants of the sessions. If parents see it this way, it's an acknowledgment for us, but the truth is we don't improvise the sessions, or, rather, we don't improvise everything. We study a lot so that the sessions turn out well, and everything seem so easy as if it was made up along the way. The facilitator leads the Ringat6 without reading from a piece of paper or looking at a book. Still, they don't get stuck, there's always something happening. There's no hurry, and the process doesn't fall apart. It's like the surface of water, it's smooth and continuous, but ripples naturally.

In later chapters, I'll speak about the structure of the sessions, the constant parts and flexible changes. But I can state here so much that there's a lot of training, preparation, improvisation skills and talent behind a successful Ringat6 session.

## 5.4 Instruments

Following Zoltán Kodály's teachings, *singing* has a central role in the Ringató method. We'd like, however, to enrich the sessions with *instruments*, and adults and children could get to know a lot of different sounds. As I've mentioned earlier, only the facilitator plays the instrument. We don't give any sound making tools to the children or parents.

It can be a classical or folk instrument, e.g.: *recorder, flute, oboe, violin, viola, cello, guitar, zither, kobza, metallophone, xylophone, percussions*, but others, too. We don't use the piano, louder woodwinds, brasses, and electric instruments.

The sound and look of the different instruments, their ways of sound production are all interesting for adults and children alike. We introduce the instrument very briefly, say a couple of words about it. What it's made of, how it can be played. We can make some interesting, playful sounds with any instrument: sounds can fly, run, bounce, dance, a bear mauls, a cat meows, birds sing, bees hum. Bells toll, hooves click etc. We can show the sounds more loudly, more softly, or with medium volume, with a little melody or a chord. There's no need for long speeches, only a tactful direction of attention simply and shortly. Sound is what's important. We can return to this little demonstration of the instrument in several sessions.

The instrument can *accompany* the singing of the facilitator or the group.

Moreover, we can play *a well-known song* we've sung together on the instrument *without singing*. The group can listen to it on the recorder, violin, cello, or other melodic instrument so that they can get familiar with the timbre of the instrument. We can repeat it once in a higher or lower register.

The instrument can also play along with the aforementioned *walking games*, when we're walking and singing together. Instruments accompanying singing together might be used again and again in an session. We don't need accompaniment, however, for lap games, even if they do have a melody. The instrument would suppress the games, and they would lose their chief characteristic. Accompaniment doesn't even suit these small chips of melodies.

The appearance of the instrument in a less eventful part of the session can be like a miniature concert.

## 6. The structure of the sessions & plans

Before we study the structure of the sessions and analyse the plans, remember that *the methods mustn't be used rigidly*. Everything can have countless versions.

The plans given here can only be the starting point, some help with the first steps. It's impossible to describe everything precisely, fully, and in detail, and it's impossible to teach everything.

It's necessary to gain experience, and to endure, sometimes 'struggle' to gain knowledge.

## 6.1 The structure of the sessions, preparing for Ringató

The facilitator carefully plans, almost composes the half-hour of the Ringató, especially in the beginning. They take care to have diverse moods in the musical material, and think about maybe having to diverge from their original plans. Although we definitely want to realise what we plan for the given session, adapting to the situation is always paramount.

The facilitator has to prepare for the Ringató musically and otherwise. Leading with gestures, without words is important. This can be practised in front of a mirror in the beginning (see Chapter 5.3). At the same time, they have to take care to speak nicely, clearly, articulate correctly, have a good speech pace and volume. They have to know the musical material of the group and the plan of the session by heart. Everyone learns by rote in their own way, but it's best to memorise the basic structural principles right at the beginning.

The following is a simple frame of Ringató, which is, naturally, *possible to change*:

- beginning: singing together, instrument
- lap games
- clapping echo or imitative rhymes<sup>16</sup>, greetings (only one)
- a walking game
- rest (singing together, instrument playing, listening to music – optional)
- lap games
- clapping echo or imitative rhymes, greetings (only one or none)
- conclusion: singing together, instrument

These are the elements of the Ringató sessions, and this order is a possible starting point.

This scheme above needs infusing with music and art. This makes the thirty minutes a complete whole. With a lot of feelings and atmospheres.

From among those listed above, *singing together* and *lap games* make up the major part of the session. They can't be missed, but *walking games* and *instrument playing* are also constant elements. About *imitative rhymes* and *clapping echo*, we usually say that at least one of them should be included in the session. *Listening to music* isn't an obligatory part of the session, neither is the *greeting* of a child on their birthday or name day.

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<sup>16</sup> [Translator's note.] These are folk rhymes or short formula tales in which the sounds of animals, common objects (eg. carts, trains etc.), or the sounds of other miscellaneous things are imitated with the creative use of language. (They folktale types are catalogued under AaTh 2075 in the Aarne-Thompson catalogue or ATU 106 in the Aarne-Thompson-Uther catalogue of folktales.)

The contents of regular sessions are loosely connected to each other. We can easily change anything, since we *don't have* the direct *development* of *any area* among our goals. Also, the pool of participants changes somewhat. Still, we take weekly account of what we've sung in the previous sessions. We pay special attention to what the new or lesser-known songs were, what we need to repeat.

Ringató doesn't work within an institutional framework, there aren't enrolled, stable participants, or a set number of sessions to do. So, it isn't like a course. *People can join in and stay away anytime.* This is the most practical for parents with small children, and, at the same time, this is the most difficult for the facilitator in their preparation. They have to keep account of the participants in the group, the new families joining in, and they have to adapt as much as possible. In the beginning, we show the parents simpler games and imitative rhymes. We bring known or almost known, easy-to-learn (it's an interesting category, but it exists) songs to these sessions. Later, when they are braver and like singing more, we can extend our repertoire with unknown or even more difficult songs.

It's possible that we've prepared a difficult, lesser-known song, but it turns out at the beginning of the session that the majority of those who are there are new participants at Ringató. They aren't familiar with the situation, they're shy to sing, almost everything is new to them. At such times, flexible change is necessary. We replace the musical material or a part of it in our mind right away. It's imperative that the parents like to actively participate in singing and in playing. They should get used to the fact that *Ringató isn't a performance, we create the experience together.* We can invite them to sing with us as soon as possible with songs that are somewhat familiar. To sum up the previous thoughts, it's fairly relative what's new or what's well-known for a group. Nevertheless, the facilitator should by all means plan a clear progress in the musical material for themselves. Conscious work has results, and the effort and time spent on preparation will pay back. It's a great joy for everyone when a singing community is formed.

The structure of the session is influenced mostly by whether we *teach a new song or not.* We're also attentive to whether we *teach a new song from the participants' culture*, or from *other peoples' songs*, or maybe a *composed children's song*. Although we teach all of them by singing, listening and repeating, we can create a separate musical game – *clapping echo* – from the text of other peoples' songs or composed children's songs, if it's appropriate, as was mentioned before, but it's not necessary.

Parents will quickly learn unknown lap games, walking games, imitative rhymes, and they'll come with us easily. Some of these newly learned games can return in the next sessions, others will be replaced by others. There'll come a time when the adults know a lot of them. *We always repeat the new song at several different points in the session.* We sing it at the beginning, around the middle, and before the end, too. *The beginning and the end of an session is always singing together.* Never conclude a Ringató with a new song or lap game, but always with well-known ones. Information and notices should be given before the last songs. The session is more complete if it concludes with a song, not with speaking.

We *sit* in a circle on the ground, more precisely on a *mat*, or on *chairs*. It's good to start singing on the mat, it's a little *cosier*, so any tensions can resolve right at the beginning. The children's age also supports spending more time on the mat. The facilitator sits among the parents in the circle. If they feel necessary, they can kneel up to play their instrument more easily or better see the entire group if it's larger. It's not advisable to stand up, we should be roughly at the same level as the participants.

The *walking game* after the time spent on the mat is also an excellent way to move ourselves a bit, besides playing with music.

We go on with the session after the walking game mostly sitting on the chairs. The chairs around the mat have several functions. It's a practical aspect that they enclose the space for the session. They also make the place and way of doing lap games more diverse.

It's difficult to do the *clapping echo* for the parents if children sit in their lap on the chair. It's easier to have the echo games in that part of the session when the group is on the *mat*.

At the *end* of the Ringató, we can sit again on the ground, but it doesn't have to be so. It's a little *cosier*, maybe even snuggler to sing the concluding songs sitting on the *mat*.

The facilitator has to pay attention to the group and their own tasks in every moment. For this reason, I advise against leading a Ringató with their own child present. An exception can be if there's another family member or someone else with the baby. This way, they can join in the session. As a last resort, carrying the baby in a sling or wrap on the facilitator's back can be helpful, but only if the little one tolerates the half hour of the Ringató well this way.

## 6.2 Session plans

Let's overview the plans of *two easier* (A, B), *two more difficult sessions* (C, D), and that of a *further one*! The latter is for a group who are truly experienced, there are many regularly coming families, and the repertoire is large.

It's worth reviewing the methodology information in Chapters 4 & 5.

The plans are easier to follow if we divide them into three larger parts. Of course, there are countless variations for what's written down here. They are all just suggestions for the first steps.

Eg. : XXXX - Several session plans with the musical material of your own culture.

## 7. The development of the musical skills of the youngest

It's familiar from the previous chapters that direct development can't be found among the goals of the Ringató method, which is a way of respecting the age of the children.

However, the rich musical stimuli will, whether we want it or not, *develop the musical skills* of the smallest children. We know that babies are born with memories of sounds, and they imitate later everything they see and hear. This is how they learn to speak, but also to sing, this is why modelling is paramount.

We're going to overview some areas of the development of musical skills, but it has to be noted that these areas are nearly impossible to separate from each other. every musical skill develops at the same time and in an interwoven fashion during singing, rhythmic games, and singing games.

### **7.1 Singing**

The child who has had a lot of good models for singing will start to try using their voice. We can soon detect the first signs of *singing skills*. If we pay close attention, we can hear, as soon as before the age of one years, that the small child tries to imitate melodies. (Assuming that they have heard singing before and there is anything to imitate.) Naturally, this is rudimentary, but it's still different from playing with speech and syllables in a rhythmic repetition. The time when this rudimentary singing, sliding vocalisation becomes real melody is quite diverse. The average child in the first year of kindergarten will still just listen to the teacher's singing, they don't usually sing along. The children who were surrounded with singing at an early age will try to sing melodies sooner. From the aspect of the development of singing skills, the most effective thing to do is not to sing too low the melodies of lap games moving on a handful of notes. It's best to sing them in the range where the children will be able to sing along after a while. This can be found around the middle of the one-line octave (see Chapter 5.2). Singing lower is often more comfortable for adults, but the short and taut vocal cords of children vibrate faster. This is why they sing higher and in a thin voice. Therefore, the best is to repeat simple, short melodies many times, clearly, in the ideal range. This helps the development of singing skills the most. Lap games with melodies are the best for this.

### **7.2 Musical hearing**

Singing skills and *musical hearing* are closely related to each other. The development of musical hearing begins in the youngest age with listening to melodies, unconsciously 'recording, collecting' different volumes, timbres, pitches. This way, everything sung or played in a Ringató session, the entire musical material serves the development of the children's hearing.

Observing improvised melodic motifs (see Chapter 5.3) also helps the development of singing skills and musical hearing. At the same time, we model the creation of diverse texts, melodies, which can help in the development of musical creativity later.

### **7.3 Sense of rhythm**

The most conspicuous is the development of children's *sense of rhythm* under the influence of music education, since their movements tell everything. The strong pulse

of music inspires even the smallest children to move themselves. The barely standing toddler will bend their knees if they hear loud, rumbling music (of any, although mostly popular, kind). It's an ancient connection between music and movement coming from somewhere deep within. The fiery rhythm of music may be joy in itself. The development of the sense of rhythm can be closely related to the child's *motor development* (see Chapter 8.1), we can say they interact with each other. Songs, lap games with movement develop infants' motor skills, and it's with the developed, organised movements that a child will be able to follow the steady pulse of music. In children's songs and nursery rhymes, this pulse is the *ta*, that is, the *quarter* note. One of the important tasks of music education in kindergarten is to have these *tas* be felt. (Conscious observation and naming of the rhythmic values is a task for the school.) In preschool age, the great amount of singing by the adults around the children, the clapping echos and walking games in Ringató sessions, but mostly lap games help the development of the sense of rhythm.

#### **7.4 Sense of tempo**

*Tempo* is also a tool for expression in music which has a key role in listening, since a *faster* piece of music affects us differently than a *slower* one. It's because of the tempo, among others, why we feel some music is happy or sad. If we move to music – for instance, we dance –, then we have to pay attention to the tempo of the music. In faster music, the beat is faster, and it's slower in slower music. (We mustn't confuse tempo and rhythm! We can't say 'in a slower/faster rhythm'. If we speak about music, the concepts of slower and faster always refer to the tempo.) Small children understand these words – slower, faster – easily, since we often use them in everyday speech, always related to some sort of movement. Children meet different tempos in countless situations in Ringató sessions, whether they're listening to the songs, or the clapping echo, or the imitative rhymes. During lap games, they have a proper feeling of the changes of tempos – slowing down, accelerating – of touches and movements. (The sense of tempo is related to the development of the sense of rhythm and motor skills.)

#### **7.5 Sense of musical form**

The *sense of musical form* also starts to develop in the youngest age without talking to children about the smallest unit of music, the motif. Similarly, we never call attention to the beginning, end, or structure of the songs and games. It would be unnecessary. We only sing and play, while the children feel it precisely when what they're hearing starts again or how it ends and with what melody. They understand, they feel how long a lap game lasts, how it repeats, with what gesture, text, melody it ends. There are such touching games whose movements follow the motifs (e.g.: XXX - *Examples of lap games.*) Children also encounter motifs in clapping echoes and the different sung improvisations. Through all this, their sense of musical form develops, which later helps in following melodic lines, attentive listening to music, and musical creativity.

#### **7.6 Listening skills**

The *skills* necessary for *listening to music* can also be developed (in connection with Ringató, we rather say: it develops, on its own), as all the other areas mentioned before. Listening to music, however, isn't the same as having music play in the background.



Background music just plays from somewhere, and we're talking or doing something in the meanwhile. We might even talk louder to better understand each other, so that the music doesn't bother us. During attentive listening, we're discovering precisely those musical colours I've been writing about. We're following the higher and lower pitches, the different volumes, timbres, we notice the changing tempos and so many more. It depends on the given music and the richness of its texture what else we can find for ourselves in the music. In the case of the smallest children, background music playing from any kind of medium isn't part of our toolkit for music education. Singing or instrument playing from a recording – whatever the genre, or even a fashionable relaxing piece of music – is not listening to music for the youngest, and, in fact, it's often tiring for them. It's unprocessed stimulus for them. Thinking about Kodály's guidance, *listening to music for the youngest is the singing or instrument playing of older children or adults*. In this situation it is important that the child sees and knows the 'performer'. We can stop any time during the song, or we can repeat, as the situation needs it. We can change the volume, the tempo, the performance style, but we can even sing something else if the children wish so. *In Ringató sessions, listening to music for the youngest means the singing of the community, or the facilitator's singing or instrument playing*. It's special to experience those moments when music visibly moves small children. They can't pay attention this way to a recording even if they're moving to it. The methodology for music education in nurseries and kindergartens also follows Kodály's principle: background music and recording doesn't play in the singing sessions. In these institutes – as is right –, they often illustrate the song to listen to with puppets or a toy. We can do it at home, too, but we don't use toys in Ringató (see Chapter 1.2).

We can see that countless musical stimuli surround the children in the sessions. Group singing or the facilitator's singing, which is slower, faster, higher, lower, softer, louder. The same appear in lap games, nursery rhymes, imitative rhymes, echo games. They can see and hear different rhythmic games, they can get to know the sound of instruments. All this aims to raise the youngest's interest towards music. It's only natural that these really young children will sometimes pay attention, sometimes not, then do again, unless something else catches their attention. This is natural, but *the influence of the sound environment won't be missing*. Tasks of musical development in kindergarten can build on these yet unconscious, but already familiar stimuli.

I've written about the development of musical skills above, but remember: in music education of the youngest, we sing and play for the sake of the song's beauty and the rhyme's playfulness. Teaching and practising cannot happen before the age of three. In Ringató sessions, in nurseries, in kindergartens, *musical games and musical experience* are the priority. We always keep in mind the development and age of the children. At primary schools and in solfège classes at music schools, the experience of singing together and the joy of music must be born besides the large body of knowledge to be learned.

## **8. Music education is not only musical education**

It's a fundamental idea in the Ringató methodology that it's the parents who are given tasks in the sessions. All motivation is directed to them. Even though we speak about music education for infants and toddlers, this, in our case, can't be separated from the

family. We often encourage parents to sing and play at home in a similar way as in the sessions. I have to add here that we involve children in these games only if they also want to take part. We mustn't bother children even with singing if something else has taken their – otherwise not at all lasting – attention.

As it's been mentioned before, there's no direct, active development in the sessions. Indirect effects of music education (*musical transfer*), however, appear in countless areas.

Before all else, each song, imitative rhyme, nursery rhyme, lap game serves the *emotional development* of the child. Besides the joy of music, they can experience their parents' love, the safety and security given by their mother and father. Small children don't understand the text of the songs, but the feelings carried by the songs will get through them without words or explanations. One of the chief characteristics of lap games is embracing, touching, tickling, a lot of different playful touches. They are indispensable for the healthy emotional development of the child. Children can accumulate emotional resources for life in these playful, singing situations.

It's true that music affects our feelings the strongest, but we have to mention other things, too. Children like to experience singing games again and again for their joy. They take part in the repetitions voluntarily, and they *become more and more persistent* in the lap games which may be long for them. It's a typical reaction for the child to say, 'Once more!'. Their attention develops through even a couple of minutes of these games.

All lap games take place in an *imaginary situation*. They are sitting in our lap or on our knees, but that can be e.g. a horse, a cart; we're cooking peas in our palms, we evoke a thick forest with the tousling of the hair, and we could go on listing the imaginary moments. We're mimicking the action, nothing is real, we just pretend it is. May an expression be known or unknown for a child, if they hear it many times in a playful situation, they'll associate some kind of image to it. This image changes with time as the child's knowledge grows. They'll understand the meaning of words, and their *imagination* is constantly working. The same happens when a child hears a song. Some fantasy image will often connect to the feelings evoked by the song the same way as tales come to life in their imagination.

The easiest thing to track is the development of their *memory*, since we can experience that, after a while, children will recall portions of the musical material they've heard. Words, fragments of words, movements, or even melodies. It's an interesting experience that even those children *remember* what they've heard in the sessions who seemingly didn't any special kind of attention when we were singing and playing. According to parents, the songs and games will turn up, sometimes completely unexpected, after the sessions. It often happens, too, that children around the age of three replay nearly the entire session at home.

They often create a mix from the songs and rhymes they've heard; it happens that older children perform them in their own rhythmic babbling. They become able to *compose*

*in a non-conscious manner (to improvise spontaneously).* This is the beginning of the development of *creativity*.

The stimuli of songs, rhymes, games grow the child's *vocabulary* even if they don't yet use or understand those words. Many expressions become part of the passive vocabulary, later the originally unknown words take on meaning and become part of the active vocabulary.

Music education contributes to the *development of speech*, too. The movements connected to lap games slow diction down a bit. Imagine a lap game (e.g.: XXX - *Examples of lap games.*), in which the child feels themselves really nice, since their mum's playing with them. They are facing each other, the child is hearing the rhythmic text, they can closely see the movement of the mouth, the articulation of the sounds. In the meanwhile, there is a gentle, rhythmic motion going on with a lot of repetition. At the end, the young one even gets a hug and a kiss. These are certainly moments rich with emotions, while they're also the most powerful situations of speech development.

The pulse of the music they hear, every game with movement, walking games, riding games, swinging games all stimulate children's *motor development* effectively. The young one sitting in their parent's lap feels the *beat*, the quarter notes in their entire body, since it's the pulse to which we move them. If we follow nursery rhymes with any kind of swinging (swaying, tilting) movements, we're, in effect, playing with the child's sense of balance, their organised motion is developing.

We know that it's not obligatory for the children to participate in these situations. Not every child keeps sitting in their parent's lap for a long time, but it's not a problem. They crawl away, they stand up, toddle a bit, maybe something else catches their attention. We can often see them watch each other or how the next child's mum or dad is playing with the child. Seeing each other is an interesting thing for the children, and even if they seem passive, they're still engaged in the game. Maybe the playful musical events affect them the same way as if they were active participants in an e.g. swinging game. Ringató sessions are *community experience* despite the fact that these little children don't yet play with each other. The sight of the other children and the adults is, still, very important to them.

Older children will follow simple rules for the sake of lap games. E.g. they'll hold their hands so that they can play certain games – e.g. XXX - *Examples of lap games* – with their parents. In this one-on-one play, children accept adults as playmates. We can say that music education assists *socialisation*.

Musical mother tongue becomes the children's own together with their actual native language in the sessions. Folk songs, folk rhymes, games leave a trace in us even subconsciously. It's exceptionally important for Hungarian families with small children living beyond the borders to sing songs and play with nursery rhymes in Hungarian<sup>17</sup>. Perhaps it's not too much to say that this is where the sense of *identity*, of belonging to a nation begins.

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<sup>17</sup> As is equally important for every family coming from a minority culture to cultivate their own heritage this way, too.

## **In conclusion**

This methodology is about traditional Ringató sessions of half an hour, which we hold weekly. By today, however, the Ringató children's concert has also evolved. They are led by several facilitators from a podium or stage, and they're longer, of 45-50 minutes. The principles, goals, musical material, methods are the same in these situations, too. We usually do only a couple of Ringató concerts in a year, usually connected to a holiday or feast (such as Mothers' Day or Christmas). The audience is made of several hundreds of families with small children sitting on mats, and they sing and play together. This is a special mixture of public situations, of multitudes of people singing together, and the intimate moments created between child and parent.

The methodology of Ringató may have started to evolve when I started teaching in 1979. Back then, when I hadn't even thought about working with families with small children. But each day, when I finished teaching, I used to think about how I had done that day. Had it been good, or had it been better in a different manner? Had they got to like the folk song we had sung? What would have been the best way to plan a class or a choir rehearsal so that it could become a genuine experience? Did they understand, did they feel the devotion in Kodály's *Ave Maria*, had the sensational musical playfulness of *St. Gregory's Day* enchanted the children? What should I do next time so that it is even better? Where and how is experience created? Why is something beautiful and how does this affect others? These things were on my mind during my work, while I taught in many places in different schools and other places.

The methodology of Ringató is composed of many things. It's the essence of more than forty years' worth of educational experience. Into the songs and games I've been teaching in the sessions, the beauty of concerts, theatre performances, books, stories, poems, exhibitions, the memories of travelling made their way. The traces of important relationships with other people, the amalgam of countless uplifting, good feelings and pains have subconsciously formed what 'has happened on the mat'.

I had outstanding teachers. I would like to teach at least a little bit like they once taught me. I remember their voice, their gaze, their movements. I received immeasurable knowledge from them. They also taught me humanity and goodness, as did my parents. The way I can thank them for all this is by passing on all that I can to those entrusted to me.