

# Choir Life

## Strings and Singing in Primary School „Integration of immigrant children through music lessons and practice playing string instruments”

### A project in Rhine-Palatinate at the Goethe Primary School in Mainz

Since around 1990, string instrument instruction has been offered in some schools starting in the first year of secondary school (5<sup>th</sup> year of school). The first goal of the project was to offer elementary vocal and instrumental lessons in violin, viola and violin-cello from a student's first year on. The second goal was to begin this project in a school within what is known as a “hot district”, in order to encourage integration of immigrant children. Thus, in 2001 string instrument instruction was offered at the Goethe Primary School. Parents of twenty-two children of ten different nationalities accepted this opportunity. After completing supplementary training, Rita Hens, teacher and principal at the school, and Dorothee Koschnicke, violinist and music teacher, undertook the task of giving a class twice a week. The twenty-two string instruments needed were donated by the Department of Culture of the Rhineland-Palatinate region. As assumed the age of six shows itself ideal for such an intensive musical project; within this period children are able to facilitate development of a musical foundation very rapidly and profoundly. There is sufficient time for training to take its course; the child's voice is as yet pure and unaltered and allows for it to be educated, and the physical conditions necessary for learning to play a stringed instrument are favorable.

Why is this project presented within the context of Europa Cantat? Because singing plays a primary role in the musical

methodology used. When the project began, the children were barely able to communicate; however, group singing became the first step for communication. Now this is the essential concept: *The practiced basic methodological idea is that nobody can play an instrument well without being first and parallel able to sing the same piece.* The practice of permanent (*correct and beautiful*) singing within this context is, therefore, an integral and inseparable part of lessons in playing instruments. Moreover, singing is also part of everyday general education at the school.

It is interesting to note that the method of “sing-play teaching” employed uses relative sol-fa instruction and the rhythmic language of Kodály. Through regular training students develop an interior “melodic ear,” rhythm and metre. Little by little, children acquire elementary musical theory. The method used for the string lessons during the project follows the teaching theory by Paul Rolland.

The results of this thesis confirm that the children who participate in this way of musical training progress not only musically but in many different aspects, as well. The “class of strings” is considered to be the best disciplined and most attentive in all the school. When the children left school after four years of education, not only had many of them deepened their musical experience within a music school and acquired a natural and positive relationship with their own voices; but most importantly, only three of the children carried their studies on to the secondary technical school of mixed abilities. All others pursued to secondary modern or grammar school. This advancement in education was something not seen before at the Goethe Primary School!

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