

THE METHOD BOOK “MALAY CHILDREN’S FOLK SONGS AND STUDIES, FOR VIOLA BEGINNERS”

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Abstract

The few common method books for beginners on the violin and viola are published mostly in Europe and designed for children aged 6 to 10 years. Children typically start to learn viola in their teenage years when their hands, wrists, and palms are almost at their full size, because the viola only exists in sizes from 14.5 inches up to 17 inches. Almost all European method books for the viola are based on European traditional, folk and classical tunes. Only a few of them include Asian tunes, and none feature Malaysian tunes. As a result, it had strengthened and developed European children’s knowledge of their own musical traditions and culture but did not expand their knowledge of musical traditions and culture from other countries. In Malaysia, children learn to play the instrument using mostly method books published in America and the United Kingdom for beginners. These help them to expand their knowledge of European traditional and folk music. However, the children start to lose interest and cease to expand their knowledge of their native traditional and folk music. The method book “Malay Children’s Folk Songs and Studies, for Viola Beginners” was created especially for Malay teenagers who would like to learn to play the viola or to switch from the violin to the viola in a short period. Moreover, it preserves the Malay folk music heritage among members of the new generation and will ultimately introduce Malay children’s folk songs to European children in the future.

Keywords: Viola, method book, traditional Malay children’s songs

Introduction

Most beginner level method books for the violin and viola are published in European countries. These method books accommodate the needs of children aged six to ten years old. The viola is normally played by teenage children as their hands, wrists, and palms are fully shaped at this age³⁷ and the size of the viola, which is between 14.5 to 17 inches, can be held by them at that time. The most popular method books used for teaching the viola in

³⁷ Popova, Larisa “Features of the transition violinists to the viola class” [Особенности перехода скрипача в классальта], *nsportal.ru*, May 1, 2014, nsportal.ru/npo-spo/kultura-i-iskusstvo/library/2014/05/01/metodicheskiy-doklad-osobennosti-perekhoda-skipacha (accessed June 04, 2016).

Malaysia include *Suzuki Viola School* method by Shinichi Suzuki from Japan, *All for Strings* by Gerald E. Anderson & Robert S. Frost, *Essential Elements 2000 for strings* by Michael Allen, Robert Gillespie & Tellejohn Hayes, *The ABC's of Viola for the Absolute Beginner* by Janice Tucker Rhoda, and *Viola Time Starters: A beginner book for viola* by Kathy & David Blackwell. These method books focus on teaching groups of strings players and contain the same tune that is played in unison during the lesson. These songs could be used for individual classes too. All of the books mentioned have the same content of pieces, scales, and exercises for altered treble, alto, and bass clefs. Normally, these books are initially played individually. When students have mastered the pieces, they will be grouped with other string instruments for unison ensemble playing. Most of the books use traditional, folk, and classical tunes that originate from North America, United Kingdom, Hungary, France, and Germany (Blackwell & Blackwell, 2012; Suzuki, 2013; & Anderson & Frost, 1985). Only a few of them include Asian tunes, but none of them feature Malaysian tunes.

As a result, the European methods strengthen and develop European children's knowledge of their musical traditions and culture but do not expand their knowledge of Asian countries' musical traditions and culture. In Malaysia, children usually learn to play an instrument mostly using method books for viola beginners published in America and the United Kingdom. These help them to expand their knowledge of European traditional and folk music but not their own traditional and folk music. Malaysians are much more familiar with Western musical forms rather than their own musical tradition³⁸

The researchers created a method book "Malay Children's Folk Songs and Studies (Études) for viola beginners, especially for teenagers who would like to learn to play the viola or to switch from the violin to the viola in a short period using native Malay folk songs. The researchers were motivated in creating this method book for beginner viola students from their workplace. During their research, beginner students started the trial version of method book with expectations to finish it in a semester's time. The book is based on the development of material for beginners and for faster achievement of Grade 1-2 of ABRSM board standards that is required for the Applied I category of grades for the Diploma and Degree programs.

The method book includes common knowledge for beginners such as the historical origin of the viola family, and the first maker of the viola and viola family. Also included are information about the creator of the modern used shape of the bow, types of wood used for the viola and bow, ways to care for the instrument and bow, and posture for holding the viola and bow. Introduction to the Alto (C) clef and placement of fingers for notes on the music staff as well as exercises on open strings in alto clef and using the difference of note values to adjust bow strokes, crossing strings are also included. The studies (études) have been developed to improve the technique and skills and are placed in front of each song, created based on Malay children's songs.

The researchers used songs from "Malay Traditional Children's Songs: Collection, Analysis and Application in Music Education" (2009) and the books *Kanak-Kanak Melayu*

³⁸Abdullah, Mohd Hassan "Introducing the Traditional Malay Children's Songs to the Early Childhood Education at the Malaysian National Child PERMATA Centre." *Research Gate.com* April, 2014, www.researchgate.net/publication/279944272_Introducing_the_Traditional_Malay_Children's_Songs_to_the_Early_Childhood_Education_at_the_Malaysian_National_Child_PERMATA_Centre (accessed June 03, 2016).

Tradisional Untuk Pusat Anak Permata Negara: Buku 1 & 2 by Mohd Hassan Abdullah, Mohd. Nizam Hj. Nasrifan, Mahayuddin Abd. Rahim.

Mohd Hassan claimed that “the traditional songs of young children are nearly lost in Malaysia due to the strong Western musical influence particularly in the formal school setting”³⁹.

The researchers used children’s collection of songs because it contains different types of simple songs that are currently not quite popular. The method book includes the songs collected followed some basic criteria such as simple rhythm, simple melody that is easy to memorize and small interval range (not more than perfect fifth). These songs were carefully selected and arranged based on the level of difficulty in playing. Songs were then transposed and adjusted for the method book. The students are to learn the pieces through singing, counting the value of beats and playing skills. The students will indirectly gain knowledge regarding their own tradition and folk songs when they play these songs. Moreover, it preserves the Malay folk music heritage among members of the new generation and will ultimately introduce Malay children’s folk songs to European children in the future.

Problem statement

The repertoire and method books available in bookstores and online (on the internet) mostly use a long process in learning as the books guide the player in a very detailed way of learning, that is by step by step teaching and focuses mostly on children under 12 years old. It also uses mostly European folk tunes in their learning. Unfortunately, no method book uses Malay folk tunes in their teaching and learning process.

Children typically start learning to play viola in their teenage years⁴⁰ due to the size of the instrument. In Malaysia, the researchers found that most violas being sold only exist in full sizes between 14.5 inches to 17 inches. To learn on such a big sized instrument compared to the violin, this requires almost fully formed hands, wrists, palms and the power and strength to produce a good sound quality.

Also, the researchers found that students from the Diploma/Degree program in Applied Viola are usually aged 17 to 22 years. In one semester, they need move on from beginner level to Grade 2 (Associated Board Royal School of Music [ABRSM]) level in technique and musical development. In this level of education, the students need to learn fast by studying the more complex way to achieve the requirement level and skills of playing. Moreover, the type of clef is another challenging learning process as the violist needs to learn reading the alto clef. Based on the problems stated above, the researchers developed a

³⁹ Abdullah, Mohd Hassan "Introducing the Traditional Malay Children’s Songs to the Early Childhood Education at the Malaysian National Child PERMATA Centre." *Research Gate.com* April, 2014, www.researchgate.net/publication/279944272_Introducing_the_Traditional_Malay_Children's_Songs_to_the_Early_Childhood_Education_at_the_Malaysian_National_Child_PERMATA_Centre (accessed June 03, 2016).

⁴⁰ Popova, Larisa “Features of the transition violinists to the viola class” [Особенности перехода скрипача в класс альты], *nsportal.ru*, May 1, 2014, nsportal.ru/npo-spo/kultura-i-iskusstvo/library/2014/05/01/metodicheskiy-doklad-osobennosti-perekhoda-skipacha (accessed June 04, 2016).

method book for viola beginners (teenage years) that focuses on technique and expression skills, based on Malay folk songs.

Objective/Aim

The objective of this method book is to teach students to play and sight-read scores on violain alto clef in the shortest possible time (3 months) using the tunes most familiar to them and created studies (études) that develop their technique and skills.

To ease the process of understanding how to perform on the instrument, adaptability to the instrument (left and right hands) and mastering the playing techniques are taught using native folk songs.

By adding this Malay method book of simple tunes and studies (études) for beginner viola players to the existing European repertoire will help acquaint those interested in learning Malay children's folk tunes.

Literature Review

Revision and examination of existing education methods and published books for viola and violin beginners brought researchers to the early history of realizing the method books and theses published in Europe.

The history of implementation of violin and viola teaching methods

Search for early historical first publications of method books for viola beginners showed that the Viola has always stayed in the second place after the violin and is usually taken as a minor instrument which could be played by every violinist.

Muñiz in Nicolás & Martínez stated that "Historically the viola, as an instrumental specialty, has been treated secondarily."⁴¹

It was interesting to trace the historical origin of where the first viola method book came from.

Arney claimed that "It is very important to trace the beginning of violin treatises from the 1750's down to the generations..."⁴²

The history of publishing treatises of teaching methods for violin players started in 1738 by Corette (*L'École du Orphée*) in France and continued through the years by Geminiani (*The Art of Playing on the Violin*- published in 1751), and by Leopold Mozart in 1756 (*The Violinschule*). In 1803, in the France Conservatoire, 3 great violinists and composers -Baillot, Rode, and Kreutzer -created the *Méthode de Violon*, which was circulated throughout

⁴¹Nicolás, Ana María Botella and Vicenta Fuster Martínez "Study and analysis of the initiation methods to the viola more used by teachers of elementary education of the province of Valencia" *Revista de Comunicación de la SEECI*, (38), 274-292, 276, November 15, 2015, dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5255846 (accessed June 03, 2016).

⁴²Arney, Kelley.M "A comparison of the violin pedagogy of Auer, Flesch, and Galamian: improving accessibility and use through characterization and indexing, " *UTA LIBRARIES*, April 13, 2006, 3, uta-ir.tdl.org/uta-ir/handle/10106/128 (accessed June 03, 2016).

Europe. In 1832 Spohr published his *Violin School* with introduced the use of a chin rest, which Spohr had invented in 1820. The first of method book, *Viola Methode L'Alto*, was published in 1825 by Italian violinist, composer and conductor working in Paris, Antonio Bartolomeo Bruni. The method focused on adult students who wished to switch from violin to viola (advanced level). A short one-page guide describes the difference between strings on the violin and the viola, including a brief explanation on the musical staff for each string starting from C string and placement of fingers for each note. The author then proceeded to include studies (études) which he called "*Lecture*". The line of all treatises showed that the violin and viola school took roots from French School.

At the beginning of 20th century, according to Davis⁴³, when music education started to focus on teaching children at public schools, there was a need to create new methods and materials of teaching for children of 6 to 12 years of age. The innovators from different countries in the world such as Zoltan Kodaly in Hungary, Karl Orff in Germany and Shinichi Suzuki in Japan started to create methods focused on education development of young students. They established methods based on teaching music for children from early childhood using their local language, folk and traditional music in the world.

Method books used in Malaysia

The search for literature regarding beginners learning to play the viola is based on existing method books popular and currently used in Malaysia. The survey showed that main books available were based on violin method books, with the books mostly transposed in alto clef but still using the violin approach. Most popular in use is the *Suzuki* method and repertoire books; *All for strings* (1985) by Anderson & Frost, *Essential Elements 2000 for strings* (2001) by Gillespie & Tellejohn, and a new collection published in Oxford, *Time Starters, a beginner book (for fiddle, viola, cello)* by Blackwell & Blackwell (2012). The other method books that are not commonly used have similarities in training approach, which include the folk songs in its content being from the country it was published in. Less attention was given to the development of sight-reading on viola, as this usually comes from experience when playing the pieces and studies (études). There exist special editions for viola sight-reading on teaching boards of ABRSM and Trinity. And of course, they are available on sale from these boards, written in the Western style and divided according to Grade. The existing literature on the viola remains scarce.⁴⁴

Methodology

The methodology consisted of compiling contents for the Malay method book for Malaysian viola beginners and evaluating it during the students' learning process while using the trial sample of the book.

⁴³Davis, Lauren. *A model view: achievement, recreation and adult beginning violin instruction*. Saarbrücken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2016, 3, musicengagementprogram.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Davis-thesis.pdf (accessed June 06, 2016).

⁴⁴Nicolás, Ana María Botella and Vicenta Fuster Martínez "Study and analysis of the initiation methods to the viola more used by teachers of elementary education of the province of Valencia" *Revista de Comunicación de la SEECI*, (38), 274-292, 276, November 15, 2015, dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5255846 (accessed June 03, 2016).

Method book content

Basic information and data which are necessary for the introduction of the viola for beginners was inserted. The first part of the book includes the place of origin of the viola and first of the famous luthier of “viola family” (violin, viola, violoncello and double bass). Also included are: the viola sizes used in practice, the parts of the instrument, the types of wood usually utilized for making the viola parts, the details of the bow (length, the inventor the modern shape of the bow, the parts of the bow and the type of wood and hair used), an introduction to the alto clef (C) and placement of notes on the music staff. Also included is information about how to care for the instrument and bow, and holding postures of left and right hands, as well as pictures showing examples. Some recommendations are given for the sequence of practice in the class and at home. This method book is similar to other method books for string players, starting with open strings, then moving on to the track used to understand the meaning and feeling of touching the strings, the distribution of the length of the bow on the strings of varying note values and crossing strings.

The second part of the book contains 20 Malay children's song-pieces presented from 9 states in Malaysia that were selected and listed in the sequence of difficulty. (Appendix 1)



Figure 1. Song-piece “Mok Puyoh Popom” (Kelantan)

For the development of technical performance skills and control using the bow, 20 studies (études) were created based on difficulty, rhythm, note values and bow patterns of each song. The studies (études) and pieces would be very useful for sight-reading practice in the alto clef using voice and instrument practice.



Figure 2. Study-9

In the recommendations for practice, it is mentioned that the song-piece should be sung first, using the name of each note, to get familiar with the pitch of the notes and the phrase of the tune. Then, secondly, the piece should be sung, with clapping based on the beats, to understand of rhythm values of the notes.

The piano accompaniment in the attached CD was created to further support students in fully understanding the full harmony of the song and to be able to practice in ensemble performance setting.

Arr: Robert Burrell

Moderato $\text{♩} = 70$

The musical score is for a piano accompaniment. It is in 3/4 time, marked Moderato with a tempo of 70 beats per minute. The score is written for a treble and bass staff. The melody is in the treble staff, starting with a half rest, followed by a quarter note G, a quarter note A, and a quarter note B. The bass staff provides harmonic support with chords. The score includes fingerings, dynamics (mp, mf, f), and articulation marks (accents, slurs).

Figure 3. Excerpt of accompaniment to Song-piece “Mok Puyoh Popom” (Kelantan)

Evaluation and feedback

Interviews and questionnaires were used as research instruments to collect data and feedback for evaluation. The students involved were provided with a sample of the method book, to learn the viola using it in the duration of one semester. During the learning process, interviews were conducted and feedback was collected during individual classes. After finishing the sample method book, the students were required to answer the questionnaire. Creswell mentioned that “a questionnaire or interview is a procedure in which a researcher makes changes in an instrument based on feedback on a small number of individuals who complete and evaluate the instrument”⁴⁵. The data from the interviews and questionnaires were collected and the means calculated. (Appendix 2)

Conclusion

“In the process of musical education, the stage of instrumental initiation is one of the most complex and important for several factors. The teacher has to make accessible and enjoyable the learning the instrument.”⁴⁶

⁴⁵Creswell, John W. *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research* (4th Edition). Nebraska-Lincoln: Pearson Education International, 2016, 284.

⁴⁶Nicolás, Ana María Botella and Vicenta Fuster Martínez “Study and analysis of the initiation methods to the viola more used by teachers of elementary education of the province of Valencia” *Revista de Comunicación de la SEECI*, (38), 274-292, 285-286, dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5255846 (accessed June 03, 2016).

The creation of the method book which is more relatable to students in its content, aims to pique children's interest in music. As it is compiled from children's folk songs, it develops not only the creative side of the student but also their technical skills. Carefully chosen repertoire will give the student confidence in controlling the instrument. The book focuses on the consistent development of student ability, technique, sight-reading and expressive skills.

Students who participated in the project and learned using the trial sample indicated that by following the steps in the book, they strengthened their knowledge of folk music of Malaysia and they learned interesting information about the creation of the instrument. The attached photos helped them to understand how to hold the instrument and bow, and the exercises on open strings, preparatory exercises (studies/études) for reading in the Alto (C) clef (that facilitated subsequent execution pieces and as well as scales) expanded the range of their knowledge of the viola. However, this method is not meant to be used as a guide for self-learning. The teacher has to guide the student in following the instructions correctly and give them support, and to stimulate the love for music, creativity and imagination.

APPENDIX 1

List of Malay children's folk songs

No	Song Title	Origin	Keys
1.	Cong Kedepai	Sarawak	E minor
2.	Nur Bulan Aku	Sabah	G Major
3.	Bat Bat Siku Ribat	Kedah	C Major
4.	Burung Hantu Bisu	Perlis	C Major
5.	Bek Simembek	Sarawak	D Major
6.	Jan Jan Jala Itik	Perak	C Major
7.	BuaiBuai Kangkong	Pahang	G Major
8.	EndoiEndoi Cak	Perlis	G Major
9.	Mok PuyohPopom	Kelantan	C Major
10.	Kapal Besar	Terengganu	A Major
11.	Tom Tom Tumbok	Kelantan	C minor
12.	Ampu-Ampu Bulan	Sabah	F Major
13.	Cik We We	Terengganu	F Major
14.	Cam Cam Punai	Sembilan	C Major
15.	Wau-Wau Pepeh	Kelantan	B flat Major

16.	Wa Wa Pepek	Pahang	F major
17.	Jong Jong Inai	Terengganu	B flat Major
18.	Cak Bere Cak	Kelantan	C Major
19.	Nenek SituaBongkok	Terengganu	D Major
20.	Tebang Tebu	Pahang	F Major

APPENDIX 2

Result

Question	Item	Mean
1.	The method book helped me to be confident in playing the viola.	4.6
2.	It is easy to learn the studies and pieces.	4.5
3.	I am familiar with the Malay tunes.	3.8
4.	The studies helped me to develop technical skills for my left hand.	4.8
5.	The studies in the method book helped me to develop technical skills for my right hand.	4.6
6	It is easier to play the pieces after practicing the studies.	4.6
7.	The introductory information in the book helped me to enhance my knowledge about the viola.	4.6
8.	The information about the Alto clef and the fingerings on the fingerboard is easy to understand.	4.5
9.	The information on instrument parts and bowing is effective.	4.5
10.	The information regarding hand positions on the instrument and bowing is easy to understand.	4.2
11.	The instructions in the studies helped to shape my practices.	4.6
12.	It is difficult to sing/play and count the beats at the same time.	3.6
13.	The CD accompaniment attached helped me with practicing.	4.3

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