



THE LEGACY OF

# SISTER LORNA ZEMKE

AND HOW SHE REVOLUTIONIZED THE KODÁLY  
APPROACH IN THE UNITED STATES



**Silver Lake College**  
A Franciscan Education *Transforming Lives*

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## Music And The Human Experience

Music has an important role to play in the lives of individuals, and in the cultural life of a people and nation. Thinkers and artists from Plato to Bob Dylan have commented on music's power to educate the soul, inspire the imagination, express the inexpressible and enrich our life in community. The experience of music is meant to be immersive — we sway in time, clap our

hands, sing or follow along with sheet music as we hear the sound. The human person is naturally musical in the same way that he or she is naturally meant to speak a language. Yet while we all recognize the importance of teaching young children how to speak, how to read and the basics of grammar, most of us do not think seriously about the importance of musical literacy and education.

# The Birth of The Kodály Method of Music Education

This is the problem that bothered and inspired Zoltan Kodály, a prominent 20th century Hungarian composer, linguist and ethnomusicologist. Kodály was raised in a highly musical family and began composing music at a young age. However, by the middle of his career teaching and composing, Kodály realized that the young people of Hungary had no concept of how to sing or of what distinguished bad music literature from good music literature. They also were unaware of the rich tradition of Hungarian folk music, the musical language of their people.

His efforts to change music education in Hungary were revolutionary and birthed similar revolutions across the globe as teachers and lovers of music began to embrace the concepts and principles of music education that became known as the Kodály Method.

In one iconic moment of the popular 1965 film, “The Sound of Music,” Maria, recently released from her nunnery, teaches the children of Captain von Trapp how to sing by assigning syllables to notes in a scale. As she puts it, “when you know the notes to sing, you can sing most anything!” Any film watcher who remembers this scene has been introduced to crucial concepts of the Kodály Method: **singing is the foundation of music education, and anyone can learn and understand music by using simple techniques that train the ear, mind, hand and heart.**

“

*Often a single experience will  
open the young soul to music  
for a whole lifetime.*

”

*-Zoltan Kodály*

# Sister Lorna Zemke, Pioneer of The Kodály Method

One of the earliest pioneers of the Kodály Method on the American scene is Silver Lake College's very own Sister Lorna Zemke. Over the course of her 45-year-long teaching career at SLC, Sister Lorna established the first master's program at SLC and the first master's program in music education in the world that embraced the Kodály Method for its foundation. She directed the Kodály Summer Graduate Music Program at SLC from 1972-2014, was founding member of the International Kodály Society and the Organization for American Kodály Educators, cofounder of the Midwest Kodály Music Educators Association (MKMEA) and the Association of Wisconsin Area Kodály



Educators (AWAKE). She helped create the American curriculum for Kodály education and pioneered programs that provide music education for toddlers and prenatal infants. By Sister Lorna's account, she has "taught on 110 college [and] university campuses; appeared [or]presented at more than 200 music and education conferences; and been involved in international conferences as a presenter or participant in Australia, Belgium, Canada, England, Greece, Hungary, Japan and Russia." No one would have guessed that an unassuming Franciscan sister with a love for music would become an international force in the expansion and promotion of the Kodály Method and an inspiring mentor to generations of music educators.

**Who is Sister Lorna Zemke and how did she come to play such a prominent role in the development and promotion of the Kodály Method in the United States?**



*Performing piano over the local radio station when I was 5 years old made a tremendous impression on me and motivated me to practice in order to be a better pianist.*



## A Musician Since Childhood

Sister Lorna's love of music was nurtured and encouraged throughout her formative years at home. She was the youngest of eight children and her parents were able to afford private piano lessons for her from the age of 4 onward. Sister Lorna, reflecting on her childhood, recalls:

**There was always some type of music playing on the radio in my home. ... I also had a unique opportunity [of ] performing piano over the local radio station in Oshkosh when I was 5 years old. This made a tremendous impression on me and motivated me to practice in order to be a better pianist. I still remember the piece I performed. It was a very easy arrangement of a composition by the Czech composer, Antonin Dvorak. I had a love for music all through my school years and enjoyed performing at recitals and family gatherings.**

By the age of 19, Sister Lorna had joined the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity and was attending Silver Lake College for her undergraduate degree. After graduating college, Sister Lorna moved to southern California and began teaching music at San Roque School, the school associated with the Franciscan-run Santa Barbara Mission.

## Sister Lorna Meets the Kodály Method

It was while teaching at San Roque School that Sister Lorna became aware of the Kodály Method. As part of her teaching, she took her school children to the open rehearsals of the Santa Barbara Symphony Orchestra which was conducted by Dr. Erno Daniel, a student of Zoltan Kodály. After attending the rehearsal, she had her students send thank you notes to Dr. Daniel and his musicians. This simple gesture of gratitude sparked a friendship and relationship that would shape the course of music education in the United States.

Thinking back to these thank you notes, Sister Lorna said:

*“ Dr. Daniel called me and told me he read them aloud to the orchestra. One favorite was from a fourth-grade boy who said, ‘You’re the best conductor in the world, and the only one I’ve ever seen.’ ”*

## The First Kodály Pilot Program

Dr. Daniel soon introduced Sister Lorna to his wife, Katinka Daniel, also an accomplished musician and student of Kodály’s, who was newly arrived from Hungary and eager to spread the concepts of Kodály. Sister Lorna invited Katinka Daniel to come and demonstrate some Kodály Methods in her San Roque classroom and was quickly enthralled by the hands-on approach to music education.

Sister Lorna recognizes that her lifelong inspiration and motivation were born in those early days in her classroom watching students respond to the Kodály Method.

*“ My motivation came from working with my mentor, Katinka Daniel, who was a constant [and] continuous source of inspiration and who I actually saw daily teaching the children in our school. The obvious excellence of instruction resulted in the learning exhibited by our students, musically and intellectually. Our students were becoming musically literate to a great degree, and eventually music educators from in and out of the state of California began to arrive and observe our children in music classes. Our school became a model of the success of using the Kodály Concept. I knew this message was meant to be shared. ”*





## Further Education & Scholarship

Encouraged by Katinka and Erno Daniel, who were both teaching at the University of Southern California (USC), Sister Lorna returned to school to study music and the Kodály Method specifically. She received her Master of Music from USC in 1968 and



her Doctorate of Musical Arts in Music Education from USC in 1973. Because the Kodály Method consists primarily of a set of general principles, music educators in the United States had an important task — to adapt the Kodály vision to fit the American context and culture. Sister Lorna was at the forefront of this effort in her teaching and scholarship. Both her master’s and doctoral theses focused on studying the Kodály Method, comparing its effectiveness to other methods of music education and its application to primary grades in the United States. Her doctoral dissertation on the Kodály Method was the first to ever be published in the English language, and she was instrumental in the translation into English of crucial Hungarian resources on the Kodály Method.

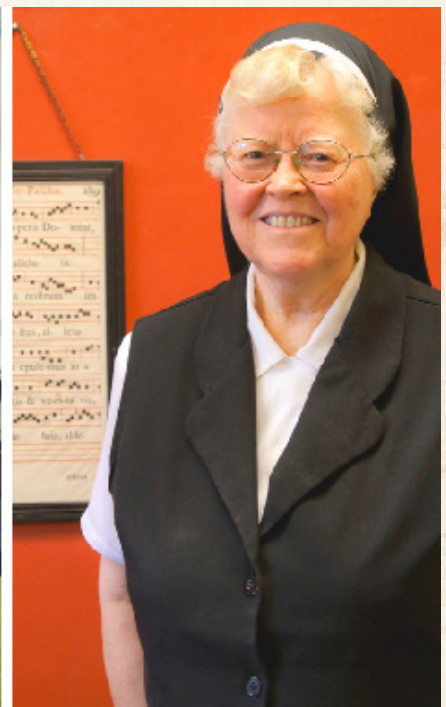
**As part of her doctoral work, Sister Lorna traveled to Hungary and spent time in classrooms with Hungarian students. She was amazed by what she found:**

“In Budapest, Kecskemet, Ezstergom and Szeged, I observed 55 music classes in elementary and junior high schools, and witnessed the fact that *all the students were musically literate*; they read musical notation as readily [and] easily as their native language. I also attended multiple concerts and operas, and noticed the adults, who obviously were not only musicians and other professionals, but also blue collar workers, were following music scores as the music was sung or performed; they also were musically literate. This was astounding to me because I had never experienced this anywhere in the United States.”

In addition to observing Hungarian students, Sister Lorna spent time learning from illustrious musicians and pedagogues both at USC and abroad. She encountered a long list of influential figures including: Zoltan Kodály himself, Halsey Stevens, Gregor Piatigorsky, Igor Stravinsky, Sir Georg Solti, Eugene Ormandy, Katalin Forrai, Lazlo Vikar, Maria Farka, Erzsebet Szonyi, Helga Szabo, Arpad Darazs, Anna Hamvas and others.

## Move to Silver Lake College

In 1971, Sister Lorna moved back to her alma mater, Silver Lake College to teach and to serve as the chair of their Music Department. At Silver Lake College, Sister Lorna found the perfect environment to establish and grow the first music programs with an emphasis on the Kodály Method. The undergraduate music degree that emphasized Kodály concepts proved so popular and grew so rapidly that Sister Lorna developed and obtained permission to start the first graduate degree program at Silver Lake College: a Master of Music in Music Education degree focused on the Kodály Method.



# Sister Lorna and the Growth of the Kodály Method in America

Formed by the very best in music education and with her programs at Silver Lake College newly launched, Sister Lorna embarked on many decades of important work teaching, developing Kodály Method curricula, collecting folk music, inspiring generations of music teachers and presenting at conferences around the world. The programs offered at SLC became known for their excellence, their comprehensive embrace of Kodály concepts and for their distinctly American spirit. Sister Lorna worked hard to incorporate America’s native music — jazz, folk, rag and blues — into the Kodály curricula and taught the master teachers under her how to do the same.

## **During this time, Sister Lorna and her fellow Kodály pioneers faced opposition from the status quo:**

“I was working when a good number of Americans were making the same effort in their states to change the typical and not too successful United States music education system into a Kodály-based music education system. The biggest challenge was convincing our general music teachers and the school administrators that there was a better way to get our students to love and enjoy singing and making music, and also to be able to read music just as they read the English language.”

Despite resistance, Sister Lorna and others persevered, giving demonstrations, lectures, and presentations around the country and world. Her drive came from an insistence that “music is for everyone. . . . Every person has an innate right of access to music as they do to other areas of human endeavor. The more we ‘know’ about something, the more we appreciate it, and it adds value to the beauty of our life. Music not only fosters a sense of aesthetic beauty, but also imparts humanistic and spiritual qualities. Kodály says he cannot imagine a person being fully human without music.”

*“ Music is for everyone. . . . Every person has an innate right of access to music as they do to other areas of human endeavor. ”*

# The Lovenotes Program

Firmly convinced that music is an important part of human and spiritual development starting at the youngest ages, Sister Lorna also developed music education programs for toddlers and babies still in the womb. In 1986, Sister Lorna developed the well-known program, “Lovenotes: Music for the Unborn,” that teaches expectant parents how they can use music as a bonding language with their unborn babies. This program has spread internationally as foreign students attending SLC have taken the program back to their homelands.

## **Reflecting on this program for the unborn, Sister Lorna explains how music can serve the baby’s development:**

“Even before the baby is born, somewhere in the fourth or fifth month of pregnancy, the child can hear sounds from the outside world. Music, then, can stimulate the child’s hearing and aid in the overall development of the pre-nate physically, mentally, psychologically and emotionally. Moreover, music allows the family — mother, father and siblings — to make the baby feel secure, wanted and loved even before birth. Because music is a language in its own right, it communicates and establishes a bond between parents and child long before birth.”

## Music for Tots

Sister Lorna also started a popular program based at Silver Lake College known as “Music for Tots,” classes for children from birth through age 5. The Music for Tots program enrolls approximately 200 children each semester and is designed to help improve not only the tonal, listening, coordination and rhythmic skills of children, but also their verbal and socialization skills, their ability to follow directions, focus attention and share with their peers.



## Recognition & Achievements

With encouragement from Katinka Daniel, in 1973, Sister Lorna and Robert Perinchief, another Kodály pioneer, founded the first Kodály organization in the United States: the Midwest Kodály Music Educators Association (MKMEA). This was the first of many Kodály organizations that Sister Lorna would found, support and participate in over the next three decades of her career.

Many of these organizations have gone on to honor and recognize Sister Lorna's contributions to the world of Kodály music education. The Organization of American Kodály Educators (OAKE) presented Sister Lorna with its highest honors: an Outstanding Achievement Award in 1985 and the OAKE Lifetime Achievement Award in 2002.



Dr. Chris Domes presenting Sister Lorna Zemke with a plaque for the Zemke-Daniel Rehearsal Hall.

## The Legacy of Sister Lorna at Silver Lake College

Because of Sister Lorna, Silver Lake College has become an internationally recognized destination for music professionals and music educators. Here at Silver Lake College, the legacy of Sister Lorna's work is tangibly present in the faculty and spirit of the Music Department and the rest of campus. Her efforts live on, especially in the prestigious faculty she has trained. Many of her protégés have become world-renowned music educators in their own right.

## World-Renowned Faculty

SLC is fortunate to have one such educator as the Chair of the Kodály Summer Graduate Music Program: Dr. John Feierabrand. A student of Sister Lorna, Dr. Feierabrand is an international figure in the world of music and movement development in children. He has published more than 70 books, curricula, DVDs and recordings, and received numerous awards for his work. Notably, he is the first U.S. recipient of the illustrious LEGO Prize, an international award given "to individuals or organizations that have made an outstanding contribution to the lives of children and are champions of learning through play."

## Physical Additions to SLC's Campus

Sister Lorna's presence on campus and her foundational music programs have shaped the physical developments and buildings of Silver Lake College. On Oct. 4, 2013, faculty, staff, students, alumni and friends of Silver Lake College of the Holy Family and the Holy Family Conservatory of Music celebrated the dedication of the Franciscan Center for Music Education and Performance, a 35,000-square-foot facility that is the new home of the college's music program and the conservatory. Sister Lorna's founding influence was what led to the eventual creation of this beautiful, functional space.



## The Music Department at SLC Today

Silver Lake College has continued the master's program in music education that Sister Lorna started decades ago. This program, the Kodály Summer Graduate Music Program, is a compact two-week summer session which takes place over four years. While earning a master's degree, students also earn an Organization of American Kodály Educators-endorsed Kodály certification. Graduate students also have the option of earning a Kodály certification in just three summers. In addition to the well-qualified faculty members who specialize in Kodály and other areas of music, Silver Lake College invites guest professors of extremely high caliber to instruct the program's course offerings. Many of the professors are themselves graduates of the Silver Lake College program. Graduate students are taught the latest research, theory and methods in music education as they fine-tune their professional skills and personal musicianship. Our music graduates and Kodály certificate holders serve as teachers and music supervisors in preschool through college music training programs in more than 20 states, as well as internationally.

# The Sister Lorna Zemke Endowment Fund

In 2016, Sister Lorna Zemke was honored by a musical composition, “The Cornerstone,” written by one of her students, Dr. Franklin Gallo and performed at a special recital. This piece was commissioned to kickstart the Sister Lorna Zemke Endowment Fund. The fund works to support a new faculty position in music education, allowing Sister Lorna’s legacy of music education to live on by way of an endowed chair of music education. If you are interested in learning more about or contributing to the Sister Lorna Zemke Endowment Fund, [please visit our website here](#).

## Conclusion

Silver Lake College has been permanently enriched and enlivened by the life and work of Sister Lorna Zemke. Not only has her outstanding scholarship and teaching ability made Silver Lake College into a premier destination for students of Kodály methods of music education, her warm and humble attitude of service has touched the hearts and minds of thousands of students. We are grateful to continue the work of excellence that she began here at Silver Lake College.

## Links to Learn More

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