

Text of article from *'The Richmond Magazine'* – November 2010

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WHEN 40 families gathered last month at *Roehampton University*, the question on their minds was one familiar to a great many parents: how far can you, should you, do you encourage your child to continue with music tuition when interest and enthusiasm wane?

In the case of these particular families, the offspring all belong to *Roehampton's Colourstrings Music School*, a Saturday venture founded on the teachings of Hungarian composer Zoltan Kodaly. The school takes children aged from 18 months to 18 years through a carefully formulated training of sight singing, instrumental tuition and performance.

Based on developing the inner hearing of very young kids through singing and harmonising, this has become a highly regarded method for developing what Kodaly believed was the natural musical talent of all children. There are no auditions for *Colourstrings*, yet its children reach high levels of attainment in strings, piano, guitar and flute. Children choose an instrument at some point between five and seven - until then the focus is on singing. Crucially, say observers, this gives them time to develop exceptional aural awareness and a solid grounding in musicianship that equips them well for a future in music.

But *Colourstrings* parents have the same issues as the rest of us in persuading kids to practise. More so, since the Saturday schedule is intensive: children have lessons of up to an hour in their chosen string instrument, plus more in musicianship and orchestral training. Many of the 250 students will be in lessons for three hours; younger ones up to 90 minutes.

"The key thing is routine," says Rachel Erdos, Music Director of the school. *"Make sure they get the instrument out Everyday, even for a few minutes, so it's a daily activity like cleaning your teeth."*

Another suggestion is to get the child to teach you what he or she has been learning – children love knowing more than their parents. They should also have something to aim for. *Colourstrings* stages regular informal concerts for parents which, says Rachel, are vital for showing children that they can give music to an audience and gain pleasure from the giving.

Inevitably, children do drift away from music. But the number of teenagers on the university campus each Saturday suggests that *Colourstrings* keeps them longer than most. Some will have belonged since they were toddlers; many will go on to musical careers. But supporting parents through the waxing and waning of interest - helping them to find ways of reigniting their child's passion - is as important as the musical education itself.