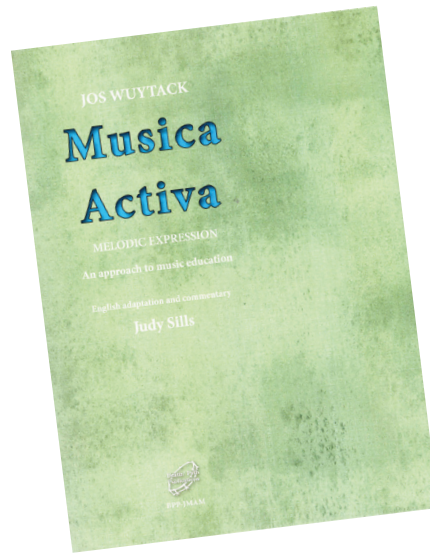


# SUPPORTING OUR LEARNING

Reviewed by Lisa J. Lehmborg

## Musica Activa: Melodic Expression

Written by Jos Wuytack/English Adaptation and  
Commentary by Judy Sills  
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*Melody is the most characteristic element of music. It is usually the predominant part of a composition. It catches our ear, and it is melody that we retain the most easily. True melody, as a means of expression, shares emotion, sentiment, and soul. It is with melody, specifically melodic intervals, that we express our true inner beauty.* —Jos Wuytack

This quote appears on the back cover of *Musica Activa: Melodic Expression*, a translation of an unpublished 1972 manuscript of internationally-revered music educator and Orff Schulwerk teacher educator Jos Wuytack. As his words imply, Wuytack provides a close-up examination of the many aspects of melody in this book. Its musical examples—many with playful lyrics—can be used as standalone lesson activities or as “jumping-off points” for creative pedagogy. Additionally, the English adaptation of the manuscript was created by Judy Sills, highly esteemed for her work as an Orff Schulwerk teacher educator in Canada, the United States, and abroad. This publication is a companion to *Musica Activa: Rhythmic Expression*.

The five chapters of *Musica Activa: Melodic Expression* each focus on a different component of melody, explaining in detail “how this component empowers the teaching of melody to children.” World music and original compositions in elemental style are plentiful in the large array

of melodic examples. Teachers are encouraged to use the provided musical examples as *models* for creating and customizing their lessons, utilizing their own resources, and seeking their students’ input.

Chapter One, “The Phenomenology of Melody,” begins by defining *phenomenology* and *melody*, with a brief explanation of each word’s etymology. The remainder of the chapter comprises sequential sections organized by musical interval (2nds through octaves). Each section includes descriptors of the respective interval’s qualities. Music on which the orchestrations for Orff instruments are based represents a variety of cultures. The chapter concludes with a chart of melodic examples for each interval presented, with harmonic function numerals for use in creating accompaniments.

“Ontogenesis of Melody” is the focus of Chapter Two, beginning with a brief etymology of *ontogenesis*, and a description of the process of language acquisition and the point (association of sound and symbol) at which children begin to acquire the necessary skills for creating and writing melodies. Wuytack advocates a teaching process that begins with elemental motifs then adds other notes, and follows the natural flow of speech. Six types of musical motifs are presented sequentially from bitonic (two pitches) through heptatonic (seven pitches), with orchestral examples and elemental orchestrations for Orff instruments for each. This chapter’s

orchestrations include both world music and simple compositions by Wuytack. Several are accompanied by instructions and/or diagrams for movement activities.

In congruence with the Orff Schulwerk approach's exploration of the "magic world of the pentatonic," the third chapter is devoted wholly to the pentatonic system. Hemi- and anhemi-pentatonic scales are discussed, as well as the ethos of the six authentic pentatonic scales: C, F, G (major) and a, d, and e (minor). The chapter is organized into sections according to the six authentic scales, with multiple orchestrations for Orff instruments and movement activities for each. Again, a variety of world cultures is represented in the musical examples.

The fourth chapter, "The Modes," focuses on the Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, and Aeolian modes, which are not only integral to the Orff Schulwerk approach but also "have made their way into pop music and folksongs, [providing] a rich medium for students and teachers to improvise and compose in the elemental style." Differences between modes, scales, modality, and tonality are discussed at the beginning of the chapter, followed by a "Modal Ethos" section that includes notated examples of each mode with descriptors of their qualities. My only criticism is that the included descriptors of qualities of intervals, modes, and so on (e.g., happy, pensive, melancholic) are somewhat Western-centric and may not be perceived similarly across world cultures. As in other chapters, orchestral excerpts and a variety of high-quality orchestrations for Orff instruments are included in assorted styles, from various world cultures.

General music educators will especially appreciate Chapter Five, "Activation Techniques for Melody," which overflows with ideas for active learning experiences to prepare and guide students' acquisition of the different aspects of melody. Sure-to-be engaging activities range

on a continuum of simple to complex, and include games, movement, visualization, singing, melodic dictation, audiation, improvisation, and composition.

Similar to the original *Musica Activa* (1994) publication, *Musica Activa: Melodic Expression* closes with several resource pages. Included are a set of "ABC's of Orff Pedagogy"; a chart showing pitch ranges of recorders, Orff pitched percussion instruments, and treble voices; and lists of concepts presented in the book with corresponding musical examples.

*Musica Activa: Melodic Expression* provides an organized, comprehensive, sequential, yet energetic and playful approach to explore a wide range of components of the concept of melody. One strength of the publication is the multiplicity of world cultures represented in the musical examples. Another is its flexibility of use. The included orchestrations are thick, rich in texture, and sometimes complex, yet lend themselves easily to simplification and could work well even if teachers chose not to use all of the parts. Additionally, the publication provides a sequential framework for approaching melody that can easily be adapted with alternate musical examples that fit particular groups of students. I highly recommend this book to elementary and middle school general music educators or anyone who is interested in delving further into melodic expression. ■

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