The Ward Method of Musical Formation

Centre for Ward Method Studies

The Catholic University of America
Benjamin T. Rome School of Music
The Ward Method of music instruction is a progressive program for teaching music theory, composition, and conducting to elementary school children through vocal instruction. The method was developed to teach American Catholic schoolchildren the fundamentals of music with a view to enabling them to sing some of the vast repertory of sacred music that forms part of the Roman Catholic Church’s tradition and the Western world’s cultural heritage. The Ward Method is unique in that it has a basis in Gregorian chant.
Who Was Justine Bayard Ward?

Justine Bayard Ward, née Cutting (1879–1975), was born in Morristown, N.J., into a family of talented “pioneer nobility.” From her earliest childhood she was involved in music, for she grew up in an atmosphere of appreciation for the cultural values of music and the arts. Her father, the successful businessman William Bayard Cutting, was one of the earliest supporters of the Metropolitan Opera Company in New York, where he was a box holder. It is thus not surprising that by her late teens, Justine Bayard Cutting was already an accomplished pianist who had successfully completed her formative musical studies in harmony, counterpoint, musical form, and orchestration. From this matrix of a sympathetic home life coupled with an early, strong technical training, she was able to fashion her future career in music.

It was not until she was received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1904, following the publication of the Motu proprio on Musica Sacra by S. Pius X in 1903, that Justine Bayard Ward’s mission in life became clear, namely: to dedicate herself to the realization of the musical and theological ideals set forth in that papal document. At the age of 25, she decided to concentrate her attention and her efforts entirely upon the music of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and for this purpose she traveled to Europe, settling in the quiet French village of Sable-sur-Sarthe, located a few kilometers from the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter at Solesmes. From 1921 to 1929 she studied at Quarr Abbey in the Isle of Wight and later at Solesmes itself with Dom André Mocquereau, O.S.B. (1849–1930), the celebrated paleographer, author of the classic treatise on Gregorian rhythm Le Nombre Musical Gregorien and choirmaster of the abbey. It was from this great master that Justine Ward learned the Gregorian art and its technique, doing so with such thoroughness that she was able to apply to her own Method, in noteworthy fashion, the rhythmic principles and the cheironomy used in Gregorian chant.

During her European sojourn, Justine Ward made the acquaintance of Jacques Dalcroze (1865–1950), and she became familiar with the important folksong collections of France, Holland, Italy, the Basque country, England, and Germany. Years later, many of the songs she analyzed were included in the books she wrote for schoolchildren.

In addition to her exceptional qualities as an artist and teacher with a great love for children, Ward’s many accomplishments in the musical education of young people as well as in the promotion of the Gregorian chant, were widely recognized by the Church and state in America and in Europe.
Originally launched from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., the Ward Method soon spread throughout the United States and then, in translation, to Holland, France, Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, Great Britain, and Ireland. In 1967, before she succumbed to her terminal illness, Ward began to prepare a new, revised edition of the Ward Method. That revision has now been completed by an international team of specialists in the Ward Method, resulting in the course of study that teaches music as fundamentally and as simply as reading, whilst not neglecting attention to purity of tone and mastery of rhythm.

In 1967, The Catholic University of America named its music building Ward Hall in her honor. The music school continues to be the seat of the Centre for Ward Method Studies.

The Foundations of the Ward Method

The Ward Method originated in the early years of the 20th century. Around 1910, profound reform of instruction in American Catholic schools was conceived at The Catholic University of America under the direction of the Rev. Thomas Edward Shields (1862–1921), dean of the Department of Education.

One of the most innovative aspects of the new program was the inclusion of music in the primary school curriculum, which was recognized as the very foundation of the child’s educational formation. After meeting Justine Ward and observing her remarkable talents, Father Sields invited her to collaborate in his reform efforts by writing a series of music education textbooks for school-age children.

Thus it was that Justine Ward began a very intense pedagogical activity at Catholic University. This allowed her to research, create, and finally apply her method of teaching music to young children aged 6 to 14. Her work was based upon the discoveries of modern psychology and inspired by the philosophical ideas of Father Shields, particularly his Philosophy of Education.

According the Father Shields — philosopher, psychologist, and biologist — any true and genuine “education” had to be primarily active, by enabling the involvement of imagination and the expressive powers of the children, discovering their latent capabilities and rendering them active, awakening the child’s curiosity and stimulating his or her interest, helping the child to think.

Justine Ward wrote a biography of Father Shields in which she transcribed and explained important passages in this fundamental work, which expresses the essential ideas of this philosopher on the subject of education. As a matter of fact, Father Shields was far ahead of his own time in many respects and many of his ideas are surprisingly relevant today.

The first task of education is to bring the emotional life of the child into subjection to law and under the control of the intelligence. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are only tools, the skilled use of which will be helpful throughout life, but it is utterly absurd to think of them as fundamental. It is music and art which constitute the enduring foundations of education, and not the three R’s. When this truth is forgotten it is not surprising that the effects of education are seen to be superficial and unsatisfactory. . . .

Education is not a mere knowing or remembering; it is preeminently a matter of doing. . . .

The primary room, instead of being a quiet, sad place where little children fear to move lest they should disturb a nervous teacher or break in upon the profound train of thought whereby their young companions are learning to master the A-B-C’s, must present a joyous, active scene. . . .

Next to the teaching of religion, the teaching of music and art constitutes the most important work in the elementary school. The real foundations of character are not to be found in the intellect but in the emotions and the will properly enlightened through the intellect, and it is through music and art that the imagination and the emotions may be reached and effectively developed. (249–50)

Completely inspired by and built upon the philosophical principles of T.E. Shields, the Ward Method makes musical education a part of the total system of instruction, integrating music into the school curriculum instead of marginalizing it. In the classroom, each child receives the opportunity for musical training, which is not restricted to the gifted. The instruction is adapted to the physical, psychological, and mental development of the child, and thus aids in the process of harmonious and comprehensive growth.

The Ward Method was used in a great many schools throughout the United States and Canada, and it was soon adopted in various European countries as well. In 1928 the Ward Method was introduced into the schools in Holland, whence it spread to France, England, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Portugal, and Spain, and eventually to Brazil, Japan, and the Philippines.

In Portugal, the Ward Method was introduced in 1950 by the legendary Julia d’Almendra, great apostle of Gregorian chant in her native land. In 1953 she established the Centre for Gregorian Studies, the first college-level academy of sacred music in Portugal, which in 1976 became a state school named Gregorian Institute of Lisbon. In 1988, the Ward Centre of Lisbon — Julia d’Almendra was created as a well-deserved tribute to this outstanding artist and educator who strove persistently to elevate the level of music instruction in Portugal. Since 1988, the Ward Centre has promoted and spread the teaching of music according to the Ward Method. Similar work is carried on today by the centers in France, Germany, and the United States.
What is the Ward Methodology?

The great overall objective of the Ward Method is to facilitate a solid musical, aesthetic, and spiritual preparation for all children, quickening their mental responsiveness and their powers of self-expression. One of the main principles firmly upheld by Justine Ward was that the classroom teacher could best serve the musical education of the students by recognizing the link between music and the other subjects being taught. This means that Justine Ward was conscious of the great importance of what in today’s discussion is called the “interdisciplinary approach” to teaching. One of her great preoccupations was to simplify as much as possible the technical musical material by freeing it from all that could be considered abstract or artificial in her method, which is essentially practical and follows a logical progression in each of the musical materials studied. The grade teacher was thus enabled to impart the instruction — a point on which Mrs. Ward insisted. “If music is to be transmitted from generation to generation as an essential part of the cultural (and religious) inheritance of each child,” she said, “it cannot be treated as an isolated subject. An isolated truth will never become functional. Music must be taught, if at all, in close correlation with the other branches of knowledge, by the same teacher who imparts them and in the regular school hours. Thus the musical future of our children is in the hands of the grade teacher.”

Proceeding from the familiar to the relatively unfamiliar, an essential methodological principle is the motivation of children to discovery for themselves, thereby also developing their own critical and aesthetic sense. The entire repertory learned, whether popular or classical, is analyzed, and the children are encouraged to discover and to express their own opinions. A simple folksong, a Gregorian melody, a Bach chorale, a theme of Mozart or Beethoven, a little canon for two or three voices, or even a collective composition created by the youngsters themselves in the classroom — all these are excellent opportunities to discover and experience music.

The teacher’s pedagogical sensitivities are called upon throughout the lessons. Justine Ward was adamant that the good teacher never resolve a child’s difficulty by solving it for the pupil, suggesting a response or singing the tones being sought. The teacher who would give in to this temptation, she said, through impatience or haste, would be “educating” in a very superficial sense of the term.

The fundamental principles of the Ward Method may be summed up in five points.

1. The basic principle is that music is a fundamental element in the development of the intellect and the formation of character.

2. The Ward Method correlates the study of music with the other subjects of the curriculum, with special attention to those aspects of music that foster appreciation of and participation in liturgical singing.

3. Whilst the voice alone is the basis of the musical training imparted, foundations are laid for a deep and broad study of musical theory.
4. The Ward Method consistently applies the paedagogical principle that the normal process of development is from content to form.

5. The method proceeds from germinal musical elements, through a series of easily graded developmental phases, toward the complex details involved in the artistic rendering of musical compositions.

Consequently, a typical Ward Method lesson of some 20 minutes’ duration will contain these elements:

- Vocal exercises (tone quality, timbre)
- Intonation (eye and ear training, pitch)
- Rhythm gestures and dictation
- Staff notation
- Original creative work, oral and written
- Songs with and without words

How to Learn the Ward Method

Certification as a qualified Ward Method teacher requires successful completion of all four Ward courses, which cover Books, I, II–III, IV, and the Gregorian Chant Practicum. Textbooks and teaching materials can be ordered from The Catholic University of America Press (cuapress.cua.edu). Information about Ward Method courses is available from Rev. Robert Skeris, director of the Centre for Ward Method Studies in the Benjamin T. Rome School of Music of Catholic University; email skeris@cua.edu.

Visit the websites below for information about and resources for the Ward Method

- music.cua.edu/ward-method.cfm (The Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.)
- wardcenter.org (San Antonio, Tx.)
- schola-st.gregoire.org (France)
- ward-zentrum.de (Germany)
- centroward.wix.com/centrowardlisboa (Portugal)
- musicasacra.com/music-pedagogy-for-children/ward-method-instruction (Church Music Association of America)
que ce petit mot tout court, mon Père, vous porte mes félicitations les plus profondes avec l'expression de mon respectueux souvenirs.

Justin B. Hard

The Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C.