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Demystifying Dalcroze: Part 1

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Dalcroze Eurhythmics, the unique music teaching approach of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, was revolutionary in its day and remains an outstanding approach to music education. Jaques-Dalcroze ranks alongside Zoltán Kodály and Carl Orff as one of the leading figures in music education in the early twentieth century, and the influence of Dalcroze Eurhythmics has reached beyond the field of music to impact the worlds of theatre, dance, and visual art forms. Yet Dalcroze Eurhythmics is a bit of a mystery for many music educators. Some may know a bit about it, and some have never heard of it. Those who have had some experience in the approach know that in Dalcroze all aspects of music are studied through physical movement. Those who know it only as "music through movement" may be surprised to realise that Dalcroze Eurhythmics also encompasses ear training and improvisation. But why movement? And where did it all come from? And is it relevant to the contemporary music classroom? This article aims to offer a brief introduction to Dalcroze Eurhythmics with the hope of directing the reader towards the answers to those questions.

Dalcroze Eurhythmics addresses the "craft" and the "art" of music by using physical movement as a powerful tool to study the musical language. The approach is based on the principle that every element of music - time, duration, melody, flow of energy, expressive elements, and so on - can be experienced by the movement of the body through space, and that movement, being instinctive for everyone, should be the natural starting point for music education.[1] Modern neuroscience research is now proving the theories that spawned the birth of Dalcroze Eurhythmics: that the brain perceives rhythm initially in terms of motor movement,[2] and that by harnessing physical movement we can in turn develop and refine our musical skills.

The man behind the Dalcroze approach was Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865 - 1950). Born in Vienna to Swiss parents, his first music teacher was his mother Julie, who had studied the educational philosophy of Pestalozzi and was herself a fine musician.[3] At the age of 19 Jaques-Dalcroze went to Paris to study with Délibes and Fauré, and then with Bruckner in Vienna. In addition to composing, conducting and teaching music, Jaques-Dalcroze was deeply interested in the theatre and dance, people and psychology,[4] interests which clearly influenced the development of his pedagogical ideas, which in turn influenced generations of music educators and leaders across many artistic fields.

In 1892, at 27, Jaques-Dalcroze was appointed Professor of Harmony at the Geneva Conservatory of Music. It was here in Geneva that he realised his students were relying on theory and rules to execute their harmony exercises, and that the expressive qualities of music often eluded otherwise technically exceptional students.[5] After initially focussing on aural exercises to develop inner hearing, Jaques-Dalcroze became convinced that good musical understanding involved not just the sense of hearing, but also the response of the muscular and nervous system. "...I came to regard musical perception which is entirely auditive as incomplete..." wrote Jaques-Dalcroze in 1919, adding that "...musical sensations of a rhythmic nature call for the muscular and nervous response of the *whole organism*".[6] He began to incorporate movement into his lessons, devising exercises in hearing, reading or singing music that also involved a physical response in order to aid the students' learning.[7] Over the coming years Jaques-Dalcroze experimented with and refined his ideas, and his "method" gained widespread acclaim in the period leading up to the first world war.[8] Leading artists in other fields became followers of his work. Of great significance for the spread of the approach to Australia was the opening of the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, established in 1913.

Dalcroze Eurhythmics comprises three branches: Rhythmics, Improvisation, and Solfège (known in Australia as Ear and Voice training).

> Rhythmics, a concept unique to Dalcroze, engages the whole body in the physical exploration of the elements of music: we step a rhythm, show harmonic movement with our bodies, follow the changing dynamics and tempo of a piece of music, and so on.

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[1] Joan Pope, 'Émile Jaques-Dalcroze', Available from < http://www.dalcroze.org.au/emile.html > [18 April 2013].

[2] Rebecca S. Schaefer, Alexa M. Morcom, Neil Roberts and Katie Overy, 'Moving to Music: Effects of Heard and Imagined Musical Cues on Movement-Related Brain Activity.' *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 8, article 774 (September 2014), doi: 10.3389/fnhum.2014.00774.

[3] Lois Choksy, Robert M. Abramson, Avon Gillespie, Daivd Woods and Frank York, *Teaching Music in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), 40.

[4] Virginia Hoge Mead, *Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Today's Music Classroom* (New York: Schott Music, 1994), 2.

[5] Ibid., 1.

[6] Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, *Rhythm, Music and Education,* 5th ed. (Ashford, Kent: The Dalcroze Society Inc., 2000), x.

[7] Lois Choksy et al., *Teaching Music in the Twenty-First Century*, 43.

[8] 'Dalcroze Eurhythmics', Available from < http://www.dalcroze.org.au/eurythmics1.html > [16 April 2013].

Improvisation fosters the development of the student's interpretation *and* creative skills, developing musicians capable of communication.

Solfège (Ear and Voice) training develops knowledge of pitch, intervals, scales, harmony and tonality.[9] In Australia and the UK, movable-doh solfa is used extensively, although in parts of Europe and America fixed-doh solfège is the norm.

The culmination of the learning done through each branch is found in *plastique animée*, best described as a kind of living analysis of a piece of music in which students examine, through movement, the elements of energy, character, harmony and form in the piece under study. This is not choreography in the dance sense, but rather an attempt to use a vocabulary of movement and the physical space to illuminate the structure of, and relationships within, a musical work.

Jaques-Dalcroze's approach is characterised by the belief that theory should follow practice. Through Dalcroze Eurhythmics we gain a physical understanding of music before engaging in a theoretical understanding or indeed performing.[10] Jaques-Dalcroze observed that learning is done initially through the senses, and his approach to teaching integrates the aural, visual, tactile and kinesthetic senses.[11] Jaques-Dalcroze's ideal was that children would learn about music physically before they began to study an instrument. These were revolutionary ideas in a time where playing an instrument and learning the theory of music were the usual starting-point for a musical education.[12]

Jaques-Dalcroze continued until his death in 1950 to develop and refine his ideas for a musical training in which all aspects of music are experienced and learned through movement. As he taught and gave demonstration lessons in the period prior to the First World War, his work gained a wide following. Although he wrote about his work and published compositions for teaching, Jaques-Dalcroze did not formally codify his teaching. Rather, those students who learnt from him went on to teach to his principles, and so Dalcroze Eurhythmics was passed to the next generation through the model of "master and apprentice". It is for this reason that many Dalcrozians prefer the term "approach" rather than "method" to describe the Dalcroze work.

So what does a Dalcroze lesson look like? The answer depends partly on the age and stage of the class, and on the individual teacher, for a Dalcroze music education is relevant all the way from the early childhood music class through to the training of professional musicians, and each Dalcroze teacher will have their own particular style. But there are many unifying elements to the approach. Typical Dalcrozian exercises include *quick reaction* games, in which students are asked to respond in a specified way at a given signal; *follow* exercises in which students respond freely in movement to live music and changing elements of dynamics, tempo and style; *canon* exercises in which students respond to what they have heard one or more bars after hearing it, and whilst still processing what is currently being played; and the use of *full arm beating* to conduct metre whilst singing or stepping rhythms. Regardless of whether of whether a class is primarily focussed on rhythmics, solfège or improvisation, elements of each branch are found in every lesson. In a Dalcroze class students are required to listen profoundly and respond personally. Skills in listening, concentration, memory and problem solving are developed alongside more overtly "musical" skills - and yet musicians would agree that the aforementioned list of skills are also essential for musicians.

A Dalcroze rhythmics class is traditionally led by the teacher from the piano or another instrument, including percussion or the voice. Live music performed by the teacher, from the repertoire and improvised, forms the basis of the class. The skilled teacher is able to direct much of the lesson through their playing and assess through observing the students' physical responses, so that long explanations and individual corrections are not always necessary. In any given rhythmics class we may step rhythms and note values, analyze forms by mapping them out in space, recognise and respond to timbre and texture through gestures, or travel across the space to show the line of a phrase.[13] Objects are often used as aids; a ball bounced on the down-beat can help solidify a sense of metre; a scarf trailed through the air can illuminate the beginning and end of a phrase. In rhythmics the students are required to listen acutely and respond physically. To expand on just one example, take the skill of starting a piece of music in an *andante* tempo - a moderate walking speed. To achieve this the student must be able to internally imagine the correct tempo, prepare to execute it (with a breath in, or by raising the arm above the keyboard), and then play in time. To develop this skill in a Dalcrozian way, the student would have many opportunities to physically take that 'moderate walk', supported by appropriate *andante* music; they would experience the energy required to prepare for the first step, and the feel of maintaining a steady walking pace. Later, the student will be able to recall those motor sensations internally when required to imagine the tempo, take that first breath, and play.

Dalcroze solfège (in Australia, "ear and voice") exercises in moveable-doh solfa (or fixed-doh solfège in other countries) also employ elements of movement to help develop inner hearing. Just think of pitches that rise or fall, intervals that are comparatively larger or smaller, and harmonies that progress to the tonic or modulate away from "home" - all these

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[9] 'About Dalcroze', Available from < www.dalcroze.org.uk > [1 November 2014].

[10] 'Dalcroze Eurhythmics', Available from < http://www.dalcroze.org.au/eurythmics1.html >

[11] Virginia Hoge Mead, *Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Today's Music Classroom*, ii-iii.

[12] Giles Comeau, *Comparing Dalcroze, Orff and Kodály: Choosing your Approach to Teaching Music.* Translated R. Covert (Ontario: CFORP, 1995), 40.

[13] 'About Dalcroze', Available from < www.dalcroze.org.uk >

concepts are best described using movement metaphors like up or down, near or far, travel and arrival, big or small, tension and relaxation.[14]

A Dalcroze improvisation class explicitly teaches the skill of improvisation, something Jaques-Dalcroze viewed as an essential musical skill. The ability to improvise, even very simply, requires an understanding of phrase and form, key relationships, style and character. Just as the elements of a rhythmics or solfège class often overlap, improvisation is found throughout any Dalcroze lesson: students are learning to improvise every time they are asked to move in response to what they hear in a rhythmics class, or when they are asked to sing an answering phrase in a solfège class. From such simple beginnings as creating a gesture to match a sound, the improvisation class develops the skill of improvising: in movement, with the voice, and, finally, on an instrument.

In Dalcroze classes we listen and *move* - but we also sing, we use solfa, we play instruments, we read music and we write things down. However, our primary understanding of the musical concepts under study comes first from a physical experience, with the aim that the principles learned through physical experience act as a bridge between the abstract musical concept and its execution.

In 2014, well over one hundred years since Jaques-Dalcroze first demonstrated his method in Europe, Dalcroze Eurhythmics continues to be a relevant and effective way to teach music to all ages. Around the world, the approach is applied in a vast array of areas spanning early childhood teaching, classroom and instrumental teaching, university training, professional development for performing musicians, working with children with special needs and working with seniors. Recent and ongoing research is proving scientifically the value of a movement approach to music education.

Dalcroze teacher training is divided into four levels. The Foundation Award is the introductory level of training, which, together with the Intermediate Award, offers the "stepping stones" towards the Dalcroze Certificate which allows the holder to practice as a Dalcroze teacher. The Licentiate allows the holder to teach Dalcroze at advanced levels such as in a University music department. The Diplôme Supérieur is the highest level of teacher training, qualifying the holder as a master teacher, and is rarely awarded outside the Jaques-Dalcroze Institute in Geneva.

In Geneva the training required to obtain a Licentiate is four years of full-time study. Because most Australians come to Dalcroze as music students, or graduates with a tertiary music degree who may well have worked professionally for many years as teachers or performers, the training in Australia recognises this experience and tends to focus on movement and improvisation skills, which are not traditionally included in many Australian music courses.

In 2015 we celebrate the centenary of the Jaques-Dalcroze Institute in Geneva, as well as 150 years since Émile Jaques-Dalcroze's birth. A special Congress in Geneva will mark the occasion (20-24 July 2015), followed shortly by the Second International Conference of Dalcroze Studies in Vienna (26 - 29 July 2015), both of which will draw leading Dalcroze practitioners, academics and students from across the globe.

In Australia we are fortunate to have three women who hold the *Diplôme Supérieur:* Dr Joan Pope (OAM), President of Dalcroze Australia, Dr Sandra Nash, Dalcroze Australia Director of Studies, and Margaret Bostaille. Dalcroze Australia is a member of the Dalcroze Eurhythmics International Examinations Board and the FIER (the International Federation of Eurhythmics Teachers). Australian Dalcroze teachers present workshops and teacher-training across Australia and in the UK, Canada, and South East Asia. The next Australian Summer Course will be held in Sydney, 7 - 16 January 2015, featuring guest teacher Jacqueline Vann (UK), *Diplôme Supérieur* (Institut Jaques-Dalcroze, Geneva), and a host of Australian teachers.

In the words of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze himself, "The object of education is to enable pupils to say at the end of their studies, not "I know," but "I experience."[15] In coming *Opus* issues we hope to bring you several interviews with leading Dalcroze teachers, each with a particular focus that will aim to "demystify" Dalcroze just that little bit more.

Want to know more? Start here...
Dalcroze Australia: www.dalcroze.org.au or find us on Facebook
FIER: www.fier.com

[14] Karin Greenhead, 'Aural training in the Dalcroze Practice: Dohs fixed and movable.' *Le Rhythme* (2013): 22 - 24.
[15] Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, *Eurhythmics, Art and Education.* Translated F. Rothwell (New York: A.S. Barnes and co., 1930), 58.