MORE THAN MERE MOVEMENT

DALCROZE EURHYTHMICS

Dalcroze techniques work with students of all ages. This widely read summary of Dalcroze's method was first published in the MEJ in February 1986.

BY VIRGINIA HOGE MEAD

Since the early 1900s, the influence of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze has been felt worldwide in the field of music as well as dance, theater, therapy, and education. To understand this influence, one needs to know something of his lifelong endeavors and dedication to improving the teaching of music. As early as 1905, Dalcroze spoke to a music education conference on "Proposals for a Reform of Music Instruction in the Schools." From the start, his ideas were considered unusual and even avant-garde, yet he continued to probe the topic of music education reform throughout his life.

Dalcroze was born of Swiss parents in 1865 in Vienna; however, he spent most of his life in Geneva. With exceptional musical abilities, a strong interest in the theater and dance, a fascination with psychology, and a gift for teaching, he chose as his lifelong profession the teaching of music. In 1892, he was appointed professor of harmony and solfège at the Conservatory in Geneva. It was in his solfège classes that the seeds of his work were sown. Dalcroze realized that his students could not actually hear the harmonies they were writing. Their sense of rhythm was only what they could perform by adding one note value to the next; there was no physical feeling of timing as it related to the dynamics of movement of the music.

Ear-training "games" sharpened the students' perception.

In his solfège classes, Dalcroze began to devise musical exercises to develop more acute inner hearing as well as an inner neuromuscular feeling for music. His ear-training "games" sharpened the students' perception and resulted in a more sensitive response to the musical elements of performance: timing, articulation, tone quality, phrase feeling. At the same time, he noticed subtle, spontaneous movements of the body much the same as those a speaker might exhibit through physical gestures. The body was conscious of the life and movement of the music. Dalcroze capitalized on these natural instinctive gestures and began to ask his students to walk and swing their arms or conduct as they sang or listened. As a gifted improviser, he inspired his students to feel the movement or flow of the music and to respond to the variations in time and energy. He called this study of music through movement "eurhythmics," from the Greek roots *eu* and *rythmos* that mean "good flow" or "good movement." He also encouraged his students to discover the music within themselves and to express themselves musically through keyboard improvisation as they might express an idea through speech, an emotion through gesture, or a picture through painting. (This idea of music teaching, so often ignored, can be the real awakening of musical understanding and interest in students.)

Thus the Dalcroze approach to music education was born. From those early days at the Geneva Conservatory, Dalcroze continued to study and

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experiment with the three aspects of his teaching that formed the basis for the development of musicianship: solfège, eurhythmics, and improvisation. His students were enthusiastic followers of an approach to music making that caused them to hear, feel, and express music with their whole being. Music awakened in them a new experience of aural and muscular sensations, and they responded with heightened mental, physical, and emotional consciousness. Although the faculty at the conservatory recognized Dalcroze's dedication to the development of musical sensitivity in his students, they clung to the traditional method of solfège in all of its drilling and static aural exercises. Besides, the "costumes" worn for eurhythmics created quite a stir: corsets and high collars were "out," and bare feet and bare legs were "in."

Between 1903 and 1910, he demonstrated his method at conferences, appearing throughout Switzerland and Western Europe. Children's classes were started all over Switzerland. Enthusiasm and interest grew through the first decade of the century.

In 1910, the Dhorn brothers, who were German industrialists, observed and were inspired by the work of Dalcroze. They built a school for him at Hellerau, Germany, where several hundred students lived and studied. Hellerau became a world center for the arts. In 1913, the Gluck opera *Orpheus* was performed at the school, where Dalcroze directed a chorus and soloists who were trained in eurhythmics. The production was the climax of Dalcroze's work at Hellerau, where music, movement, lighting, and staging converged in perfect harmony. The school closed at the onset of World War I, and Dalcroze returned to Geneva. There the Emile Jaques-Dalcroze Institute was founded in 1915.

Through an article in *Good Housekeeping,* Dalcroze's work was introduced in the United States. Teachers came to America to teach, and in 1915 the New York Dalcroze School was founded. By the early 1920s, eurhythmics courses were listed in the catalogs of the Cleveland Institute of Music and Carnegie Institute of Technology (now called Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh.

Dalcroze continued to revise and develop his ideas up until the time of his death in 1950. Those fortunate enough to study with him speak of him as a unique human being—a warm-hearted individual whose standards and expectations were high and who could cause quite a feeling of anxiety in students with his keen criticism. However, his humor and charm could easily relax a tense situation. His enthusiasm for life, his intense belief in what he was doing, and his ability and sensitivity as a musician resulted in a lasting devotion from thousands of students.

Classes Today

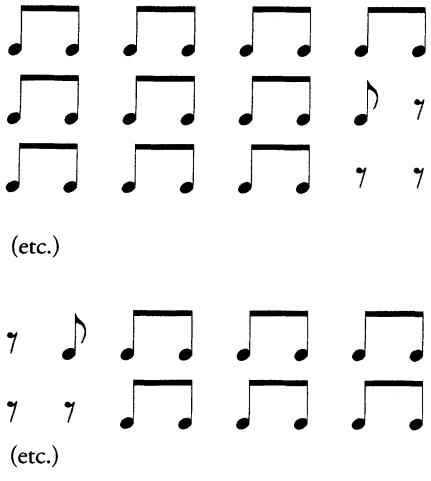
Dalcroze techniques are found at every level of music education, in universities, colleges, and public and private schools, as well as in private teaching studios. The Dalcroze approach is taught by licensed teachers in settings where the topics of solfège, eurhythmics, and improvisation are adhered to as a unified program. It was his belief and intent that the three subjects be intertwined. Thus the development of the inner ear, an inner muscular sense, and creative expression are the core of basic musicianship. In public and private schools and studios, cognizant teachers who use eurhythmics techniques relate ear-training games, singing, and improvisation to the movement experiences. For some teachers, Dalcroze techniques are practiced only as eurhythmics. When solfège and improvisation are integrated with eurhythmics, students have experienced the method as Dalcroze intended. They have studied the music aurally, orally, and physically and then expressed it creatively as their own.

A class of teenagers could be exploring the subject of rests in music: active and passive rests and rests of varying lengths. Besides feeling the function and effect of rests through movement, these similar exercises may be designed for ear-training or sightsinging.

For exercise 1, students step eight eighth notes at a given tempo. They repeat the measure, each time substituting rests at the end until there is a whole measure of rests. The number of rests then are added from the beginning of the measure (see figure 1). The same exercise could be clapped, played on percussion instruments, or sung using the major or minor descending scale. As an improvisation exercise, small groups of students could be asked to create a movement sequence based on the above exercise of disappearing and reappearing rests. Students could also be asked to improvise a composition at the keyboard in which rests are the featured element in the music.

For another exercise, while singing

Figure 1. An exercise for adding rests and then removing them



a simple sight-reading example, students could be asked to insert one particular kind of rest upon command. The command "hop" could mean a quarter rest and "hip" could mean a half rest.

Basic Principles

How does the Dalcroze method result in musical learning? It is the realization and understanding of his philosophy that has resulted in certain principles inherent in any Dalcroze teaching. These four basic tenets apply to all learning, whatever the age and whether it be for the listener, the performer, or the creator.

1. The skills of perceiving and responding to music must be developed. With the young, it may merely mean playing a musical game and responding to the beat. At a more advanced stage, it could mean hearing a phrase and then stepping and conducting it twice as fast.

2. Students must develop an inner sensing of music: the inner aural sense and the inner muscular sense. Students will internalize the time, space, and energy relationships in movement that correspond to those in music. As an example: the young child learns to adjust his space and timing as he "takes a walk (or a run)" and attempts to arrive at a certain place by the end of the song. Older students develop an inner sense of time, space, and energy relationships when rolling a ball to the musical phrases. The same relationships are sensed in the student's physical being before the student begins to play a rhythm pattern on a percussion instrument. Students should be taught to prepare for playing and singing by feeling or sensing the relationships of note values before beginning to perform. For example, a student can scan a rhythm pattern (see figure 2) and immediately establish a tempo beat and the various rhythmic units before he or she begins to perform.

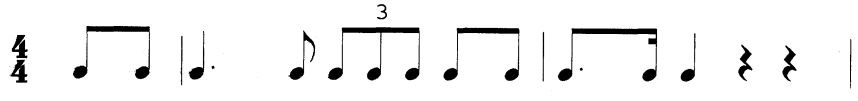
3. Sharper communication between the ear, eye, body, and mind must be developed. Because of the movement aspect of the Dalcroze techniques, students are actively involved and mentally attentive in their listening and responding. Links are constantly being made between the ear that hears, the eye that sees notation, the body that feels, and the mind that comprehends and sends messages back to the body for a response. By design, Dalcroze exercises quicken the reaction time and sharpen the link of communication needed by anyone listening to or performing music. This need is best exemplified in the conductor or concert performer who operates in a constant cycle of activity between the ear, eye, body, and mind.

4. Students must develop a storehouse of aural and kinesthetic images that can be translated into symbols and, upon recall, be performed at will. This is the key to music reading. This source of musical ideas becomes a repertoire for expressive performance and a means toward a more sensitive perception. To acquire this repertoire takes a long time, especially when we think of the amount of time allotted to music in the schools. No matter how small the repertoire, students are mentally and emotionally excited when consciously aware of specific tonal and rhythm patterns as well as concepts about music they hear or see in notation. For example, a very young class of children may be quite pleased as they begin to find the rhythm of two eighth notes and a quarter note in their names (Jessica, Natalie, Zachery), in seasonal themes (valentine, please be mine), and in songs ("Pass One Window, Tideo").

Dalcroze exercises can usually be categorized into four major types that require student responses including stepping, clapping, arm gestures, conducting, singing, and playing an instrument. In a *follow,* the student responds instinctively to the music, using natural movements of walking, gesturing, and responding in space with precision and sensitivity. A *quick reaction* exercise is the most fun, and may be at times frustrating or exciting ... and often challenging. Students are asked to change their response at a given musical signal or verbal command. Sometimes two and three different signals or commands are established, and it isn't surprising that confused students may burst into laughter. An *interrupted canon* is an imitative response, like an echo. In a *canon,* the student responds to the teacher's improvisation through imitation one measure later. This demanding task requires intense concentration, memory, and alert faculties. One must perform one idea while hearing and trying to remember another. There is no limit to designing variations and extensions of these exercises for different age levels and student abilities and needs.

These techniques are being used by music teachers at the elementary, junior high, and senior high levels. They are adapted to the situation but are based more on an awareness and understanding of Dalcroze philosophy than on a specific course of action for each age level. Teachers of young children recognize the importance and value of using Dalcroze techniques in the teaching of music probably because the children's world is one of sound making, movement, and play, and the use of their natural behaviors ensures learning. Teachers in the middle school and high school are more reluctant to incorporate movement in their lessons because they themselves don't feel comfortable moving, because the space is limited, or because they are not sure of the reason or value in doing so. Ironically, enthusiasm and lively, rhythmically subtle

Figure 2. A rhythm pattern for students to scan and then perform



movements in teenagers are apparent when they are enjoying music outside of school. Yet, there are still some teachers who continue, day after day, teaching music by the "Make a list in your notebook for the test Friday" approach, or through the "Tenors, that wasn't right; listen to it once again!" approach.

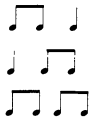
Examples of the Dalcroze approach at advanced levels are numerous, which reinforces the view that movement, solfege, and improvisation can be practiced by children, adolescents, and adults. An a cappella choir is scattered around a room, rehearsing a Brahms motet while stepping the beat and conducting, thus experiencing the flow and direction of the musical line. The same choir later vocalizes on a rhythm pattern with quick changes on command from the director to a new pattern.

A church choir director asks his choir to step a quarter note tempo beat while singing a harmonic progression. The timing is 3/4; on one command, the choir changes to 3/8 and on another command, to 3/2. Such an exercise heightens their perception and response time but may also prepare them to rehearse a particular anthem.

Many people who have only attended a conference session or a college lecture on the Dalcroze method find it difficult to transfer what they have learned into their daily teaching. In the first place, it is difficult to understand the principles involved without active participation in classes. Second, one must consider experiences, musical material, sequence, and scope of what is to be learned. This is certainly true of all music teaching, but the keys to this method are the development of inner hearing and the development of the sixth sense—the muscular sense—that communicates to the mind and the whole being the elements of time, space, and energy as they happen in music.

There is a general sequence of musical concepts to be developed in the Dalcroze method; however, one cannot say what constitutes a year's curriculum. All students, no matter what age, must travel through the same skills and understandings, and these are continually improved and refined, even in the professional musician. Remember that whatever is "taught" must be met and explored over and over again in new contexts and new musical examples. Figure 3 sequences the basic concepts to be presented. (A word of explanation: The term "space" usually implies the use and amount of space as it relates to time and energy in movement. In this context, however, "space" implies the use and movement of tonal spaces—that is, intervals, register, direction, and density—as well as sound space in terms of rests in music.)

Figure 3. Basic concepts of the Dalcroze method

TIME CONCEPTS	ENERGY CONCEPTS	SPACE CONCEPTS
		Sound and silence
Tempo: fast/slow	Dynamics: loud/soft	High/low
Tempo beat		Directions of melody: going up, down, staying in place
Duple/triple feeling	Accented/unaccented	
Changes in tempo	Changes in dynamics	Steps, leaps
Fundamental movements: walk, run, slide	Articulation: staccato/legato, legato	Patterns: sol la sol, mi re do, do mi sol
Patterns 		Home tone (Tonic)
		Mode: major/minor

Reading from left to right, the first concept is sound and silence. An initial consciousness of sound beginning and ending is important. Then the concepts of fast and slow, loud and soft, and high and low can be developed separately at first. (Not "slow-high-soft," all in one example.) For each concept, students need opportunities to realize and explore everyday actions and speech that give meaning to the idea. Teachers must be ready to reinforce student actions with improvised sound, either vocal, instrumental, or as Dalcroze intended, at the keyboard. Students need to respond to sound and musical examples that highlight the concept, recognize the concept in new musical examples, and use the concept in creating their own music. Then there is a conscious awareness of what the concept means. Young children learn best through everyday play activities that relate to these musical concepts as found in a song or singing game. They can feel the *beat* when they walk the postman's "beat" on a valentine song, or the *pattern* if they tap out every "tideo" in the song "Pass One Window, Tideo." They experience with complete freedom of expression many of the elements and concepts found in music. Older students enjoy the challenge and heightened activity in the Dalcroze exercises of quick reaction, interrupted canon, and canon.

The work of Emile Jaques-Dalcroze has been recognized not only by musicians but also by dancers, actors, therapists, and educators throughout the world. What started out as a reform of music instruction became a philosophy and theory of music learning that touched many fields. Various specialists acknowledge the development of heightened concentration, keen mental discipline, a sharpening of the senses, and the development of the creative self in those who experience Dalcroze techniques. To those who are trained to teach music via this method, the essence of the approach is in the musicality and joy inherent in every Dalcroze experience. ■