

**THE HISTORY OF THE  
"BILDUNGSANSTALT-HELLERAU" 1910-1914  
Written by Elfriede Feudel in 1956, Translated by Thea Ney**

If today, someone wants to know what is meant by the term "Rhythmic Education" he or she will not be able to find the answer in just one place. He will have to visit different institutions such as schools, pre-schools, art schools music academies and other places. In each of these institutions, he will become acquainted with one part of the work, and only by careful observation and comparison will he realize the meaning of rhythmic-education.

It would be easier and more convincing if one could get information at a Central Institute where one could observe eurhythmics being taught to children of all ages and adults. We do not have such a place in Germany today, but we did have it at one time. There the idea of rhythmic-education rose like a flame and its glow attracted the attention of many people at home and abroad. Those were the years before the First World War. Into this period, I should like to initiate you today.

The beginnings of rhythmic-education are closely connected with the name Hellerau. What is Hellerau? A little village on the border of a big forest territory called "Dresdener Heide" (Dresden-Heath). Hellerau could be reached from Dresden within half-an-hour by tramcar - it lies 100 meters above the town so that on clear evenings one could admire the flood of lights of the big city below. Hellerau was one of the first garden cities in Germany. New ideas in architecture in connection with land reform were initiated here. In Hellerau, there were only family houses, small houses for the workers and villas for the intellectuals. The best architects created these types of houses and decided the outlay of the streets, and if one went along the main street of Hellerau, called "Am green Zipfel", one could enjoy the attractive picture of this row of houses, each house having its own peculiarity. Agents from many other cities visited Hellerau to study the ideal model of a new town. In the center of Hellerau stood the big factory of the Dresden workshops for handicrafts, one of the first German factories, which produced quality work in furniture and equipment.

The second important building was the "Bildungsanstalt" for music and rhythm, founded by Wolf Dohrn. Who was Wolf Dohrn? He was the business director of the college, which he had created only for a few years. He died in a ski accident in the Alps in the spring of 1914. If we realize the impact he has had on our work, having initiated rhythmic-education under its founder Jacques-Dalcroze in Germany and having created a home for the work, where it could develop and spread, then it is only right

that we should keep his memory alive. The foundation stone in Hellerau was laid in 1909 when Wolf Dohrn was 32 years of age. He was a friend and collaborator of Friedrich Neumann, the politician for social reform. He was also co-founder of the workers' union for handicrafts, so he came from a rich working-background. How did he come to abandon all his up-to-date interests and commit himself entirely, with the help of all of his capital, to the task of education? He was always eager to answer this question - he said, he met the musician and pedagogue Jaques-Dalcroze and saw a demonstration with his students. At first he was skeptical, but during the course of the exercises he became convinced that, here, something was produced which would be of great importance for the future. Because of this experience, he decided to ask Jaques-Dalcroze to come to Germany with his students, where he built him a college with a festival hall appropriate to international standards, and a resident home and houses for the staff and students.

It is difficult for us to understand today the emotion, which Wolf Dohrn felt when watching such simple rhythmic exercises, yet we should not imagine that he was a fanatic. His father and grandfather were passionate nature explorers. Objects of their exploration were the lower vertebrate animals: beetles, worms, insects, spiders, and sea animals. When the interest in nature exploration which took place in the 19th century and found its climax in Haeckel and Darwin began to fade, a new field of interest took its place: the human being and his needs, the danger which the growing intellectualism and the absence of artistic activities brought to his life. The time of the great social struggle and reform began and the question of art education, in particular, became of special general interest. Everywhere, in institutions for adult education one endeavored to awake the interest in art. Wolf Dohrn was a child of his times - he was as fond of art as he was of music. However, in his work with Friedrich Naumann he had become aware that spiritually, people were in need of help and here art education was not enough. What he saw in Dalcroze's work, seemed to him a way that promised to give people what they needed, even if it led for the present into the unknown.

During the winter of 1910/11 Jaques-Dalcroze was already teaching in Dresden: in April the foundation stone for the great festival hall and school house was laid, and in the autumn of 1911 lessons began there with many students from Germany and abroad. The building caused a sensation because of its plain and functional style. Its architect was Heinrich Tessenow. With

this building, he established his reputation and fame as one of the best German architects. We students were apprehensive at first, but when we took possession of the house and moved about in its halls, we became aware of this building, through its absence of adornments and plainness, invited us to move, indeed, it intensified movement and ennobled it. How much the room is a counter-play of the body movement, we experienced in Hellerau as clearly as never before or afterwards. The most beautiful part of the Tessenow building was perhaps the great hall with all its walls covered with white material behind which were thousands of glow lamps so that the hall could be plunged into every nuance of soft and blaring light. There was no stage in front of the ascending amphitheatrically rows of seats only a simple acting area, which was created by movable stairs and steps, curtains and pillars. Between this and the seats was the sunken orchestra pit. In this hall, the students with the Dresden Philharmonic Orchestra and Emmy Leisner as Orpheus produced Gluck's Orpheus in 1913. Soon afterwards, there was the first performance of "Die Verhündigung" by the French poet, Claudel. The house itself was the center of a much bigger arena around which were playing fields, tennis courts, and areas for sunbathing. We now must imagine the whole terrain alive with young people, about as many young men as young ladies. There were also the children of Hellerau who came from a daily eurhythmics lesson – they surrounded Monsieur Jaques wherever they way him, he was like the Pied Piper amongst them.

The number of students grew every year; in 1914, there were about 500 students from 14 nations. There was no entrance examination but the training finished with a diploma examination, which one could take only after one had passed the elementary examination.

Hellerau was a place of study; the aim was the achievement of a high standard in music and movement, which later could be passed on to others by teaching. It seemed to me that in no university had work gone on so intensively as here at Hellerau. If it is an achievement to keep hundreds of young people in an atmosphere of disciplined enthusiasm, this was the merit of Jaques-Dalcroze : Dalcroze gave the lessons and he was a friend to his students as well as an example. He had a number of young teachers around him, but he excelled as a musician, by his charm, his humor, his original ideas and his human qualities. He was already ready to talk to his students at any time and he was willing to learn from them. We became aware of the mutual "give and take" so characteristic for this way of teaching. There were 21 lessons on the timetable divided between eurhythmics, ear training and

improvisation. To this was added dance anatomy and choral singing. Of course every student had a piano and from the little houses in the village, music sounded forth until late in the evening. We also had to be prepared to have extra lessons when prominent guests arrived to see the work. That so many visitors came to Hellerau was partly due to the propaganda carried on by Wolf Dohrn, who wanted to draw people's attention to the new way of teaching music through movement prior Dalcroze.

For us students, the three years meant a time of improbable, untroubled happiness, a time of unforgettable experiences and impressions, which were so new that we could hardly realize them nor explain them. We experienced harmony in the working together of the leading men: Dalcroze, Dohrn, Appia, Salzmann and others. We experienced harmony in our own circle of students - we experienced the close contact with the inhabitants of the village, who took part in many ways in the life of the "Bildungsanstalt." Though we students knew that we were learning daily and hourly, yet, this was not learning in the usual way for the sake of gaining knowledge. It was rather a growing into new forms of intuition and though, a gaining of greater self-confidence and an experiencing of greater joy in life and in its tasks. Our training closed with the diploma examinations. Musicians and experts such as heads of conservatories, lecturers from universities, composers and conductors, gave these. They wrote melodies and figured bases on the blackboard, which we had to sight-read and transpose -they gave the themes for improvisation. They discussed with the staff of the Institute the achievement of each candidate in movement expression and in conducting. This brings me to the year 1914, which brought a sudden end to the hardly begun development of the work at Hellerau.

In February, Wolf Dohrn died in a ski accident in the Alps and in the summer, Dalcroze left for Geneva and did not return to Hellerau because of the war. All students dispersed to their home countries. Wolf Dohrn's enterprise was therefore, wrecked in all outward circumstances. However, the fundamental idea lived on. The struggles, difficulties, and oppositions against the work in Germany helped perhaps more than the times of splendor to clarify the meaning of rhythmic education in the years, which followed. In the history of education the foundation of Hellerau stands unique and without equal. We know of great institutions such as the Pestalozzi Home in Ilferton, the Froebel Kindergarten in Keilnau and others. Nevertheless, there has never been a place of research where music in its importance for the

spiritual and emotional development of the human being was placed into the center.