

THE EURHYTHMICS OF JAQUES-DALCROZE

By Frank MARTIN

*Honorary President of the Board of Directors of the
Institute Jaques-Dalcroze*

It is always extremely difficult to reply when somebody asks you, "What is eurhythmics and what are its uses?" We cannot really designate it by any of those convenient abstract words: pedagogy, art, or discipline. For Jaques-Dalcroze Rhythmic is not only a pedagogical method and it is certainly not an art like music or dancing, and it is not in the real sense of the word a discipline either. In fact, eurhythmics finds itself, by the will of its own creator, opposed to the general tendency of all contemporary disciplines. In this age of out and out specialization, all contemporary disciplines tend to look for the analysis rather than the synthesis, because analysis is concrete and instantly usable and gets results much more easily and much quicker. This position obviously was not intended by Mr. Jaques-Dalcroze to be a condemning of the search for immediate results, which are indispensable to all forms of study. He felt both for himself and for his pupils (for he was a born pedagogue) the pressing need for something that could bring into play, simultaneously, all human faculties, or at least, as many of them as possible.

I would like to quote you a very short text from the first eurhythmics' lesson as told by Charles Faller who was organist, conductor, and director of the Chaux-de-Fonds conservatory and vice-president of the UIPD:

"I had the good fortune to be present at the very first eurhythmics' lesson. It was in June 1903. The place: the stage in the main hall of the Geneva conservatory. The pupils: the first course in "child" solfa, which the maestro had held. On arrival at the lesson "Monsieur Jaques" asked us to leave our tables and to gather round the piano. He then made a group of rather bewildered children walk, run and jump, and then said to them, "There is something in this; I am going to see what I can find." During the holidays, he put together his

first eurhythmics method, and in the autumn, the first lessons were given. A marvelous adventure was underway!

So it can be seen that in inventing his eurhythmics method, Jaques-Dalcroze did not start with a preconceived idea, that he had no intention of breaking into the field of dancing, that he did not dream of creating a new art or discipline. Simply, as a music teacher, he had noticed that his pupils had a poor feeling for musical rhythm, created it artificially by adding one pause to another, and he had also noticed that they in fact possessed this musical rhythm quite naturally in their bodies, in their way of walking and running, in the way they swung their arms, and the idea came to him to use these already-existing elements to build up a rhythmic feeling that was no longer artificial but lived. It can also be said that originally at least, musical practice was the only aim of his research.

But the results that he obtained led him imperceptibly to the development of his method and to make it into a sort of complement to intellectual, artistic and sporting disciplines which appeared to him rightly and essentially specialized, with each only making demand on a limited part of our being. Eurhythmics then does not claim to be a substitute for any other kind of teaching. It is a complement to these various forms of teaching.

Born out of musical solfege and invented by a composer, it took music as its primary driving force. I say music and not musical rhythm as is too often believed. By this, it joins the leading examples that are offered to us by past civilizations, which were more reasoning and by virtue of this more human than ours: the Greeks are the first to come to mind but the ancient Chinese also. The study of music therefore is intimately linked to the practice of eurhythmics, but not the study of music as a technique, as in the study of instruments or singing with a view to musical performance, or the study of harmony or counterpoint with a view to composition. In this case, direct contact with music is concerned; the first concern is not to make

music but to listen to it. The ear must be developed by practicing solfege, hearing of all forms must be cultivated; intonation, intensity rhythm. Without musical hearing, we would revert to a sort of primitive state where only the rhythm as such counts, joined to bodily movement. This in fact is often how eurhythmics is seen; it is also unfortunately, how badly prepared people teach it.

This is only one aspect the most material of eurhythmics teaching as rhythm itself is only one aspect of music. It is, without doubt, the most primitive aspect of music; but at the same time, it is the element, which is at the deepest root of our vitality.

I do not think that Dalcroze would ever have had the idea of his eurhythmic method if he had lived in a place closer to Nature and more naturally adapted to rhythm than the very intellectual town of Geneva. It was first and foremost a lesson in spontaneity that he was giving his pupils, making them find again their daily gestures, those musical rhythms that they copied out so painstakingly when they joined up crotchets to quavers.

And when speaking of eurhythmics, this is always the point we come back to, it is this that characterizes it and, I think, makes it something unique, it puts into action simultaneously the main activities of our bodies.

Firstly, attentiveness. We have to grasp everything we hear and record it immediately; Secondly, intelligence, as we have to understand and analyze what we have heard; Then, sensitivity, we have to feel the music, let the musical movement go inside ourselves; Finally, the body goes into action; which, by its movement more or less adapted to the music, proves that we have been attentive, that we have learned and understood, and finally that our sensitivity has been awoken.

But these various movements of the mind and of the body, far from being successive, are simultaneous. This interpretation by gesture and by gesture of the whole body, at the same time as it gives the joy of discovering, little by little, the appropriate gesture, provides a natural outlet for the intellectual and sensitive

tension of our mind, by an immediate bodily realization.

It is in this immediacy and in this constant working communication between the mind and bodily movement that the relaxation and the joy can be found, that a good eurhythmic lesson will unfailingly give.

It almost goes without saying that eurhythmic action and the correlation that it establishes between cerebral and bodily activities, finds a particularly favorable ground with children. It is during childhood that this teaching, complementary to other disciplines of the mind and body, finds its natural place. What, in music is rhythm is perceived by us as a function of our gestures and of our bodily movements. The gesture can be completely interior, not at all manifested, but it exists within us. As we follow a melody by singing it inside ourselves, so we follow a rhythm by an appropriate interior gesture.

From this, it follows that the study of musical eurhythmics should start with gesture and, primarily, the gesture, which is the most simple and the most massively rhythmic walking. It is first of all through walking that the study of eurhythmics should begin, because it contains all the basic elements of what constitutes rhythm: tension, relaxation and finally, the regularity of alternation of these two elements which create continuity. This is what Dalcroze felt in that first lesson where he made his students walk about to create his continuous solid base, experienced in the whole body, on which was to be built all his study of musical rhythm as a factor of the static and dynamic possibilities of the body.

The expression of a fully evolved sensitivity that music brings can only be expressed bodily by gestures, which become "dancing". In dancing itself, it is one art form which is grafted onto another, which unites for the attendant satisfaction of our eyes and ears, perhaps, even more, for the satisfaction of our body in general, since by following a dance with our eyes, we recreate that dance within ourselves, by singing it inside ourselves, like a melody that we have heard before.

In eurhythmics, expressive gesture, which is related to dancing, does not, generally, have any other aim than that of giving the pupil the opportunity of manifesting his understanding of the music he hears. This is almost exactly what small children do when they dance spontaneously to the music they hear. However, in the person practicing rhythmic, either this manifestation, although generally improvised, must remain perfectly conscious, in the gestures used or in the structure of the music which is proposed.

To summarize then, the meaning of eurhythmics as founded by Jaques-Dalcroze is, firstly, to create in young people a genuine rhythmic sensitivity, by making them feel the musical rhythm in their body, which, with its muscular system, is the very seat of all rhythmic movement.

Secondly, as this rhythm is by nature musical, the meaning of eurhythmics is to teach to hear and to feel music; the bodywork must be accompanied by advanced study of solfege under two forms: dictation and sung solfege.

Finally, by its power of bringing into play simultaneously various faculties of man: attentiveness, intelligence, quickness of mind, sensitivity and bodily movement, eurhythmics helps create a harmonious synthesis of these faculties, which finds expression in a sensation of happiness and fullness.

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