**Eurhythmics**

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## Summary

Eurhythmics, a coined word meaning ‘good’ or ‘right rhythm’, is the English name for the interactive approach to music education developed in the early 1900s by Swiss teacher-composer Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950). He is often called Dalcroze, the pseudonym he adopted in his youth. The Dalcroze method, named variously in countries where the teaching spread, combines movement and ear training with physical, vocal, and instrumental improvisation. Teachers improvise at the piano but also use composed music and recordings to lead their classes, while participants listen, move, and sing to follow, responding immediately in the moment. Games and exercises include walking and stepping rhythms, swaying and swinging, using body percussion such as clapping, musical conducting, playing hand instruments, bouncing balls, ‘sculpting’ phrases in space, and devising ‘plastiques’ or realizations of musical works. Through the artistry of Dalcroze lessons, people shape and time personal movement within collective music activities. Learning to notate music builds on embodied experience followed by reflection and analysis. The teaching imparts musical elements, forms, and styles, usually from Western classical and folk traditions but increasingly from jazz and world sources. The purposeful, motivating music that Dalcroze-trained teachers improvise is the key tool of this distinct pedagogy. Many educators contribute to the enrichment and expansion of Dalcroze practices in the twenty-first century.

## Exposition

The Dalcroze method achieved widespread use in twentieth-century arts education. It offered new concepts of how to move and make music with the original instrument, the human body. Dalcroze and his first students explored the basics of walking and beating time along with more adventurous movement such as lunging, skipping, leading and following with a partner, or carrying an imaginary object. The work cultivated timing, strength, imagination, awareness, and cooperation with others. Dalcroze taught, as specialists do today, group lessons in the overlapping areas of movement (originally ‘rhythmic gymnastics’ and later called eurhythmics, *la rythmique, der Rhythmik,* among other terms), solfège, and improvisation. These three areas combine to provide a well-rounded initiation into music.

file: historical.jpg

Figure Early Eurhythmics Practitioners in Australia.

Source: http://www.dalcroze.org.au/historical.html

Teachers improvise at the piano to direct eurhythmics students to walk and run at different tempi, to step rhythmic patterns, to conduct with the arms and the body, to breathe and phrase sensitively, and to control slow movement. Solfège concentrates on ear training, often based on Dalcroze’s unique sol-fa exercises, sung rhythmically, to develop the sense of pitch and tonality. Improvisation emphasizes practical harmony through composing in the moment, a skill considered necessary for teaching. When a teacher plays changes in speed and dynamics, eurhythmics students discover how to adjust personal movement to correspond, reinforced by the group’s collective response.

Listening to the teacher’s unfolding music and joining it by improvising movement is the transformative activity of Dalcroze study. Teachers take the lead, directing by their playing, aware of how participants respond. Yet often the exact reverse occurs, as when a teacher follows a student or the group, improvising music to match the moving source. Lessons are the primary encounters in which experts and learners interact at all levels of training; they integrate moving, conducting, singing, and playing, giving students many dimensions of musical experience. The creative work called ‘*plastique animée*’ or ‘plastique’ involves realization of a musical composition such as a fugue or rondo in movement, by making group choreography or structured improvisation.

Benefits of Dalcroze study include awakening of the ear and other senses, concentration, coordination, balance, readiness to move and stop, ability to function in an ensemble. Although the clientele is often assumed to be children, eurhythmics study has been significant for many adults, amateur and professional, and in recent years especially for seniors and those in therapeutic settings. Demand typically exceeds the supply of qualified teachers because the quality of the work depends on rigorous apprenticeship training.

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Figure Children learning the Dalcroze Eurhythmics Method.

Source: <http://www.emmashubin.com/dalcroze.html>

The Dalcroze method is a way of teaching and learning, not a physical technique or performing art in itself. It results from an oral tradition, a body of knowledge handed down from person to person by direct study and mentorship. Movement and improvisation are its main activities, although the teacher's directions and cues bring language into play, and participants' voices can provide another dimension of sound. Dalcroze practice persists thanks to communities of teachers who assimilate and transmit experience, continuously renewing the method by creation in the moment. To them notation is a useful tool, a way of recording ideas or points of departure for invention, but they do not privilege what is written over what is known in the musical body, moving or improvising at the piano.

## Film Documentation

The Dalcroze Society in London distributes films on eurhythmics produced by Meerkatt Films.

**Further Reading**

Bachmann, M.-L. (1991) *Dalcroze Today: An Education through and into Rhythm*, trans. D. Parlett and ed. R. Stewart, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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Greenhead, K. and J. Habron (2015) ‘The Touch of Sound: Dalcroze Eurhythmics as a Somatic Practice,’ *Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices* 7:1: 93-112.

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Jaques-Dalcroze, E. (1921) *Rhythm, Music and Education,* trans. H.F. Rubinstein, London: Chatto and Windus.

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Mead, V.H. (1994) *Dalcroze Eurhythmics in Today’s Music Classroom,* New York: Schott Music Corporation.

Odom, S.L. (1995) ‘Dalcroze Eurhythmics as an Oral Tradition,’ *La Memòria de la*

*Dansa,* Barcelona: Association Européenne des Historiens de la Danse: 31-38.

Schnebly-Black, J. and S.F. Moore (1997) *The Rhythm Inside: Connecting Body, Mind, and Spirit through Music*, Portland: Rudra Press.

Wedin, E.N. (2015) *Playing Music with the Whole Body: Eurhythmics and Motor Development,* Stockholm: Gehrmans Musikförlag.

**Suggested Paratexts**

I suggest using one historical and one contemporary photo. Thousands exist and can be found on numerous websites.

Here is a good historical option: <http://www.surrey.ac.uk/content/dalcroze-eurhythmics-moving-through-archive>

Here are examples of contemporary options: <http://www.emmashubin.com/dalcroze.html>

I have high resolution photo files and information on how to obtain permission to use them for publication. If the editors want my specific recommendations, they should contact me directly and I’ll provide images and info: [selmao@yorku.ca](mailto:selmao@yorku.ca)

Alternatively, if they want to search online I’ll be happy to consult about whether they have found appropriate examples. Many sources online are inaccurately identified.