**Hellerau (1909-)**

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## Summary

Founded in 1909 as Germany’s first ‘garden city,’ Hellerau is a district of Dresden located in wooded countryside north of the city. Developers Karl Schmidt and Wolf Dohrn followed Ebenezer Howard’s concepts of community planning to build a modern village around the Deutsche Werkstätten für Handwerkskunst (German Workshops for Crafts). Schmidt and Dohrn surrounded the workshops for producing furniture and architectural details with curving streets of attractive row houses, cottages, and villas for residents. A team of architects including Richard Riemerschmid and Hermann Muthesius gave physical form to Hellerau’s principles of quality, harmony, and functionality in life and work. Wolf Dohrn spearheaded the effort to add a training institute for the Dalcroze method, or eurhythmics, a progressive pedagogy based on combining music and movement. Heinrich Tessenow’s ensemble of buildings for the Bildungsanstalt Jaques-Dalcroze (Jaques-Dalcroze Training Institute) completed in 1911 rapidly became famous, transforming the garden city into an art colony. Student festivals presented in the modern simplicity of its studio-theatre, inspired by the ideas of stage reformer Adolphe Appia, drew large audiences and coverage in the international press. The First World War dispersed most of the original participants, but Hellerau’s reputation as a birthplace of modernism endured. After decades of use as a German police academy and Soviet army base, the restored Festspielhaus (Festival Hall) reopened in 2006 as the European Center for the Arts Dresden. Once again this remarkable space hosts avant-garde performances, art and media installations, conferences, and workshops. Hellerau is a destination of cultural tourism, a museum of what was modern and visionary at the time of its founding and a vital scene of experiment today.

**file: Festspielhaus\_Hellerau\_1913.jpg**

Figure Festspielhaus, Hellerau, 1913

**Source:** © Bildarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz / Kunstbibliothek, SMB  
Original: Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\_image.cfm?image\_id=2155

## Hellerau and Dance

A focal point of Hellerau, the Dalcroze institute was dedicated to music and movement as a basis for learning in the widest sense. ‘A workshopfor future art, the laboratory of a new humanity’ was French poet Paul Claudel’s way of evoking the experimental atmosphere of Tessenow’s building (476). Several hundred students, teachers, and artists came from across Germany and countries beyond to join the community. The artistic director of the institute was Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, the Swiss educator, pianist, and composer often referred to by his pseudonym Dalcroze. He and his colleagues welcomed visitors to lessons, which were the main encounters of experts and learners at all levels of training: a teacher at the piano interacting with students moving, singing, and improvising.

Participants, including local children, wore simple leotards and moved barefoot in the studio-theatre inspired by Adolphe Appia’s ‘rhythmic space’ designs. Appia’s direct study with Dalcroze stimulated him to imagine modular stairs, inclines, and platforms, while Alexandre de Salzmann installed state-of-the-art lighting in the studio-theatre, a huge rectangular hall with no proscenium separating performers from audience. Its inner walls and ceiling of stretched cloth panels were surrounded by lights that could be dimmed or brightened with great precision, creating a total immersion in light.

During the summers of 1912 and 1913 thousands of people attended festivals, which presented the institute’s work through open classes and performances. Students including future dancers Mary Wigman and Marie Rambert took part, wearing leotards and performing barefoot, in stagings of Gluck’s *Orpheus* with Appia’s radical designs*.* This modernist production was much acclaimed as the highpoint of programsthat included Bach fugues and inventions, works by Dalcroze, and student compositions demonstrating the plastic embodiment of music.

When the First World War began, the utopia of rhythm had to end. Some participants had already left on their separate paths to perform, teach, and found schools. Other participants made their ways as musicians, dancers, teachers, writers, therapists, and social workers, many taking the Dalcroze method to their own countries. Working on their own and making new connections, teachers elaborated the work they already knew and developed their own, adapting to diverse environments. Experiences shared in the community of Hellerau formed the basis for networks and linkages that nurtured people in their later careers. The sudden end of the Hellerau institute in 1914 meant that the Dalcroze method would have far-reaching influences.

file: Festspielhaus\_contemporary.jpg

Figure Festspielhaus, Hellerau, today. Copyright Stephan Floß

Source: <http://www.hellerau.org/presse/festspielhaus>

Since the 1990s histories of Hellerau written from different perspectives have proliferated at the same time that the site has been restored following German reunification. Scholarly interest is intense among researchers from many disciplines who are fascinated by Hellerau’s various modernities. Their work includes publications and exhibitions on the history of architecture, design and community planning; theatre history, particularly on the innovations of Appia and Salzmann; dance history and musicology; and cultural histories focusing on life reform, feminism, body culture, physical education, and eugenics. Leaders of the Deutsche Werkstätten and the Festspielhaus now direct their enterprises and programming toward an ambitious future, including a proposal for world heritage site designation.

**Further Reading**

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**Film Documentation**

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**Suggested Paratexts**

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