



**SPECIAL ISSUE**

Dalcroze Eurhythmics in music therapy and special music education

## Conference report

# The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of Dalcroze Studies

*'The movement connection'*

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The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of Dalcroze Studies  
*'The Movement Connection'*

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University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna (mdw),  
Vienna, Austria



**Victoria Conlan** studied music at Goldsmiths College, the University of Sunderland and the Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM). Between these periods of study, Victoria composed and performed music for various theatre companies in the North East of England, taught secondary school music, project-managed community arts residencies and toured as a performing musician. Victoria first encountered Dalcroze Eurhythmics during her studies at the RNCM and incorporates Dalcroze pedagogy into her current work with Trafford Music Service and as a musicianship tutor on the RNCM Young Strings programme.

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At the end of July 2015, almost 200 people from 24 countries spanning all five continents gathered in Vienna to celebrate the life and work of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and the approaches to education, performance and therapy that he has inspired. Walking through the city centre on the opening night, I was nervous that I would not find the delegation for the ceremony to unveil the plaque celebrating the birth of Jaques-Dalcroze 150 years ago. That was until I heard the sound of drums and rhythmic chanting floating through the air. I turned the corner and I knew I was in the right place as I saw a collection of Dalcroze students and teachers from Poland, led by Anetta Pasternak, moving and gesturing beautifully in the sunshine. This initial performance, specially devised for the opening ceremony outside the house where Jaques-Dalcroze was born, was a highlight of the conference before it had even really begun.

Over the next three days, students, researchers and practitioners from such varied disciplines as architecture, biomedical science, choreography, dance history, drama and theatre, early music, music composition, special needs education, teacher training and more, came together to create an interdisciplinarity, connected, but not bound, by Dalcroze Eurhythmics. With 52 papers, 23 workshops, two symposia and an optional excursion to visit the Schloss that housed the Hellerau-Laxenburg school (a successor school to Jaques-Dalcroze's original institute at Hellerau, Dresden) to choose from, we explored *'The movement connection'*, especially the body-mind and its interactions with sound and music.

The first paper I heard was by Helga Neira-Zugasti, a Rhythmics lecturer at the host university and a class teacher for children with mental and physical disabilities. It was a real call to arms.

Zugasti championed the effect of Dalcroze Eurhythmics on the individual and education in general (i.e. not just musical learning), and its impact on the further development of society. She highlighted respect for individuals' abilities, their own learning rhythms, and the need for equal value to be placed on physical, spiritual and mental capacities within a results-oriented learning culture. Quoting Jaques-Dalcroze, Neira-Zugasti believes that "There should be no separation between thinking and acting" (Jaques-Dalcroze 1921/1967). It was a relief to hear an articulation of the necessity to help children develop an inner picture of the world that is not experienced as a "secondary digitised experience".

Quoting the UN's Convention of the Rights of Disabled Persons, she spoke of how the very essence of Dalcroze Eurhythmics and similar approaches to rhythmic education help to develop "respect of the variations of human beings... [enabling] persons with disabilities to develop their abilities to their full capacities". Neira-Zugasti only spoke for 30 minutes, yet it was enough to prompt me to start planning how to implement her ideas and match her passion in my own teaching. How could I integrate the eight ways we experience the world (movement, perception, thinking, speaking, social emotional acting, intending, memorising, creating) into my lessons in order to help children to create their own inner picture of how the world works?

While I was listening to this paper, other delegates were being equally inspired by a paper relating to the haptic nature of sound (the effects of the physical, touch-like nature of music) and workshops on exploring elements of Dalcroze movement and their digital capture, and developing improvised movement studies inspired by the paintings of Stanislaw Ignacy Witkiewicz (Photograph 1) – and all before 10:30 am on a Monday morning! By lunchtime, I began to welcome the feeling of possibility. Delegates were hearing and experiencing papers and workshops describing how to become more fully aware and free through Jaques-Dalcroze's embodied approach and I was, indeed, doing that myself. It was a feeling of being fully stretched out, physically and mentally.

The connecting and international nature of Dalcroze Eurhythmics makes for a very diverse group of delegates and contributors. Of the 24 countries present, Britain had 20 delegates, who between them gave 13 presentations and three performances throughout the conference. A highlight for me was the paper *'When words are not*

*enough'* by Bethan Habron-James (RNCM, UK). This presentation validated the direct emotional responses to working with human beings in challenging circumstances and recognised the creative output of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Habron-James also addressed the need for researchers to reflect artistically, through poetry, improvisation and composition, when words are not an efficient or sufficient means of communication.



**Photograph 1: Aleksandrowicz and Sobieraj-Bednarek workshop<sup>1</sup>**

Over the course of the conference, I was able to see tangible links between how the trust and collaboration fostered during Dalcroze-inspired activities could be used as a means to resolve conflicts and problems in rural areas of South Africa where diverse stakeholders experience severe problems relating to water (Liesl Van Der Merwe). I learned, in Paul Hille's paper *'The Erasmus Symposium Hörraum (2012, Vienna) and the impact of attentive listening on wellbeing'*, that sound travels faster in water at 0°C than it does in air at 20°C, with the consequence that when submerged in a liquid sound bath (a pool that facilitates listening underwater) participants can feel the sound in their muscles and tissues. Furthermore, "The research showed that, through attentive listening, participants slowed their breathing rates, lessened their perspiration, and synchronised their heartbeats with the music" (Hille 2015: 79).

In a workshop by Lisa Parker on syncopation I found myself partnered with an American woman I had not met before. We created an on- and off-the-beat sequence together. Later, I had the fascinating and mind-expanding pleasure of listening to Sally

<sup>1</sup> Photo credits: Irmgard Bankl.

Ann Ness's (University of California, Riverside, USA) presentation on *'Choreographies of landscape: Semeiotics in performance in Yosemite National Park'*. I was engaged and challenged by this presentation, as I was by many other contributors, but rarely felt stranded. I felt that I was in a benign environment that encouraged risk taking and exploration, regardless of whether I fully grasped the concept of the symbolic emblem in everyday life, or how I might become a real historical actor rendering myself a symbol of the landscape.

There was a different keynote speaker each day. The first, *'Dalcroze mapping'*, given by Gunhild Oberzaucher-Schüller, an independent Austrian scholar, was aptly about Jaques-Dalcroze himself and his relationship to cultural developments in Vienna. Musician and neuroscientist Eckart Altenmüller (University of Music, Drama and Media, Hannover, Germany) used the four words 'embodied', 'embedded', 'extended' and 'enacted' as part of his keynote presentation entitled *'Brain mechanisms of motor learning and embodiment and their consequences for Dalcroze Eurhythmics'*. Altenmüller stated that "musical acting does not depend solely on brain processes, but results from structures widely distributed across the whole body...thinking is nothing more than moving in thought"; therefore, we think better when we move.

The keynote presented by Marja-Leena Juntunen (Sibelius Academy, University of the Arts, Helsinki, Finland), *'Towards embodied musical agency'*, considered Dalcroze pedagogy to be more than a method for music teaching, rather a phenomenological, philosophical approach, encompassing how we live and perceive the world, and our capacity to act in and upon it. Dalcroze pedagogy encourages us, Juntunen said, to "be in the musical world through the body".

For those of us who were unused to some of the scientific, academic and philosophical approaches but wanted to know more, there were the *'Getting started'* seminars. These hugely popular sessions explored ways into research, including specific areas such as historical research, and phenomenology. The seminar I attended started by asking us to consider our passion and helped us formulate a purpose statement, encouraging us to pursue that passion in a piece of research. The focus of the phenomenology seminar was how to use an approach, such as interpretive phenomenological analysis, as a Dalcroze practitioner-researcher.

In the corridors and at lunch (locally produced and largely organic) I was forever meeting other participants who were telling me how much I would have loved the session they had just been to. A common complaint was that it was difficult to attend all of the sessions due to a schedule with four parallel sessions.



**Photograph 2: Closing ceremony**

Being part of this 'interdisciplinarity' for three-and-a-half days was, for me, the outstanding feature of the conference. We joined together in practical sessions, and watched a world premiere performance (Goves, RNCM, UK) and we came together for a closing ceremony unified by rhythm and song (Photograph 2). Most memorably for me, we marvelled at the vocal and improvisational skill of Hilde Kappes, an alumnus of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, in an unforgettable evening performance (Photograph 3). The hilarity of her comic creations brought everyone together with laughter and admiration, celebrating the potential we have, when embodying music through movement and embedding our ideas bodily, to extend our whole selves, as we enact our learning and creativity.



**Photograph 3: Hilde Kappes' concert**

## REFERENCES

- Hille, P. (2015). The Erasmus Symposium Hörraum (2012, Vienna) and the impact of attentive listening on wellbeing. In J. Habron (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference of Dalcroze Studies: The Movement Connection* (p.79). Vienna: University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.
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