

# Rhythmic and Moving Patterns in Dalcroze Eurhythmics

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**Abstract:** *The Suisse music pedagogue Emile Jaques-Dalcroze initiated an original education system revealing that rhythm and movement could be combined in order to facilitate the complexity of learning music. The synthesis of imagination, body motion and emotion is fundamental in the development of expressiveness and creativity. In our study, we are going to analyze the tools of Eurhythmics as a multi-senses teaching method. The interdisciplinary approach of eurhythmics made possible the expansion of the method to other arts, including dance. Finding symmetry, balance and accuracy in music, and dance as well, is related to the embodiment of rhythm. The components of the Eurhythmics (i.e. rhythmic exercises, improvisation, performing) are interdependent and lead to a mental and kinesthetic experience. The legacy of Jaques-Dalcroze in today's music education is based on active learning experience and on a veritable body dramaturgy.*

**Key-words:** *music education; eurhythmics; dance experiments; interdisciplinary approach.*

## 1. Dalcroze and music

Music has always been a part of people's lives as a constant element: children sing at the playgrounds, when they want to express joy, the most important events in our existence are accompanied by music and this gives beauty to life and ennobles the soul.

Due to the complexity and importance of this art in human life, there are many specialists who were interested with the effective approach and development of this field and the specialized training of children and adults to promote the values and joy that music can bring in our lives.

Dalcroze is one of the great personalities in the field of music education, which has dedicated decades of research to improve the perception and capitalization of music, special music education of children but also of adults. The Dalcroze method is an interactive and interdisciplinary approach to music that allows a holistic development of the human personality, through the development of multiple intelligences, cognitive, affective processes, creativity and imagination and motor involvement of the whole body.

One of the main directions of approach to Dalcroze pedagogy is rhythm, along with solfège and improvisation. His experience as a teacher has led him to analyze and explore seriously the possibilities of improving the preparation of students but also of teachers who carry out music education in schools. Thus, he revised the way of teaching harmony but also initiated a real system of rhythmic education, which eminently involved the bodily movement, ideas presented in his main works: *Méthode Jaques-Dalcroze* (5 parts, 1907–14), *Eurhythmics, Art and Education* (1930) and *Rhythm, Music and Education* (1922).<sup>3</sup>

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### 1.1. The role of Eurhythmly in music education

One of the great dimensions of music is rhythm, which has been an important concern for musicians as well as for specialists from other scientific branches (medicine, astrology, pedagogy, linguistics, psychology, etc.), thus we talk about heart rhythm, rhythmicity that exists in nature (the succession of seasons, day and night), the rhythm associated with the progress of human learning, the rhythm of speech, accents existing in words, the development of psychic processes and of the whole personality.

Closely related to the musical field, concepts close to the rhythm term have emerged, which have developed over time as true independent disciplines, such as: rhythm, eurhythmics, rhythmic improvisation.

The word Eurhythmly has Greek origin (εὐρυθμία, from εὖ- “good, good” and ῥυθμός- “rhythm”) and signifies a compositional balance, happy proportion of the parts in a work of art.<sup>4</sup> This general definition refers to the antiquity of Greece, where symmetry, harmony and balance were considered true values of art. Continuing this idea, the *Dictionary of musical terms* presents Eurhythmly as a harmonious combination of lines, sounds and movements,<sup>5</sup> stressing the importance of harmony as a whole but also emphasizing the inter-disciplinary of sound-movement, which again reminds of antiquity.

In ancient Greece, there were two types of arts: expressive art and constructive art. The first type of art was the expression of syncretism in poetry, music and dance, and the second category referred to architecture, sculpture and painting. The idea of interdisciplinary has been configured ever since and nowadays, the new paradigms in modern education consider this principle to be extremely effective in the learning process within the formal and non-formal education.

Today, the syncretism of poetry, music and dance is very common in music education systems established around the world, of which Dalcroze, Orff and Willems are mentioned. It is hard to imagine a music lesson without the harmonious combination of the three arts, the unifying element being the rhythm. It exists in the accents of the words in poetry, in the rhythmic dimension of the music, in the relationships between the durations, and the dance is the perfect expression of the rhythm, marking certain accents through gestures or positions of the body.

In children's musical education, the song supported by the movement of the body is an edifying syncretic element. The song, as an element of expressive musical language, loved and very accessible, combines the word with the melody in an organic whole and constitutes a context that stimulates movement, especially at the age of childhood. The song is at the same time content of learning process (I want to learn a song because I like it), but it is also the source of learning, through it being introduced many musical elements, facilitating learning and understanding of the musical phenomenon.

Eurhythmly, as a method of children's musical education, refers to the movement of the arms and legs in a specific way, depending on the changes in the rhythm and tone of the music. This method aims to develop the physical reaction to music for faster learning of the songs but also for the mental and physical abilities of the children.<sup>6</sup> The intuitive combination of the melody with the dance favors the development of the musicality, through the movement, through various rhythms, with implications of musical dynamics, which implies the use of musical sounds, from very low intensity to strong sound effects. Everything is easier to assimilate in association with bodily movements.

<sup>4</sup> Ion Coteanu (coord.).1984. *Dicționarul Explicativ al Limbii Române*. București: Editura Academiei RSR, p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> Gheorghe Firca. 2010. *Dicționar de termeni muzicali*. București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, p. 198.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelia Marinescu (coord.). 2010. *Enciclopedia Universală Britanică* (vol. 5/16). București: Editura Litera, p. 355.

Rhythmic improvisation, an expression of freedom in creation and artistic manifestation, is another important element in Dalcroze's pedagogy, with multiple benefits in the musical formation of the child, requiring cognitive processes such as imagination, creativity, creative thinking.

In music education activities, according to the Dalcroze method, each lesson always starts with experimentation, then elements of musical language will be associated with the experiences lived. Practice precedes theory. It has been shown that it is more efficient by going from practice to theory and understanding of abstract musical concepts is easier through music, through Eurhythmics. The earlier the child is introduced to rhythmic musical activities, the more effective it is for him to learn the elements of rhythmic musical notation later. During the musical pre-notation period, there are many activities that involve games, counters, pulsation of a binary or ternary meter, which will favor the succession of the accents. The teacher performs improvisations, spontaneously creates music and asks, encourages the child to respond in the same way, thus ensuring the expressive character of the music. Later, these games will be associated with the elements of musical language, but the child is accustomed to feel, think through music and with music, updating the musical experiences lived until then. Based on a solid foundation, all the rhythmical content that the school demand through music education, can be built on (but also other parameters, such as melody, harmony).

In Dalcroze's pedagogy, activities must be conceived progressively, from simple to complex, from what the child already knows to a new learning experience that brings a new acquisition. These activities bring general benefits, regarding the development of the whole personality, such as:<sup>7</sup>

- physical and mental well-being
- ease speaking in public
- mental balance and relaxation
- intellectual and physical agility
- concentration.

Dalcroze's Eurhythmics favors the social develop of the child, improve the relations with the others, because many activities involve connections between people, games or rhythmic exercises performed in pairs or small groups. All these leads to the strong relationships within the group of students, but these benefits can be transferable for the adult group, without a musical preparation.

For example, a company that wants to build healthy relationships within the members can organize a team building which involves rhythmical activities for its employees.

Stimulation and cognitive and relational development through movement allows the experience of the body as an instrument which transmits musicality and sensitivity and develops creativity and imagination in an extremely pleasant, provocative and attractive manner.

## **1.2. Rhythmic activities during the musical pre-notation and notation stage**

The creativity demonstrated by the teacher in music education lessons is also transmitted in the formation of the student's personality. A creative teacher will have creative students. Depending on the particularities of the age and the musical experience of the children, both during the pre-notation and notation stage, the teacher will design specific activities, respecting the principle of progressive development, meaning to go from simple to complex.

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<sup>7</sup> *Institutul Jaques-Dalcroze*. Retrieved March 6, 2020, from <https://www.dalcroze.ch/english/what-is-eurhythmics/>

For this paper, we selected only rhythmical activities, such as:

- correct breathing exercises and muscle disconnection;
- exercises for the correct metric accents;
- exercises for designing rhythmic formulas and adding movements;
- exercises for visual-auditory identification of the measures;
- body polyrhythms;
- bodily improvisation exercises with a certain given metric space;
- exercises for attention and memorization;
- group exercises;
- exercises of creativity with the surrounding objects;
- exercises for the will and the inhibition.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2.1. Musical pre-notation stage

With small children we can practice singing next song, then adding movements. First, we teach the song and we are making sure that everyone is capable to sing it clear. If the Romanian song is too hard we can choose another song and adapt the movements.

#### *Podul de piatră*

*cules de Emilia Comişel*

1. Po - dul de pia - tră s-a dă - ră - mat, Vom fa - ce al - tul  
C-a ve - nit a - pa și l-a lu - at, Al - tul mai trai - nic

pe râu în jos și mai fru - mos

When the song is very well known, the kids can practice the movements. If we have a big class is better to split the children in 2 or 3 groups, in a circle.

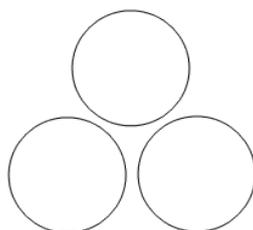


Fig.1: *Circle arrangement*

Children sit in a circle holding hands. Each time a step is left, for two measures (4 steps). Then we return with 4 steps to the right for two measures (4 steps). The movement is repeated twice. Further the hands are detached and each child turns to the left a measure and a half, then claps his hands on the other half (2 measures), then returns the same way to the right (other 2 measures), arriving in the same place.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriela Munteanu. 2010. *Sisteme de educație muzicală*. București: Editura Fundației România de Măine, p. 135.

Then, to be more fun and challenging, we can add elements that complicate the game:

- accents for the first beat in each measure;
- keeping only the movements for the first half of the song and the second half is replaced with other movements that fit in the same metrical structure;
- each child improvises movements for two measures (depends on their level).

### 1.2.2. Musical notation stage

For older students, who have already started the rhythmic notation, we can choose the song *A Ram Sam Sam*, which is learned after teacher model. It is important for them to interpret the song correctly, so after they will be able to focus on the rhythmical part.

#### *A Ram Sam Sam*

*Traditional Moroccan folk round*

A musical score for the song "A Ram Sam Sam" in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves of music. The lyrics are: "A ram sam sam, A ram sam sam, Gu - li ram sam sam, A ra - fiq, A ra - fiq, Gu - li gu - li gu - li gu - li ram sam sam." The music is written in a single treble clef with a key signature of one flat (Bb).

After this stage, we can practice and gradually add to the song, rhythmical exercises adapted to their ages and level of musical preparation, one of the following lines:

- Clapping hands;

A rhythmic notation exercise for clapping hands, consisting of two measures of music on a single staff. The first measure contains four quarter notes, and the second measure contains four quarter notes. The notation is enclosed in repeat signs.

- Snapping fingers;

A rhythmic notation exercise for snapping fingers, consisting of two measures of music on a single staff. The first measure contains four quarter notes, and the second measure contains four quarter notes. The notation is enclosed in repeat signs.

- Slapping knees;

A rhythmic notation exercise for slapping knees, consisting of two measures of music on a single staff. The first measure contains four quarter notes, and the second measure contains four quarter notes. The notation is enclosed in repeat signs.

- Stamping feet.

A rhythmic notation exercise for stamping feet, consisting of two measures of music on a single staff. The first measure contains four quarter notes, and the second measure contains four quarter notes. The notation is enclosed in repeat signs.

At the beginning, each line is taught according to the model given by the teacher, than the children write the rhythmic part after dictation. The exercise starts with the strong beat in measure, without anacrusis. Each line is read rhythmically and then the class is divided into 4 groups. Each group will practice rhythmically each fragment but one line is chosen for each group, first, then switch between them.

The timbre variety will be provided by the body parts involved in rhythmical exercises. The children will be able to improvise their own rhythmic line, using previous experience, with surrounding objects (tables, pencils) or small percussion instruments.

## 2. Dalcroze and dance

The “Eurhythmics” system, designed by Jaques-Dalcroze for musicians, as a synthesis of musical and rhythmic patterns, explored music visualization into physical expression. In this respect, his philosophy was influential on the world of dance. The method of eurhythmics have had a “great application for training dancers and choreographers to form deeply felt relationship among eye, ear, memory and one’s kinesthetic awareness.”<sup>9</sup>

Having the human body as a main instrument, Dalcroze Eurhythmics aims to improve musical abilities by training the hearing and much more than that, bodily expression becomes a means of free choreographic composition.

Analyzing movement depending of its rhythmic pattern revealed the most effective gesture, the most significant attitude as well as the most accurate dance technique. According with Dalcroze’s method, the dancer’s body is educated to react to the complexity of rhythmic patterns: “music released into the brain an image that started an impulsive movement and, if the music is perceived correctly, the movement became expressive.”<sup>10</sup>

From music pedagogy, eurhythmics developed as a method for inner discipline of a dancer: training equally the body, mind and sensitivity. The principles of this method, applied in dance pedagogy began with musical education and continued with developing specific body training according to the essential human emotions.

Dalcroze’s eurhythmics pointed out the interdependent relationship between rhythm and movement and, many of his disciples converted his musical principles into choreographic basic elements.

### 2.1. Rhythmic experience

Eurhythmics could be translated in dance language as rhythmic impulse of the movement – and many choreographers tried to identify and coordinate these instrumental skills.

Dalcroze’s system of rhythmic training also developed the dancer’s rhythmic and expressive potential through the medium of his/her own body, which became eventually an instrument of expression.<sup>11</sup>

For dancers, the study of eurhythmics is based on a rhythmic experience that implies:

- using the body as an instrument
- coordination of music and body motions
- physical interpretation of rhythmic symbols
- integrating body, mind and emotion in a meaningful expression

Marie Rambert and Vaclav Nijinsky were the first choreographers who applied the Dalcroze’s system for Stravinsky’s *The Rite of Spring* (1913). This ballet inspired from the Russian pagan rites is considered the first dance performance based on Dalcroze’s dramaturgy of gesture. Dance technique set in motion from inner understanding of rhythmic patterns of Stravinsky’s music.

<sup>9</sup> Marc Raymond Strauss with Myron Howard Nadel. 2012. *Looking at contemporary dance: a guide for the internet age*. Hightstown NJ: Princeton Book Company, p. 2.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Bourcier. 1994. *Histoire de la danse en Occident, II, Du Romantique au Contemporaine*. Paris: Edition du Seuil, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Elsa Findlay. 1971. *Rhythm and Movement: Applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics*. Evanston: Summy-Birchard Inc., pp. 3 - 4.

In choreography music, movement, body and mind merged on a dramatic visual expression.

The accuracy of sensorial response to the specific musical rhythms is (until present) the main goal of a choreographer – he/she knows that all motor skills and abilities of a dancer are dependent on well-developed sense of rhythm.

Exploiting the unpredictable and dissonant rhythmic patterns of Stravinsky's music Nijinsky stimulated the body, mind and emotions of the dancers which became significant and transformed into a vital rhythmic experience for the audience as well.

Maybe because this ballet is concerned primarily with the development and expression of musical rhythm, it fascinated the choreographers until nowadays.

One of the first choreographers who explored in her works the correspondences of musical patterns and dance movements was Ruth St. Denis. She and Ted Shawn founded the first modern dance school in America – Denishawn – where the students were educated to listen to the rhythm of a musical piece and to express freely that specific rhythm through body motions.

Teaching eurhythmics, Ruth St. Denis made the first step to abstract dance. Visualizing music her choreographies emphasized the spiritual function of the art of dance and formed the basis of modern dance in America.

Jaques-Dalcroze's theory of rhythm as the basic element of musical art applied in the art of dance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – modern dance curriculum included as necessary the movement education.

Rudolf Laban was a German theoretician preoccupied of modern educational dance. Inspired by Dalcroze, he founded the conceptual instrument, an original method and a scientific approach for understanding and analyzing the complexity of moving body. He analyzed human body movement related to space, gravitation, rhythm and he studied the "qualities" of dance movement such as fluidity, tension and energy.<sup>12</sup> Coding the possibilities of dance movements in time and space, Laban conceived a theoretical corpus as well as a compositional method which is a true legacy for the future choreographers.

For Laban and his disciples rhythm is a particular language that transcends the dance motion.

Mary Wigman was Dalcroze and Laban former student and, she was the first German choreographer who searched the union between the body rhythm and the mental rhythm. But, for her the sound rhythm isn't fundamental for mental rhythm as in Dalcroze eurhythmics. Her famous dance composition *Witch Dance* (1914) illustrated the concise expression of solitude, of terror, of internal impulses but it had no music support, it was based on pre-existent music – beating the rhythm with bare feet she tried to induce by dancing the profound rhythm of a divinatory act.

### *2.1.1. The embodiment of rhythm*

The interdisciplinary approach of eurhythmics made possible the expansion of the method to other arts, including dance, as it was mentioned above. Finding symmetry, balance and accuracy in music, and dance as well, is related to the embodiment of rhythm.

The components of the Eurhythmics (i.e. rhythmic exercises, improvisation, performing) are interdependent and lead to a mental and kinesthetic experience. Such an experiment we had in 2019 when dance students performed in my version of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

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<sup>12</sup> Isabelle Ginot, Marcelle Michel. 2002. *La danse au XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Larousse / Vuef, p. 86.

In this project we started working simultaneously on three directions:

- structural and stylistic suitability of music and dance
- transforming dance techniques into body language
- scenic performance

*The Rite of Spring* is a provocative dance performance in which human body needs special discipline – it had to become a well trained instrument in order to defeat gravity in jumps and air resistance in rotations, and also the dancer’s body must be able to transform, to flex, as well as to express joy and sorrow without words.

Dance is perceived in prehistoric age as an expressive action with a magic power – rhythm is the basic source of body motions and posture – so, there was an incipient “choreography” but the imitative gestures and rhythmic exercises were the basic elements.

Wishing to find the ancestral roots of dance, together with my students, we started with simple exercises like breathing, walking, contact with the ground, alternation between body tension and free movements – all that leading to a body awareness necessary for understanding and performing the dramatic scenes.

Applications of Dalcroze’s Eurhythmics were the ideal technical support in obtaining the control and coordination of dance movements. The physical interpretations of rhythmic symbols of the score became significant and students learned how to coordinate their body movements as a result of a valuable rhythmic experience.

Rhythmic exercises and imitative gestures were gradually transformed into formal symbols which could express a sensible and creative spirit.

*The Rite of Spring* project was an opportunity to analyze the basic and specific rhythmic structure of music and to discover the impact of embodiment of rhythm over the body language. Eurhythmics was the method I chose for develop force and elasticity of muscles and more, to gain the aplomb and motor skills of my dancers – in this particular study of technique and body language “body, mind and emotion are integrated in rhythmic expression.”<sup>13</sup>

Rhythmic exercises could be considered the prelude of dance, elements of calligraphy of dance movements, but without them dance couldn’t become an expressive scenic performance.

Stravinsky’s music was challenging at the beginning because of its abrupt rhythmic patterns, but step by step, it defined scenic action, pointed out the dramatic plots, music patterns specified the characters.

Experimenting ritual rhythmic exercises the choreography activated kinesthetic memory and thus our performance revealed ancestral memory of the art of dance with its rhythmic core.

## 2.2. Body musicality

This concept of body musicality was also born from Jaques-Dalcroze’s eurhythmics: the profound emotion produced by the music will modulate the body movements and, in this respect, dance is essentially produced by music. Choreographers who were influenced by this point of view consider dance relied on specific features of music – rhythm, melody and harmony.

Isadora Duncan was the choreographer for whom the music provided the essence, the strength and flow of the dance. She declared that her art is inspired by nature which let her to rediscover the fundamental rhythmic and moving patterns of dance. Duncan developed a body musicality that echoed in the work of many choreographers of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>13</sup> Elsa Findlay. 1971. *Rhythm and Movement: Applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics*. Evanston: Summy-Birchard Inc., p. 2.

The freedom of expression is the main objective of my course of *Dance Improvisation*, it stimulates creativity and students could discover by themselves the possibilities and limits of a dance movement.

Inspired by Eurhythmics and by Isadora Duncan, I proposed to my students a dance performance in which they would collaborate and explore technical concepts furthermore they had the opportunity to express their ideas and beliefs dancing.

Our performance – *A life song (Cântecul unei vieți)* was intended to be a choreographic representation of Isadora Duncan's autobiographic book: *My life*. Musical support compiled Chopin's preludes, waltzes, nocturnes and piano concert.

Dance passages, both for the soloists and ensemble, pleaded for individual freedom – freedom of expression and of action. Every person had family and social ties and everyone had an instinctive desire for liberation and exceeding boundaries. Having this theme of liberation from any compulsory and restrictive laws (family laws, school laws, ballet laws...) our performance based on structural music patterns and built an architectural body structure.

In my opinion, choreography is a process in which understanding music leads to a perfect execution of dance movements – rhythm of music and rhythm of dance could overlap but they are significantly distinct.

Finding their body musicality (as Isadora always did) dancers were confronted to a complex situation as they have to coordinate dance movements and pantomime with four pianists who played live at two pianos, on the stage. Musicians and dancers worked together increasing the potency to go beyond the superficial level of considering dance mere music visualization.

In this project we started with rhythmic and physical exercises, we analyzed and found the best artistic structure and we proposed our own key elements to managing a music and dance performance that can withstand a school experiment and promotes a beautiful experience within the stage.

Eurhythmics as synthesis of imagination, body motion and emotion is fundamental in the development of expressiveness and creativity. From this point of view, it is a valuable method and a cardinal principle of dance composition. Paraphrasing Nietzsche, we could consider the applications of Dalcroze Eurhythmics in the art of dance as an evolution from feeling to representation.

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