

The Dalcroze Method of Musical Education

Dalcroze is a wonderfully fun and invigorating approach to building musical skills and understanding. Participants use their bodies as their instrument to experience, embody, and create music. Participants work together, learning by ear from the music, from the feelings of movement in their bodies, and from their classmates. Many activities are structured as fun and increasingly challenging games, guided by the music and played together with their fellow classmates.

The Beginnings

Emile Jacques-Dalcroze (1865-1950), a composer, theorist, and teacher, began teaching at the Geneva Conservatory in Switzerland in 1892. He was frustrated by the lack of musicality, fluency, and accuracy of his students' performances. According to Dalcroze, he began developing his ideas after watching a student, who had terrible rhythmical difficulties, walk smoothly and with an even rhythm out of the classroom. Dalcroze believed that if he could help that student tap into the smooth, natural rhythms of his body when walking, he could help him solve his rhythm problems. Dalcroze's classes soon began to resemble dance classes, rather than music theory classes, with the barefooted students moving around an empty room to music improvised by Dalcroze.

Emile Jacques-Dalcroze sought to help his students connect the rhythms, phrasing, and emotions of music to the physical movements of their bodies. His experiments led to the development of what he called Eurhythmics.

Eurhythmics

Our word "rhythm" comes from the Greek word "rhythmos", which means "flow". The term Eurythmics literally means "good flow", by which Dalcroze meant the flow of the music experienced through the physical feeling of motion in our bodies. Rhythm for Dalcroze was not limited to the precise timing of note lengths (such as quarter notes and 8th notes), but the motion during those notes that take you from one note to the the next note. The journey is just as important as the starting and ending points. When rhythm is viewed from this perspective it also encompasses all aspects of dynamic energy, character, emotion, texture, tessitura, and musical expression. In a Dalcroze class, participants seek to embody all aspects of musical expression in their bodies.

Although Eurhythmics is the most popular part of Dalcroze's 3-pronged approach to building comprehensive musical skills, his approach to Solfege, which covers all aspects of pitch, melody, counterpoint, and harmony, is equally beneficial and revolutionary. The skills developed in Eurhythmics and Solfege are then combined to create music spontaneously through Improvisation.

Today the Dalcroze approach is one of the leading approaches in music education and has significantly influenced many educational methods, both in music and other fields. Dalcroze is unique in the music education field because it is equally beneficial for all ages and ability levels, from preschool children to conservatory students and professional musicians, as well as senior citizens and people with special needs. In advanced study, participants learn to completely internalize, perform, and embody kinesthetically all aspects of music, such as polyrhythms, syncopations, phrasing, and the emotional affects created by harmony and melody. Embodying music with the entire body enormously improves musical expression, creativity of interpretation, and accuracy in performance. Because Dalcroze produces these results, major conservatories, including Juilliard, the Cleveland Institute of Music, Longy, and Carnegie-Mellon University require their students to take Dalcroze Eurhythmics classes.

Dalcroze and Suzuki

Suzuki and Dalcroze both begin from the same starting point and share similar goals. The Suzuki method begins from a listening experience with music, then moves toward learning to recreate that music on an instrument. After learning to create music on a instrument, reading written music on one's instrument is mastered. Suzuki's loftiest goal is to create beautiful people with wonderful personal character through music.

Dalcroze begins with experiencing music through listening, moving to the music, and singing. These musical and movement experiences are refined to build musical performance skills, musical understanding, and reading skills that can be universally applied to any instrument. We experience and explore music through our ears, voices, and bodies, then learn to transcribe our experiences into visual representations (first more abstract and then into standard musical notation). We then learn to translate musical notation into the musical and movement experiences they represent.

What You Might See in a Dalcroze Eurhythmics Class

Dalcroze identified 34 elements of rhythm that should be experienced and mastered by musicians. Eurhythmics classes build skills in one or more of these areas of rhythm.

Dalcroze requires complete awareness, attention, concentration, and involvement from each participant. One type of game Dalcroze invented to accomplish this was a game where participants must instantaneously change their activity at a given signal. The chosen activities build musical skills and the ability to change quickly from one skill to another (for

example, changing accurately from walking quarter notes to jogging 8th notes). The signal may be visual, vocal, or musical. This can be as simple as following the leader or as complex as switching between multiple different rhythmic skills at given musical signals. This type of game is called a **Quick Reaction Game**.

Participants may also be asked to follow the nuances and changes of the music through their movement. They will need to move in a way that they feel and show the dynamics, articulations, register, variations in tempo, character, or mood. This game is called a **Follow** and encourages participants to experience and express the meaning and of the music in their bodies. A Follow expands participants expressive horizons and, through movement, helps them explore the different physical movements required to produce these different moods on an instrument.

Participants may echo back what the leader does. For example, the leader may play, sing, or gesture a rhythm or phrase that is 4 beats long, which the participants echo in the next 4 beats through movement or with their voice. This activity builds instantaneous memory, the ability to play by ear, and is a type of dictation in which everyone is dictating the music they hear through movement in real musical time. In the first level of this game, called an **Interrupted Canon**, the leader waits silently while the participants echo back the phrase. In a more advanced level, called **Continuous Canon**, the leader keeps going, while the participants remain 4 beats behind. Participants must simultaneously memorize the next phrase while remembering and performing the previous phrase.

Participants may be asked to replace one element of a phrase or pattern with a new element. For example, participants may be asked to replace every third beat of a melody with a rest; or when they hear a certain signal or command, replace the next beat with two 8th notes. **Replacement** games build comprehensive skill and control over a given musical element by developing the ability to use it instantaneously in new and varied contexts.

Music is the teacher in a Dalcroze class. The teacher improvises music that leads students to build skills and conquer challenges found in the music. We also learn to sing and move music composed by great composers that builds the musical skills that all musicians use on all instruments and in many styles of music.

Most importantly, we have fun together in Dalcroze classes. Dalcroze is a social, joyful, fun, and invigorating experience that draws us back again and again to experience music together with our friends through fun and challenging games and activities.

Goals of Dalcroze Education

Mental, Emotional, and Social Goals

1. Development of **attention** and **awareness**
2. Convert attention to **concentration**
3. Convert concentration to **active** and **responsive listening** (aural, visual, kinesthetic).
4. **Objective observation** and **assessment** of one's performance leading to
5. **Self-correction** and developing increasingly more **skilled** and more **accurate performances** through practice, which develops
6. **Confidence** through observing one's own improvement.
7. **Social integration** (develop awareness of the similarities and differences between oneself and others; develop appropriate responses between oneself and others in a group; develop ensemble, teamwork, and cooperation skills)
8. Develop **memory** (aural, visual, kinesthetic)
9. Develop acute physical **responses** to and **expression** of all **nuances** of sound and feeling

Physical goals

1. **Ease, comfortability, and fluency** of performance
2. **Accuracy** of performance
3. **Personal expressiveness** and **creativity** of performance, utilizing the physical laws of:
Time + Space + Energy + Weight + Balance + Plasticity
Within a **field of gravity** and subject to differing degrees of **resistance**
4. Develop **inner hearing** and **conscious kinesthesia**

Musical goals

1. Quick, accurate, comfortable, creative, and expressive personal responses to music.
2. Convert personal response to music into expressive representative performance (phonomimesis).
3. Discover musical elements that create the character and affect, such as nuances of tempo, dynamics, accents, articulations, trills, rests, cadences, phrasing, etc. (analysis)
4. Convert representative performance into sound performance using both one's voice and instruments.
5. Convert performances (mime and sound) into representative symbols (notation)
6. Convert symbols (notated music) into expressively creative physical and musical performances.
7. Create expressive musical spontaneously in real time (improvisation).