

## **Solfège in choral setting: listening and singing in movement**

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### **On embodiment of music**

Playing or listening to music is a multi-sensorial experience that engages both mind and body. Using methods of teaching that includes all senses is stressed by Peter Gärdenfors, professor in Science of Cognition: 'Involve more senses and the whole body. The more senses that are used in a teaching situation, the better it is remembered. For example, it has been shown that a combination of picture and voice often gives better effect than a combination of picture and text. To use the body as an implement gives a sort of experience that also leads to a deeper foundation for the teaching material'. [my transl.] (Gärdenfors 2010, pp. 267-268) In Dalcroze Eurhythmics bodily experience is used as a method for teaching music and musical expression. Also, movement and expression in movement is taught through using music. The body is used as an experiencing and expressing instrument for musical gestures and occurrences. It is an overall pedagogic with the ambition to engage the whole person. The total being is active in expression: physical with the whole body as an instrument and psychological in the sense that total awareness is needed in the creative, physical expression. In this kind of work with the music, the student gets an inner picture, an experience of the music, and shapes it in physical expression which he or her can convert into his musicianship, either in a piece of music or as gestures in an idiom. According to Juntunen (2004, p. 15) Dalcroze Eurhythmics can be seen as a process to awaken musicality and to develop musicianship in a wider sense. In teaching and learning Dalcroze Eurhythmics, different senses should be involved, making the complete student active and therefore both the teaching and the learning as efficient as possible.

### **On solfège**

The word *sofège* or *sofeggio* is originally a name for singing exercises or *etudes* where you sing on the solmisation syllables or on vowels (a *vocalise*). The designation is also used for courses in music theory and aural training, often with basis in singing on solmisation syllables and with a focus on sight-reading (Franzén 1979; p. 415). The aim of *sofège* in Dalcroze Eurhythmics is to embody and visualise the music – the aural experience gets concrete, which makes it an efficient and hands-on methodology for teaching music theory. The students show the music and their aural experience with their bodies, additionally they practice and learn the music. At the same time, they show what they have heard and understood, and it is obvious for the teacher if the student has grasped the material.

Dominique Porte, headmaster at Institute Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva 1971–1990, writes:

*It teaches nothing more than the traditional solfège, but it teaches it in another way. First it is about making music, eurhythmics and to sing, before any analytical thought. If the main aim of solfège, commonly seen, is to identify the musical elements in duration, pitch, intensity – because identification makes dictation as possible as reading – is the main aim of the Dalcroze-solfège that the analyse first is based on the activity of the student, on his experience. In relation to live music the solfège ceases to be fractional or preparatory. It is over his or her personal adeptness, over the applied and perceived music, that the student makes a reflected journey back. His knowledge is never going to be larger without an at least equally large increase of his*

*musical awareness. The solfège becomes a reflected thought through accompanying the expressive action and through being at its service.* [my transl.] (Porte n.d., p. 4)

Solfège focuses on tonal basic concepts and sounding structures in music, such as scales, keys, intervals, rules of phrasing and nuancing, and aims at developing the inner hearing of the student. Aural training integrates with exercises in metrics and improvisation. Contents are for example singing *prima vista*, vocal improvisation, notation and composition. Practice comes before theory and therefore you first practise and then you analyse.

The studies of Solfège aims to awaken: *The sense of intervals and keys and the ability to distinguish its colour of sound.* They teach the student to hear melodies and to picture them and their counterpoint in all keys, to discern harmonies and harmonic series, to read music *prima vista* and to improvise with his voice, to notate and to compose melodies. [Jaques-Dalcroze 1914, p. 99] [my transl.]

The teaching is supposed to develop tonal consciousness (Bertolotto 1979, p. 658). Tonal consciousness is, according to Jaques-Dalcroze 'our thought's and our being's ability to, even without help from either voice or instrument, imagine series of tones and tone combinations, recognize all kinds of melodies and chords, with help from comparing tone and tone. This consciousness is generated by repeated experiences with ear and voice.' [my transl.] (Jaques-Dalcroze 1907, p. 67) In traditional solfège in Dalcroze Eurhythmics is the tonal consciousness – the inner hearing – trained, among other things through singing on solmisation syllables.

### **To build a soundscape – listening and singing in movement**

Fundamental for understanding the methodology of Dalcroze Eurhythmics is a personal experience of the teaching situation, which includes embodiment of music and expression of aural experience in movement. This must be closely followed by reflecting on and verbalising that same experience, and furthermore identifying the experienced music theory. Here follows an example of how to let participants in a lesson experience aural training and basic training of just intonation through *sofège*. The themes are both the interval seconds and the Aeolian scale (natural minor), and both are explored through singing and improvising together. The group sings on solmisation syllables (or on numbers) and with hand signs, thus singing on the same vowels. Given the vowels are pronounced the same way this enhances a common and just intonation.

As a preparation for working with the scale, exercises in singing and walking the minor and major second are made: The group stands in a circle. When taking steps forward, one sings a tone upwards; when taking a step backward, one sings a tone downwards. Small step – minor second, larger step – major second. One person is leading, the rest imitating at the same time. This exercise might take a while. It is also possible, changing leader, and/or having more circles in the room, thereby creating voices and harmonies (harmonic or disharmonic).

After this, improvising on the scale and at the same time walking and signing builds an Aeolian soundscape in the room. As a conclusion of the session, a recording of the orchestral piece *Cantus in memoriam Benjamin Britten* (built on the descending Aeolian scale) by Arvo Pärt could be played. The participants could either sign and sing together with it and explore the Aeolian descending scale in a wider musical context, or just rest and listen to the music, silently reflecting over the experienced workshop. The session should be winded up with a common dialogue on and verbalisation of the content and learning outcome of the session.

## References

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