

Stepping into Music
By Anita Strevens
(*Primary Music Today, Issue 32, Autumn 2005*)

Anyone who is involved in music education for younger children will have been hard-pressed to ignore the burgeoning interest in movement as part of a music curriculum. It was with some delight that members of The Dalcroze Society UK became aware of such phrases in the DfEE/QCA document Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage as '[Practitioners should enable children to] sing simple songs from memory, recognise sounds and sound patterns and match movements to music', and in the Music National Curriculum, Key Stage 1: 'Pupils should be taught how to explore and express their ideas and feelings about music using movement, dance and expressive and musical language'. This was recognition of the experience of Dalcroze teachers - that engaging in music through full body movement gives access to our full learning capacity embracing all learning styles, and develops new creative vocabulary and experiences upon which to draw.

Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, born in Vienna in 1865, was a music educator who believed that experiencing the elements of music with the whole body leads to a deeper understanding of those elements. Through Eurhythmics, (music through movement) Dalcroze sought to strengthen our sensibility towards music. He believed that a student performs better in all aspects of his life through an improvement in the connections between mind and body. Dalcroze influenced education and musical training through conservatory teaching, performing, composing and improvising. He worked in collaboration with artists such as Marie Rambert, and his ideas were reflected in the performance of Nijinsky, the choreography of Diaghilev and permeate the music education approaches of Zoltan Kodály and Orff.

In a Dalcroze session, all elements of music are taught through movement. Students experience all musical concepts through music and movement exercises. Pulse, pitch, tempo and duration, accent, silence, dynamics, phrasing, energy and release, articulation and sustained legato can all be experienced through whole body movement, enhancing musicianship without an instrument being involved. The exercises promote a love of movement and aside from all the musical benefits, co-ordination, concentration, listening skills and group awareness are all improved. The net result is a growth in confidence and a nurturing of the ability to feel the music with the whole body, allowing auditory memory, communication, expression and creativity to develop.

A strong sense of pitch is developed, through aural training, usually following Kodaly solfa principles, starting with the easiest of intervals, the minor third, upon which many nursery rhymes are based. Building up the range of the voice gradually, the student develops a keen sense of intonation, a confident singing voice and the vital musical skill of inner hearing.

Youth Music, through the particular interest of David Sulkin (Director of Policy and Programmes), had shown interest in the Dalcroze approach, and following discussions during the summer of 2004 between the Dalcroze Society and Youth Music, it was suggested that the Society bid for substantial funding for an "Early Years" project.

Three Dalcroze teachers with Early Years teaching and training experience were chosen to create and manage the bid. Siân Davies has run extensive Early Years projects for the London Boroughs of Hackney and Lambeth and has a wealth of experience as an education officer for the East of England Orchestra (now renamed 'sinfonia ViVA') and for the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields. Margareta Burrell is a music therapist as well as a Dalcroze teacher, and has been giving music sessions and training staff at Thomas Coram Early Childhood Centre in London for some years. I

teach Dalcroze on the String Training Programme of the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and run 'Music Umbrella' – subsidized classes for pre-school children and their families in Dartford, Kent, as well as giving Dalcroze workshops around the country.

In December 2004 we heard that the bid had been successful, so the next stage involved finding a name and logo for the project, finding Early Years settings willing to host our music and movement sessions, and finding eighteen people willing to become trainees – to commit to attending Early Years music and movement sessions one day per week for two terms. We also had to find the 10% partnership funding required by Youth Music, and this we managed through a generous donation from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, involvement of Sure Start settings and funding generated by the Society itself.

The project's name, 'Stepping into Music', was chosen because it describes our aims - to give young children a gentle and enjoyable initiation into music, and also to give an idea about Dalcroze Eurhythmics being active, involving the whole body.

It was vital to Youth Music that we should work in areas of need, so after some research into the level of funding already received in various areas, three areas were chosen - Thanet and East Kent; the Basildon area of Essex; and Peterborough. Sessions take place in Sure Start centres, playgroups and Foundation stage classes of infants' schools. Initially nine settings will have received eight music and movement sessions in the summer and the autumn terms, each lasting approximately 40 minutes. In the autumn of 2005, nine new settings will join the project, giving eighteen settings who will benefit.

The eighteen trainees have observed the music leaders teach during the summer term, and in the autumn will be leading the sessions themselves, with the Dalcroze teachers observing half of the sessions. To enable them to feel ready for their new roles, the trainees have already attended a weekend course at Easter and four days on the Dalcroze Society Summer School. During the Summer School they experienced classes given by other Dalcroze teachers, which they found to be a broadening experience. The experience of the trainees varies. There are one or two musicians already leading Early Years projects, but interested in incorporating movement into their work. There are others who are professional musicians, but not yet involved in Early Years education. In addition we agreed to find Early Years professionals from the local settings who were not necessarily experienced musically, but who were keen to increase the music provision within their settings by enhancing their own skills. When the trainees start delivering sessions themselves, they will be working in pairs, so that their mix of talents can be exploited to the full. It is very likely that the Early Years professionals will help the musicians enormously with behaviour management, and the musicians will help with musical points.

To add to the incentive for taking on the training, and to raise the potential for carrying on the training work after the life of this project, the Dalcroze Society sought accreditation from Canterbury Christ Church University College. Those trainees already at degree level will receive an Advanced Certificate in Early Years Music and Movement from CCCUC, and the Further Education training will result in a BTEC Advanced Certificate in Early Years Music and Movement under licence from Edexcel.

Dalcroze is a multi-faceted discipline, and the trainees have attended various workshops – development of their own movement and rhythmic awareness; early childhood movement development; improvising simple music for movement; singing sessions to enhance their sense of pitch and to help their understanding of the development of the young voice; repertoire sessions and creative song and dance workshops. Young children learn so much by imitation that a considerable amount of time is spent on the personal development of the trainees. Their quality of movement and their ability to sing at a pitch suitable for young voices is an important part of the Dalcroze approach.

The training required to become a fully-fledged Dalcroze teacher able to play appropriately for a vast array of exercises, to choose suitable music for expressive movement and to have a clear understanding of the elements of the physical work required, all takes time and energy. Dalcroze teachers would agree that there is always room for expansion of their knowledge and repertoire, so during the training days, some visiting artists have also contributed exciting workshops in which Dalcroze teachers and trainees alike have participated with enormous enthusiasm and relish. Workshops so far have included an African drumming and dance workshop given by Usifu Jalloh and an Indian dance workshop given by Anusha Subramanyam.

As well as the sessions in Early Years settings, two shorter projects will take place in Salford and the Kensington area of Liverpool, when Early Years professionals will spend a day at a forum learning some basic skills and repertoire, and the Dalcroze specialist, accompanied by a trainee, will visit some Early Years settings. In the New Year, most of the people involved in the 'Stepping into Music' project will spend a day with those involved in two other Early Years projects funded by Youth Music. These are the Wigmore Hall's Chamber Tots programme, and the London Philharmonic's Colour Strings project. Each organisation will present some of its work with children and then give a talk or practical workshop based on their work. There will also be a one-day forum in Kent in Spring 2006, where Early Years specialists and music teachers will be able to experience Dalcroze Eurhythmics classes, take part in workshops given by visiting musicians and hear more about the 'Stepping into Music' project.

The project this far has meant a huge amount of work for the three of us, and others have become involved as well - we have subsequently enlisted help with teaching and observing from Joanna Graham, another Dalcroze teacher with Early Years experience, and Zoë Hayward, who has lately taken on most of the administration and co-ordination of the project. Olivia Lawson is evaluating the project, and Nicola Gaines, as chair of the Dalcroze Society, has been very supportive throughout, finding the partnership funding and keeping us calm when the many deadlines have approached. In the settings, members of staff have participated with enthusiasm, and many have been grateful for the new repertoire and training tips that have come their way.

This autumn term promises to be an exciting time as we observe our trainees growing into their new roles, and the time approaches when they will receive their accreditation. The rewards for all the hard work are evident in each setting visited. There is the child who has found a degree of self-control which the staff would never have thought possible, and the setting where the staff have noticed an element of calm and co-operation about the children which was absent before music and movement came into their lives. There is the mother who is surprised that her child now sings his way through the day, and several children whose speech has improved rapidly since the start of the sessions. Above all, there is the delight on the children's faces as we enter the settings, and they realise that, as one child in Peterborough said 'Today is dancing day'.

An example of a Dalcroze music and movement session for three and four year olds:

The session would probably start with a greeting song if the music leader is a visitor who just comes once a week.

A short musical and physical warm-up would then take place, for instance based on enacting movements experienced in a play park - starting low, pretending to climb the steps of a slide, and using arms and voice to whoosh downwards; swaying forward and back as if pushing a swing, or side to side and up and down as if on a see-saw.

Continuing the park theme, children might be encouraged to move at different speeds, offering ideas such as riding a bike or climbing a hill then running down the other side. The music leader might improvise music for this activity and other children

would be encouraged to copy the speed and articulation of the chosen child's movement, and to remain alert to their use of space.

The session would be balanced between circle song time and full body movement so that the children do not tire, and there might also be some percussion work to aid understanding of pulse, rhythm and timbre. It would almost certainly involve some form of quick response game, where children have to stay alert and keep listening in order to react to signals within the music. Every opportunity is sought to give the children a chance to offer their ideas, and for these to be built into a song or a game. The children are also encouraged to talk about what they experience in the sessions, improving their vocabulary and their confidence.

The trainees are being encouraged to spend time observing the children after the official music session finishes. It is vital that they understand how a child's burgeoning musicianship may be in evidence at any point during the day, with a snippet of a song emerging, or some rhythmic movement experimentation taking place, but possibly only lasting a few seconds. If nursery staff can tap into these moments and expand them, the musical co-operation and communication that takes place between the child and adult can be very enriching.

Anita Strevens' first job was as a cellist in the Ulster Orchestra, where she spent five years. She discovered Dalcroze Eurhythmics through her children's experience of it, and now divides her time between performing on the cello, and teaching Dalcroze. Anita gives workshops and training in music and movement to Early Years staff, peripatetic instrumental teachers, orchestral musicians and school teachers. She is the String Leader of the Red Rooster Project at the Mick Jagger Centre in Dartford.