

Mireille Weber

Rhythmics, _____
Solfege... _____
A Path towards MUSIC _____



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English translation: Mary Brice

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A Path towards MUSIC

Jaques-Dalcroze Institute, Geneva

Rhythmics

What is it? What does one do in the classes? What is its purpose?

Rhythmics is a method of education which closely links MUSIC and MOVEMENT.

It is the interdependence of these two fundamental aspects which allows the body to experiment through natural movement the various facets of music. With the Jaques-Dalcroze method, movements and displacements are evoked by the music and its various components, thus allowing the simultaneous development of a person's corporal and musical expressiveness.

This **link between music and movement** is at the heart of the method created by Emile Jaques-Dalcroze.

“He did not invent this union (it has always been present in dance) but the original character of Rhythmics is to ensure that this union serves educational aims. It is never an end in itself, but a means of entering beneficially the space enveloped by music and gesture”.

PORTE DOMINIQUE, Geste et musique, La Rythmique Jaques-Dalcroze, 1989, p. 1.

Gesture and movement take place in a physical ambiance and/or relational space. Use of the space also implies an adaptation of one's physical energy in relation to the energy felt in the music. Dalcrozian education does not only appeal to a person's intellect but to his or her whole being.

During a rhythmics lesson, the students are asked to follow the music, to move with it and to translate it through movement, either freely or according to specific instructions: moving around, clapping, swaying, skipping, jumping, moving the body in a multitude of different ways, in segmented or global movement. For example, they must adapt to changes in tempo, rhythm, rests, measures, phrases, dynamics. They react to variations in energy, pitch, intervals, scales, modes, melodies, harmony, forms, styles and characters of the music. They modify their physical responses according to changes perceived in the music; they acquire automatisms due to the repetition of musical elements. The numerous reaction games will keep them vigilant, in order to be able to adapt easily and with fluidity.

This auditory training enables the development of the quality of listening and interior hearing, and stimulates vocal expression. They integrate the music through living it physically and understanding it intuitively, before discovering it intellectually.

Throughout the lesson, the students' attention is stimulated. They listen, but it is an **active listening**, because they follow and react to the music that they hear.

With Rhythmics, the student is the player in his own learning. He acts, and in this way he integrates.

All these experiences will gradually lead the students to realise the connections between what they hear and their physical response, to become aware, and to understand what they do and why. They will therefore be capable of reasoning, of analysing, of conceptualising and of assimilating deeply new concepts or musical subtleties.

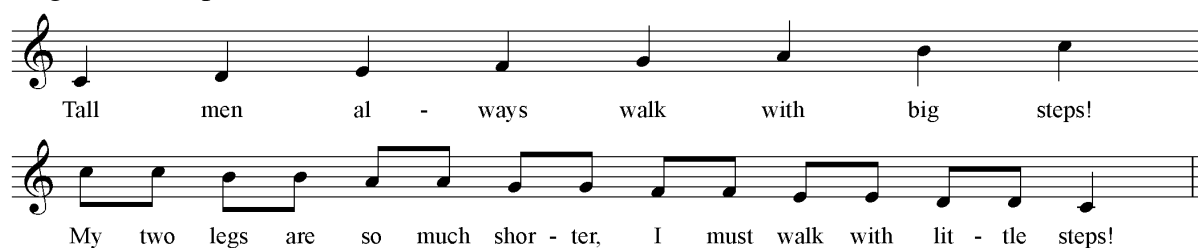
Rhythmics pre-solfege I – children 4 - 5 years old

Using a specific material: a square coloured cardboard (30x30cm)

1 - Do you know how to walk with big steps, little steps? Who can show us? Can we do these different steps while following the music?"

*This simple warm-up exercise that varies the size of the steps, will prepare adaptation of energy and tempo. The improvisations support the activity through loud and soft dynamics. Already we are looking at the relation between **Time – Space – Energy**.*

Sing these two phrases:



Follow the tempo and the number of steps more precisely.

This short melody of two phrases gives a more exact framework. Singing and following the scale makes the children aware both of it and of the dynamics, which accompany large and small steps.

2 - Give a coloured cardboard to each child.

"How could we carry it? Under the arm as if it were heavy, or, as if it were light, on the head..."

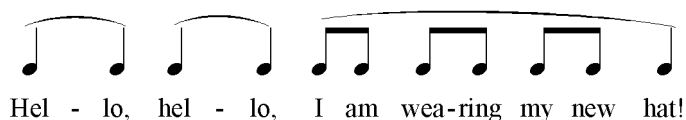
What activities could be proposed?

"How could we move with a tray in our hands, or the handbag of an elegant lady, or at the wheel of a car...?"

"What if it were a small lake where we dip our feet, one after the other?"

This part of the lesson appeals to the pupils' imagination and they suggest ideas. The teacher's role is to use them in ways that serve her purposes.

- If the child's idea is a hat, the teacher could create the following phrase, for example:





Say hello twice and bow.

For each idea given, it is important to create rhythmic movements that we can repeat several times. These rhythms are not necessarily regular or within a measure, but the pupils perceive rhythmic phrases because of the texts.

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Holder of the teaching Licence of the Jaques-Dalcroze method and a Diploma of psycho-motor re-education, **Mireille Weber** taught Rhythmics and Solfege at the Jaques-Dalcroze Institute in Geneva for more than forty years.

She was dean of children's and amateur adults' classes, she initiated parent-child classes and created an adolescent choir which she conducted for many years.

She also taught pedagogy and methodology of Rhythmics for Solfege to the professional students of the *Haute Ecole de Musique*. Thanks to her singing career, she gave lessons in singing and vocal technique.

Throughout these years, she created numerous children's performances, of which the most remarkable, in May, 2008, was the opera "Douce et Barbe Bleue" of Isabelle Aboulker, involving more than one hundred children singing and dancing on stage.

Her long teaching experience contributed to the realisation of the film "Rhythmics, Solfege, a path towards music" in 2010. This film uses a

variety of exercises to illustrate the learning process of the Dalcroze method.

Now retired, she is regularly invited to teach in the context of adult formation and to give children's demonstrations of the Dalcroze method in Europe and Asia.

"Go to the piano; it will be easier if you play!" ... this comment from a child shows the essential link between music and movement experienced through Dalcroze Eurhythmics.

This book is destined for anyone interested in general music pedagogy, as well as for those who would like to deepen their knowledge of the Dalcroze method of music education.

In these pages, the teaching of musical language via Rhythmics is exposed in a practical and creative way. It describes numerous lessons for children of all ages and levels; some exercises could also be appropriate for adults.

The many human capacities challenged by Rhythmics, the progressive approach to musical language and the process of acquiring various musical concepts are analysed and explained in the light of Dalcrozian pedagogy and methodology.

The exercises presented are the fruit of her extensive life experience. With a personal approach, Mireille Weber aims to explain "the how and the why", as well as to give guidance and ideas to those who may wish to benefit from them.

English translation: Mary Brice