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Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: Listening in Movement

Daniela Amaral Rodrigues [α] & Silvia Maria Pires Cabrera Berg [σ]

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Introduction

The composer and pianist Émile Jaques- Dalcroze (1865-1950) begins his story as a musical pedagogue in Harmony classes taught at the Geneva Conservatory, around 1895. He realizes, in practice, that the assumption that those entering the Music course, as instrumentalists, singers and composers had an innate ready hearing capacity, or a special and definitive talent for listening, was not a reality. At the time, students were required to write chords without the aid of the piano, without any auditory training to do so.

Dalcroze then begins a series of physiological experiences associating body and brain in musical learning, with a focus on the development of listening. He initially observes: "among my older students, acoustic sensations were delayed by anticipated and useless reasoning, while among children they revealed themselves in a very spontaneous way and very naturally engendered analysis" (DALCROZE, 1920, p.5)[1]. He concludes that the development of auditory functions happens much faster among children or the earlier this process begins, not only for reasons of organic-neuronal availability, but also for the fact that they are driven by curiosity and the joy of knowing, giving way to a learning to read and write music without difficulties. The reverse process imposed, on the other hand, duty over pleasure.

More than that, Dalcroze is concerned with musical culture and not merely with the formation of a technical ear, capable of distinguishing intervals, chords and melodic lines. Dalcroze discerns the development of hearing, as an organ of sense, of listening, in a broader sense, as musical sensitivity, which creates its own configurations based on memory and relationships, enriched by diversity, which understands and organizes what it perceives, building his reference of taste and judgment, always expanding his conceptions and creative possibilities, surprising himself and exploring the frontiers of music. Listening, for Dalcroze, does not develop only through mechanical repetition for mnemonic purposes, but is associated with a total experience, in which the entire body participates in the movements of the spirit, carried away by the joy and affections of music, a dynamogenic force that galvanizes muscles and nerves, beyond the ears and the intellect.

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[1] Dalcroze's citations are translated here by me from the original text in French.

I. Music and Motor Skills

Dalcroze identified difficulties among the students in vocally performing the rhythms with their different durations, although they showed that they understood these variations. He noticed that the driving and dynamic nature of music affected not only the ears, but the hands, feet, head, torso, permeating the entire being with its vibrations. However, when the musical impulse encountered obstructions between the sense of hearing, muscles and nerves, it could not be fully realized. He came to understand that what he called "musical arrhythmia" was a kind of symptom of a general disharmony between body and spirit, or between body and will, mediated by sensitivity. And he concluded:

> I thus came to consider solely auditory musicality as an incomplete musicality, to research the relationships between mobility and auditory instinct, between harmony of sounds and durations, between time and energy, between dynamism and space, between music and character, between music and temperament, between musical art and dance. (DALCROZE, 1920, p. 6, my translation)

Dalcroze realized that musical performance involves the tactile sense and motor skills, often more than hearing itself, also imprinting traces of memory on the body that guide instrumental practice. And that learning an instrument in itself does not necessarily imply the development of listening, it is important, for this, to establish the connection between the movement, which the dynamogenic nature of music impels the body to do, and hearing, creating a body and auditory awareness. On the other hand, Dalcroze observed that the teaching methods of the time were aimed at the sense of vision (musical notation) or at training the muscles for instrumental performance, without actually

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worrying about hearing. In Dalcroze's pedagogical conception, music is first apprehended through sensitivity, through emotion, through the creative freedom that the playful approach of his Rítmica[2] instigates. Subsequently, reflection elaborates on what was experienced, giving rise to concepts. It is, for Dalcroze, the connection between brain (or nervous system), ear and larynx that makes "the whole organism what can be called an *inner ear*".

II. Music as a Practice for Integral Human Development

The Swiss musical pedagogue highlights, in his article "Musical Studies and Ear Education" (DALCROZE, 1920, p. 9-13) the problem of fragmentation and excessive specialization of musical teaching, resulting in teaching focused on the instrument, limited to repetitive digital technique exercises or a very restricted muscle segment. For him, musical pedagogy should be concerned with awakening vital sensations and awareness of affective states and reinforce different modes of sensitivity as well as awakening thought, before using it to analyze and write music. And it foresees broad possibilities for musical education, whether aimed at those who decide to dedicate themselves to a musical career, or for children, young people and adults, in general, indicating new developments in the research that gave rise to its methodology:

> Would it not be possible to create new reflexes, undertake an education of the nervous centers, calm overly restless temperaments, regulate antagonisms and harmonize muscular synergies, establish more direct communications between the senses and the spirit, between the sensations that alert the intelligence and the feelings that recreate the sensory means of expression? (DALCROZE, 1920, P. 12, my translation).

Dalcroze understands that "an instruction *in* rhythm and an education *through* rhythm" can provide students with a balance between their potential, overcoming difficulties, a finer sensitivity and a more flexible intelligence, fundamental to all, music lovers and professionals, regardless of their innate artistic gifts. He aspires to an education that relates all aspects of music to each other and promotes global human development, integrating body, will, sensitivity and intelligence. In his words: "Vibrations of sounds, vibrations of emotional movements should combine and harmonize, and none of the branches of music should be dissociable from the others" (*idem*, p. 11).

In Dalcroze's *Rítmica*, improvisation plays a fundamental role in the development of listening, through the creative imagination that adapts, replaces and varies what is perceived. For Dalcroze, therefore, listening is not a passive, purely physical reception, but a complex and active process, involving the entire being, making the body an *instrument* or expression of the soul and spirit. In this process, the individual sensorially captures the sound, while making its selection, making its own cut, reconfiguring and inventing new configurations, based on the perceived musical material. Its purpose is not limited to learning musical elements for later analysis; is dedicated above all to the development of musicality, fruitive and creative capacity, making each listener, regardless of their existential choices in relation to music, the role or participation they will assume in relation to musical production, as a composer, performer *or* listener - everyone listens, interprets and creates or recreates what they hear, finding in this the pleasure of exercising themselves in the poetic freedom that art offers.

III. Becoming Free from Automatisms

Dalcroze therefore has a liberating conception of musicalization or education through music, and in particular, of its methodology, as it aims to overcome the automatisms acquired in the condition of urban and sedentary life, reduced to mechanical and repetitive gestures, actions and involuntary reactions, muscular responses and tensions that translate into body rigidity and slow reflexes, affecting willpower and sensitivity. Rhythmics consists of a methodology that guides the creation of exercises with the aim of dismantling blocks or bodily obstructions to movement, linked to perception and musical memory. *In* Dalcroze's view, a flexible body, ready for any movement or stop, in different intensities and muscle tone, changes and variations in the temporal flow, in the spatial direction or in the quality of the movement, enjoys the musical experience as a totality, a process complex, transforming it into a creative impulse. He is thus capable of feeling and expressing himself through his polysemic power, imagining new derivations, deducing the sound qualities of his material and subsequently also creatively elaborating abstract ideas and concepts, based on practical, living experience, instead of merely reproducing them.

Therefore, the freedom achieved in the body is realized in the three correlated instances, as freedom in wanting, feeling and thinking, coming from the inside out, externalizing itself in the gesture, which embeds its memory in the body, generating new references and new arrangements for receiving music. Initially mediated by will and thought, these dispositions and responses gradually become involuntary or thoughtless. Dalcroze considers this a replacement of *automatisms*, mediated by a process of consciousness, towards autonomy. This process results, for Dalcroze, in the creation of an

[2] Dalcroze's musical education methodology, created from observation and pedagogical experience with his students, combining body, listening and voice, through rhythm, as a central element of music and the arts, as a whole.

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ear as a *whole organism*, a true *inner ear*, through a path of broad movements, with the entire body, based mainly on gait, for intimate, subtle, spontaneous and expressive movement of affections and emotions.

Education *through* rhythm and *for* rhythm is not limited to this element of music or the aspect of the temporal organization of sound. On the contrary, rhythm is considered the primordial and vital element, common to all arts, even static ones, such as sculpture, present in nature and in human beings. Dalcroze identifies rhythm with the dynamogenic nature of music, which, in his definition, consists of sounds and movements. It is also the rhythm that makes the body vibrate in movements corresponding to what the hearing perceives. For him, therefore, overcoming what he called "arrhythmia", obstacles and bodily tensions, listening would be fully available to enjoy music in all its aspects, in all its details. Muscular rigidity is related to rigidity in thinking and feeling - and vice versa - as well as a cooling of will and creative capacity, with the physical, soul and spiritual dimensions being intimately intertwined, in mutual and complex interference.

IV. Final Considerations

Therefore, Dalcroze's project is not only artistic, but also social and human, conceiving culture and art as goods of the spirit, belonging to everyone. It can be said that, according to his thinking, the artistic experience with music constitutes training for life, providing the balanced development of each individual's potential, between sensitivity and intellect, and, above all, allowing "to see *clearly*" and exist freely, with self-awareness. The bond with music happens in this context of freedom to feel, think and want without formal predeterminations, with the joy and integrity typical of all genuine creative play, particularly artistic play, and the child's imaginative fantasy.

Accordingly, priority is given to sensitivity, which precedes analytical, conceptual thinking, that is, listening precedes any theoretical teaching. Musical learning does not result from the induction of what the teacher wants to teach, but from reflection on the lived listening experience, based on open dialogue between teacher and students, as a community of learners, in which impressions and sensations are respected and valued. and discoveries in the collaborative construction of knowledge. Dalcroze highlights, in many of his texts, the memory of collective music-making in popular culture, in the festivities celebrating the harvest in Switzerland, as an ideal for a lively musical education, in his view, capable of training not only more complete musicians and sensitive, like listeners who truly love music, as an integral part of life.

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