

# Émile Jaques-Dalcroze

By Joan Pope, 2009

Émile-Henri Jaques, born to Swiss parents in 1865 in Vienna, assumed the name Émile Jaques-Dalcroze in the late 1880s. Selma Odom, Helene Brunet-Lecomte, Irwin Spector and others, present several suggestions regarding this. Some believe it to be a suggestion of the publisher of his early works to avoid confusion with another composer with the surname 'Jaques'; others support the idea of a combination of the name of a friend, Valcroze, and the family origins in the region of St Croix. One gives a comment that he himself said that now he did not have to be one of the many 'Frères Jacques' of the world.

He received his musical training variously in Vienna, Geneva and Paris where he took lessons from Gabriel Fauré. Following various engagements, including one as conductor with a touring opera company, he became Professor of Harmony at the Geneva Conservatorium in 1892. As a composer he took particular interest in the folk songs of the Suisse-Romande, and was involved in numerous original choral-theatrical pageants, *Poème Alpestre*, 1896, *Sancho Pança*, 1897, *Festival Vaudois*, 1903; others followed in 1914 and 1923. He became known as a witty cabaret composer and improviser, and tried his hand at string quartets and other formats. In 1899 he married soprano Nina Faliero and wrote a number of songs for her and later, some hundreds of action songs for young children. The couple had one son, Gabriel; a lawyer, later involved with the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze as an advisor. International audiences became aware of him around the turn of the twentieth century, not however, as a composer, but as a highly original presenter of a new approach to music and movement education.

Jaques-Dalcroze was influenced by contemporary educators. He was attracted to the writings of Swiss piano teacher and theorist, Mathis Lussy who explored the nature of rhythm, and the relationships to be articulated between space and time. The views of François Del Sarte on the categories of gesture and use of space, awakened his interest in gestures with meaning. Knowledge of the Del Sarte (Delsarte) material is not as widely known in Australia as was in USA during the nineteenth century. He took acting lessons from 'Talbot' in Paris, the assumed name of an actor at the Comédie Française, and very interested in aspects of modern theatre design and costuming through his friendship with Adolphe Appia.

The dynamic ear training work with young children presented by Mlle. Marie Chassevant at the Geneva Conservatoire clearly influenced his inventive singing and movement games. He was interested in the work of psychologist Edoarde Claparède, founder of the Institut Jean-Jacques Rousseau. These varied influences provided a well-informed basis for Jaques-Dalcroze's teaching. One might describe him as a borrower, but he was also a thoughtful blender who possessed the creative facility of taking known ideas and making new concepts. That he was no dancer or gymnast himself is clear from innumerable anecdotes and *memoires* from his students, yet he evolved movement challenges that produced both intellectual and physical feelings of delight and discovery in his adult students, and provided learning with joy and humour, in his classes for children.

Some anecdotes from the Australian students of the 1920s who had classes with Jaques-Dalcroze in London and who attended the First Congress of Rhythm he presented in Geneva in 1926 as part of an internationally significant international Summer course are vivid. Jean Wilson's notebooks and letter précis, and Thelma St John George's press cuttings reveal comments such as 'A podgy little man with pointy beard, waistcoat and soft gymnastic-type shoes to class.'... 'Sitting at piano yet bouncing away from it from time to time'; 'An absolute Pied Piper with children.' Many other comments are in Natalie Tingey's *A Record of the London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics and its graduates at home and overseas*, 1974, and also in a (Federation International Enseignants Rythmique (FIER) 1981 publication, *Histoires*, in English translation, as *La rythmique Jaques-Dalcroze; Stories: yesterday and today*.

Teaching adult performance students led Jaques-Dalcroze to consider aspects of musical training such as their rhythmic problems and lack of 'inner hearing.' Interested in movement studies, functions of the nervous system and the psychology of teaching and learning, he commenced experimental classes based on natural movement responses to the elements of music. Jaques-Dalcroze proposed that as movement is instinctive to everyone, it should be the starting point for the study of music. Walking steps, being the 'natural model of measure' could interpret the different duration of notes, while head and arms could 'keep order' and analyse the measures and pauses. He advocated regulated breathing to introduce the study of phrasing, and an understanding of muscular contraction to develop subtleties of expression. 'Doubtless', he said, 'all this appears very simple, and so I myself thought at the beginning of my experience' (Jaques-Dalcroze, in the *British School Music Review* of 1910).

Simple or not, its basic value was soon recognized, notably by an invitation, in 1910, from the Dohrn brothers to establish a College of Music and Rhythm Arts and Education, *Die Bildungsanstalt*, at their factory producing high quality wood craft, in the ‘garden city’ of Hellerau, in the ‘light hills’ near Dresden, which led to an extraordinary burst of artistic and educational endeavour. It attracted international attention from musicians, dancers, actors, writers and forward-looking educators. The term ‘eurhythmics’ was coined by British Professors J. J. Findlay English-speaking teachers and musicians, what they had observed at Hellerau in 1911. Until that time it was known as ‘rhythmische gymnastik’ in German or ‘la rythmique’ in French.

The London School of Dalcroze Eurhythmics was established in 1913 to offer training for teachers and help supply the big demand for the work in schools. The school was sanctioned by Jaques-Dalcroze to give the training in English particularly for residents of Great Britain and its Dominions. Jaques-Dalcroze visited London regularly during the year and taught, gave demonstrations and examined students for several decades. At the outbreak of WWI Jaques-Dalcroze severed his connection with Hellerau and set about establishing his own Institut in Geneva which opened in 1915. By this time there were also Dalcroze training schools in Barcelona and Paris as well as dedicated teachers in St Petersburg, Tokyo and several centres in the United States of America.

Jaques-Dalcroze directed the Institut in Geneva until his death in 1950. He travelled widely in Europe and England presenting lecture-demonstrations and conducting intensive courses. He did not travel to the Americas or the Orient, nor to Australia, New Zealand or South Africa, where however, news and practical exploration of his work was spread by numerous teachers who had studied with him. He was a prolific writer and many of his articles were gathered into several publications such as *Rhythm Music and Education* and *Eurhythmics, Art and Education*. The archive of the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva has a rare collection of his teaching and examination notes, manuscripts, compositions, programmes and press cuttings. The Institut Jaques-Dalcroze has, within the past decade, issued various catalogues of his works, and reprinted a considerable quantity of them.

*The information in this article is drawn from many sources, including Minutes, Journals articles by Michael Sadler, Percy and Gertrude Ingham and Prof J. J. Findlay from the archives of the Dalcroze Society of Great*

*Britain, held at the University of Surrey in the National Resource Centre for Dance (NRCD). Article by Joan Pope May, 2009.*

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