

CONFERENCE REPORT

The 5th International Conference of Dalcroze studies (ICDS5) ‘Dalcroze practice in diverse cultures, communities and contexts’

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CONFERENCE DETAILS

The 5th International Conference of Dalcroze studies (ICDS5)
“Dalcroze practice in diverse cultures, communities and contexts”
22-23 October 2021, online

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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INTRODUCTION

The 5th International Conference of Dalcroze Studies (ICDS5) was held on the 22nd and 23rd of October 2021 (ICDS, 2021). Due to the pandemic, this biennial conference was initially postponed and then moved online for the first time. Dalcroze practitioners and those from related fields, students and established scholars were all welcomed as presenters. Attendees represented countries from all over the globe with the online forum possibly increasing accessibility for the many diverse participants (350 in total). The benefit of accessibility gained from the online structure of the conference balanced some of the inconveniences of communicating through technology. The conference theme was ‘Dalcroze practice in diverse cultures, communities and contexts.’ This theme encouraged discussion and celebration of the relationships between people, practice, and place in Dalcroze study and related practices.

Dalcroze Eurhythmics (DE) entails carefully facilitated exercises centred on the body as a means for embodied experiences (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921, 1925). DE was developed by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) with the intention of awakening connection between the body, mind and emotions through exercises engaging music and movement. Directed movement exercises encourage attention to detailed nuances of physical



Photograph 1: Conference logo

actions which can lead to a more holistic sense of self. As Juntunen and Hyvönen (2004) explain, Dalcroze practice calls for constant “awareness of kinaesthetic sensations. The goal is to show music’s heard and felt qualities in body movement” (p. 203). Greenhead and Habron (2015) contextualise this by explaining that “for Jaques-Dalcroze, music was not only the goal of study; it was also the means to discovery, of developing skilfulness and of personal transformation” (p. 103). ICDS5 provided a space for such discovery and collaboration through listening to others’ experiences and performances as well as actively workshopping.

ICDS5’s technical operation was headed by four Regional Coordinators (Andrew Goldman, Stephen Neely, Alexander Riedmüller, and Katherine Smith), with each providing online infrastructure in their respective time zones. Their preparation and collaboration were evident in the smooth facilitation of forums (up to six parallel sessions at times) that helped attendees come together meaningfully despite being all in our own spaces across the globe. The conference also made videos of the presentations available to all participants for a fortnight after the event.

Throughout ICDS5, presentations explored incredibly varied applications of the principals of Dalcroze pedagogy to music, dance, education, performance, therapy and somatic practices. There were many inspiring presentations in an abundance of formats from symposiums, workshops, roundtables, posters, papers and performances, to an online chat forum for informally meeting other delegates. Each presentation was unique and offered thought-provoking perspectives on Dalcroze theory, history or practice. There was a mixture of research methodologies utilised, from historical research, practice-based research, art-based research, to autoethnographic research and many more. Underpinning this variety was the participants’ shared focus, curiosity and willingness to listen, argue and learn from each other. Personally, I was honoured to present alongside Bethan Habron-James, Diane Daly and Rosalind Ridout in a symposium on the use of autoethnography in Dalcroze practice and research. I also presented an autoethnographic paper which explored my experience as a Dalcroze student and the unexpected benefits this had on my negative body image. I drew on parallels between my experience of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Dalcroze. Both start with a breaking down of issues or tasks to focus on individual components. CBT taught me to observe myself objectively without falling into self-criticism and then built up alternate self-talk. Then Dalcroze taught me to become aware of and actively embody free but intentional movements through observation and action. The exercises grew in complexity over the classes and provided a regular supportive space in which to consciously engage with my body and with others. This way of working with and thinking about my body further promoted self-acceptance and a resilient mindset. As a presenter, I appreciated the willingness of attendees to actively listen, as this supported an atmosphere for deeply delving into often quite personal topics and experiences. Throughout the conference, there was a sense of the importance of embracing diversity with courage and openness. To paraphrase Ava Loiacono; Education is the most powerful tool we have to fight injustices and inequalities (Giovanardi et al., 2021). The nature of Dalcroze practice lends itself well to a diverse range of abilities and ages. Intersections between music therapy, arts-based therapies and Dalcroze are active and living within the Dalcroze community.

Three keynote speakers from different backgrounds and countries gave thoughtful insights, highlighting different aspects of the conference theme. The opening keynote speaker was the current UNESCO Chair in Dance and Social Inclusion, Nicholas Rowe from the University of Auckland, New Zealand. He spoke of the current and imminent challenges we face as arts educators, students and practitioners due to politically, economically or environmentally forced mass migration globally. He elaborated on the significance of performing arts educators in aiding cultural integration in response to the challenges of a strong and often unconscious impetus towards acculturation. He deftly guided the discussions of artistic practice into the realms of social awareness.

The theme of diversity elicited contemporary insights into Dalcroze studies and the exploration of relationships between people, practice, and place. The second keynote speaker was Kathryn Kay, a Dalcroze Eurhythmics teacher at the Royal College of Music, UK. She shared some of her approaches and experiences of teaching children from diverse backgrounds. Kay explored how she had facilitated increased access to

music-making online during COVID-19 lockdowns when students were perhaps less active or in tune with their bodies. Her presentation encouraged participants to engage with and think of the human body as the most expressive, skilled, beautiful and intelligent instrument we can use to experience the world around us.

ICDS5 also highlighted the use of Dalcroze practice to build bridges across geographical and cultural boundaries even in unanticipated contexts. The final keynote speaker was Liesl van der Merwe from North-West University, South Africa. She presented an exploration of joy as a concept that runs throughout Jaques-Dalcroze's writings. Her original theory examined the conditions for experiencing joy and its transformative consequences, for example joyful experiences promote optimism and curiosity in the Dalcroze classroom. Van der Merwe demonstrated these concepts with beautiful stories and recollections about using Dalcroze in promoting joyful experiences and even conflict resolution in diverse communities in South Africa. There was a strikingly memorable moment as she guided us into an exercise of moving together to a lively piece of music. All the straight faces on the Zoom matrix loosened and eventually erupted in laughter as we joined in wholeheartedly. Her energetic delivery explained this connection: "When we move together, it just makes us stronger".

In an active embodiment of the theme, this conference encapsulated a rich diversity of experiences. Dalcroze practitioners, scholars and students demonstrated that they are continuously evolving and adapting their practices. As Jaques-Dalcroze put it:

The more we have of life, the more we are able to diffuse life about us... music is a tremendous... force: a product of our creative and expressive functions that, by its power of stimulating and disciplining, is able to regulate all our vital functions. (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1921, p. 155)

Presenters at the conference showed that the practice of Dalcroze had potential to build connections and promote physical and mental well-being, and resilience.

This conference could be seen as growing from Jaques-Dalcroze's (1921) idea that "the aim of eurhythmics is to enable pupils, at the end of their course, to say, not "I know", but "I have experienced" (p. 155). ICDS5 celebrated achievements and looked towards possible future applications of Dalcroze and related research in arts, education, humanities, and the natural, social, life and health sciences. Insights grew from a conscious effort of practitioners and researchers to recast Dalcroze study and practice in the light of contemporary society. Many thanks to John Habron, Chair of the Scientific Committee, and the ICDS team for providing a platform for seeking to uncover the deeper meanings and possibilities in the legacy of Jaques-Dalcroze. This conference was a thought-provoking sharing of knowledge and experience. Dalcroze continues to evolve as a living practice.

The next ICDS will be held in 2023. Further information and updates about when and where it will be held can be found here: <https://www.dalcroze-studies.com>

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