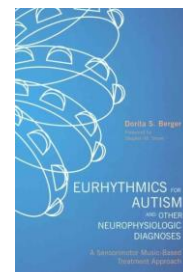


Book review

Eurhythmics for Autism and other Neurophysiologic Diagnoses: A Sensorimotor Music-Based Treatment Approach (Dorita Berger)



Reviewed by Bethan Habron-James

Title: Eurhythmics for Autism and other Neurophysiologic Diagnoses: A Sensorimotor Music-Based Treatment Approach | Author: Dorita Berger | Year: 2016 | Publisher: Jessica Kingsley | Pages: 261 | ISBN: 978 1 84905 989 3

Bethan Habron-James is an internationally renowned teacher of Dalcroze Eurhythmics and holds the Diplôme Supérieur of the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze, Geneva. She teaches at the Royal Northern College of Music, Manchester, UK and trains future teachers of the method nationwide. Bethan is also an experienced teacher of children with special educational needs and undertook some pioneering research into her practice in this field. Previously a professional violinist, she continues to teach the violin, applying her Dalcroze knowledge to string pedagogy.

Email: bethanhajam@gmail.com

As I began to write a literature review for a piece of research on how children with special needs respond to, and interact with, Dalcroze Eurhythmics pedagogy a couple of years ago, I was struck by the paucity of literature in this field. Certainly, there are references to followers and collaborators of Jaques-Dalcroze who began to apply his method to the special needs population, amongst them Joan Llongueras with the blind, Mimi Scheiblauber with the deaf, Priscilla Barclay in her work as an occupational therapist and Claire-Lise Dutoit, whose significant book *Music, Movement, Therapy* appeared in 1971 (Dutoit 1971). David Frego writes of the benefits of Dalcroze as a therapeutic tool (Frego 2007, 2010) and in recent times, wellbeing is increasingly becoming recognised and acknowledged as a by-product of participating in Dalcroze lessons (Habron, Jesuthasan & Bourne 2012; Van Der Merwe 2015).

Therefore, it was with great anticipation and enthusiasm that I welcomed the news of an addition to the literature in Dorita S. Berger's

Eurhythmics for Autism and other Neurophysiologic Diagnoses: A Sensorimotor Music-Based Treatment Approach. Berger is the author of *Music Therapy, Sensory Integration and the Autistic Child* (2002) and together with her brother, Daniel Schneck, co-author of *The Music Effect: Music Physiology and Clinical Applications* (2006). Both books are invaluable tools for anyone working with music in a therapeutic context since they deal with questions such as 'what is music?' and 'what effect does music have on the body?', in particular within atypically functioning populations. The former lays the groundwork for this current book by giving detailed information on autism as a pathology and introducing the idea of humans as primarily emotional beings who interact with the world on a sensory level. Whilst detailed analysis is given of the various sensory systems, the main focus is on the auditory system, how it interacts with the visual, motor, proprioceptive and vestibular systems, and how music interventions can have a profound impact as an integrative and adaptive tool.

Berger took classes in Dalcroze Eurhythmics with Marta Sanchez, an internationally renowned teacher of the method, at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh (or Tech, as it was known at the time) during her undergraduate training to which, she says, she is greatly indebted, both as a musician and a clinician (p.16). The concept of embodying music seemed to her both revelatory and logical. She went on to apply much of the movement and improvisation activities to her work as a therapist and researcher.

Reading this book as a specialist in Dalcroze Eurhythmics, I learnt a great deal about the science behind what I do. Take the simple task of walking to the music, for example: the process of entraining to the rhythm in this way organises the motor, sensory and physiologic functions which, in turn, support autonomous movement and behaviour. With many years of training and experience in Dalcroze practice I could appreciate and understand the way in which the method was being applied in Berger's work. However, were I to have read it as a music therapist, whose training includes a knowledge of physiology and the science of music, the information gained may have been of a less revelatory nature. Further, the description of what is Dalcroze Eurhythmics is somewhat limiting, considering that the book (and the work) is based on this specific music pedagogy. The reader is not directed to many sources to substantiate Berger's overview, nor made fully aware of the expressive aspect of the Dalcroze work and its fundamental principle of working with time/space/energy relationships (see, in particular, Bachmann (1993) to gain an in-depth understanding of the method).

Nevertheless, books can have their limitations when dealing with somatic practice. I would encourage readers interested in this work to gain first-hand experience of the Dalcroze practice in order to fully appreciate how Berger has adapted some principles of the method for her own clinical practice.

It is important also for readers in different countries to note the difference in terminology between American and British English. Whilst both refer to the overall method as Dalcroze Eurhythmics, those working within the UK training school, and its affiliated programmes abroad, call the rhythmic movement 'rhythmics', as opposed to *eurhythmics* (USA) in order to differentiate it from the umbrella term, Eurhythmics. Another differing factor is the use of the 'fixed' versus the 'moveable' doh systems in teaching aural training internationally. Berger calls this branch of Dalcroze Eurhythmics "solfeggio" and claims that the fixed doh system is used by most Dalcroze training

programmes, its purpose being simply to teach sight-reading. Unfortunately, this understanding is very limited and incomplete. The moveable doh system is used in many training programmes, but the focus of all Dalcrozian aural training lessons is to develop inner hearing and give a physical understanding of aural concepts, in space, for example an interval or triad experienced as a spatial relationship between people, not only to teach sight-reading.

The aim of the book is to show how the application of Dalcroze Eurhythmics can have an impact on an inefficient inter-sensory system in populations who are neurophysiologically challenged. It is divided into three parts. The opening section, called 'The Theory', gives a clear and thorough description of the sensory systems, the role of the brain, and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which regulates the survival-anxiety and the fight-or-flight responses in the body. It also summarises current theory on autism, whilst highlighting an important personal insight of the author's, on which much of her work is based, namely that autism is a *dis-ease*, requiring careful assessment of needs, rather than a disease from which persons seek a cure. Her work focuses on finding a process of adaptation for those with special needs, which allows them to respond with courage to the demands of their environment, and to life in general; she frames her clinical work with the acronym COPING: Calm-Organized-Paced-INtegrated-Growing.

The second, and main section, deals with 'The Practice'. The potential application of Berger's work to the Dalcroze-trained practitioner is far-reaching. The abundance of clinical exercises and subsequent case studies offers a wealth of ideas and insights that are clearly grounded in Dalcroze principles. On my second reading of the book I discovered just how many of the annotations I had written during the first reading highlighted and encapsulated its richness to Dalcroze practitioners, be they working in special education or not. By describing music as 'acoustic energy' Berger identifies the basic elements of music – rhythm, melody, harmony, dynamic and form – as having their own energy descriptor. For example, the unifying energy attributed to form can act as a means of developing a sense of anticipation ("will the theme return?") and consequently, attention span.

The scientific theories introduced in the opening section permeate the second section; the reader is led to understand why a particular exercise has a particular effect, and this leads to an 'aha!' moment for someone like myself, who often works intuitively

and has often experienced similar responses to those of Berger's.

Berger identifies her work as that of a music-based clinician, using terminology such as 'treatment' and 'intervention', much akin to that of a music therapist and as such her approach is highly structured and organised in a progressive and accumulative manner. The primary exercises begin seated and focus on the use of the breath, they then progress to using the upper body in rhythmic movement, again, remaining seated, then moving through to full-body movements in the space, whereby motor-planning is the focus. Imitation is an indispensable tool in the preliminary exercises whilst improvisation, both instrumentally and physically, is encouraged as the work progresses. The second section concludes by underlining the importance of clear goals, objectives and assessment procedures in such clinical-based work, the key for the latter being observation.

The book concludes with a summary of the principles discussed and follows these through to their application to other neurophysiologic diagnoses, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and Parkinson's, and further to the 'typical' ageing population. Berger also includes a short description of other movement theorists, Laban, Alexander and Feldenkrais, for the interest of the reader, but is quick to point out that the key to the Dalcroze method, which sets it apart from a purely movement-based practice, is the music which, in the case of Dalcroze Eurhythmics, is often live, improvised music. It is the relationship of the client with the *music* that is heard, the *music* that is created, and with the *body* that is fundamental in understanding the relationship between client and clinician. She encourages us to trust the music.

As a whole, this is an accessible and inviting text to read. Each main section opens with a pertinent quote that invites the reader into the chapter. The language, whilst being at times technical, is not too challenging. New or specialist vocabulary is explained and the reader is taken on a journey of understanding through carefully placed introductions and summaries to chapters, all of which are of an appropriate length. There is a list of recommended books for further reading concluding the first, more scientific section, which I personally found valuable. There are, however, some editorial issues, from typographical errors to inaccurate references, neither of which one would expect in a book of this stature.

As Berger herself acknowledges, the book may take several readings in order for its contents to be absorbed and its principles put into practice. It may also be used as a reference book for those who

wish to be reminded of *how* music has an effect on the body. This is a book for learners, for those seeking to deepen their practice and who welcome the new. I encourage you to read it.

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