

BOOK REVIEW

Navigating landscapes of Dalcroze practice: Histories of music and movement

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Book information

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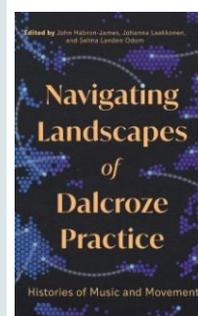
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Navigating Landscapes of Dalcroze Practice: Histories of Music and Movement is a landmark contribution to the field of music and movement education. Edited by John Habron-James, Johanna Laakkonen, and Selma Landen Odom, this volume brings together sixteen international scholars and pedagogues to explore the evolution and diversity of Dalcroze practice worldwide. Rather than focusing solely on Émile Jaques-Dalcroze himself, the book foregrounds the lived experiences, adaptations, and interdisciplinary applications of his ideas across more than a century. The book brings lesser-known, deeply devoted pedagogues to the forefront, thereby shedding light on the diversity of paths through which Jacques-Dalcroze's ideas have been established in different pedagogical and societal contexts.

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950) revolutionised music education by integrating listening, movement, singing, and improvisation, using the human body as the primary instrument. His approach, known as Dalcroze Eurhythmics, has influenced not only music education but also dance, theatre, and therapy. This book invites readers to time-travel from Hellerau, the creative laboratory and community, across continents and disciplines, as the Dalcroze practice adapts to social, political, and technological changes. Thematic chapters serve as “pathways into the past,” offering the reader historical and practical insights. The contributors from diverse backgrounds examine, for example, the transnational movement of ideas from Europe to Australia and the

Americas, as well as interdisciplinary applications in music education, dance education, therapy, and physical education. Contributors also offer a rich mosaic of insights into the impact of global crises and challenges, such as World Wars and technological advances, on Dalcroze practice among a variety of participants.

A few themes invited me, as a reader, to reflect more deeply on the topic. First, the gendered nature of the Dalcroze approach becomes evident in the way its key proponents, those who studied the approach and advanced it within their respective countries, were predominantly women. The Dalcroze approach's emphasis on bodily expression, often centred on the female body, was deeply intertwined with the prevailing cultural norms and the political climate of the time. This connection was particularly pronounced in the chapters focusing on the Soviet Union and in Central Europe. For example, in the Soviet context, Dalcroze Eurhythmics was re-scripted to align with socialist ideals through collective labour motifs, avoiding free movement and expression. In the post-Dalcroze period Hellerau in Dresden (Germany) and Laxenburg (Austria), by contrast, Marianne Pontan and Rosalia Chladek absorbed elements of the Dalcroze approach into a dance-education discourse of *Körperbildung* (formation/cultivation of the body), through which students were encouraged to aim for natural body movement and individual movement capacities. These examples aptly illustrate how embodied expression may be mobilised to serve either individual or societal functions. Such functions are frequently interwoven in various ways, as exemplified by the history of Dalcroze Eurhythmics.

Second, an intriguing perspective emerges in the chapters examining the dissemination of Dalcroze practice through radio broadcasts, notably in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and Poland. From today's standpoint, this is especially thought-provoking: while these historical efforts sought to teach music and movement remotely, contemporary discourse often regards remote instruction in these embodied practices as problematic or even ineffective. This contrast invites a deeper reflection on the nature of embodied learning and its relationship to recent technology developments. The Dalcroze practice emphasises embodiment, sensory experience, and interpersonal interaction, that is, elements that are difficult to replicate through digital or audio-only formats. Also, many authors of the book noted that Jaques-Dalcroze emphasised that teachers must closely observe pupils' responses; without such observation, the approach cannot be fully realised.

Yet, the historical use of radio demonstrates an early attempt to overcome spatial and logistical barriers, suggesting that pedagogues have long grappled with the tension between accessibility and pedagogical integrity. In light of recent experiences with online education during global crises, these historical examples challenge us to reconsider whether technological mediation necessarily diminishes embodied learning or whether innovative approaches could bridge the gap. They also raise questions about how cultural and political contexts shape perceptions of what is considered 'authentic' or 'effective' in Dalcroze Eurhythmics.

Thirdly, the book also highlights how historically strict rules governing who could become a certified Dalcroze teacher created challenges for the method's development across different countries. These rigid criteria sometimes limited the spread and adaptation of the approach within diverse educational systems. By showing how closely some practitioners anchored themselves to a fixed understanding of the method, the book reveals how differing interpretations can lead to

conflicts in perspectives and goals, particularly when striving to adapt Dalcroze pedagogy to varied cultural contexts and contemporary educational needs.

Some chapters assume familiarity with Dalcroze terminology, which may challenge newcomers. However, this is also understandable given the book's focus on exploring Dalcroze-based pedagogical and artistic practices in depth: engaging with the method's authentic concepts and vocabulary is essential for discussing its principles and applications accurately. While the book offers a strong historical analysis, readers looking for extensive examples from modern classrooms of the presented countries may find fewer than expected. This gap also highlights an opportunity: as Dalcroze-inspired pedagogies continue to evolve worldwide, there is growing momentum for a dedicated volume that brings together current research, contemporary teaching practices, and diverse case studies from different educational and cultural contexts.

Navigating Landscapes of Dalcroze Practice: Histories of Music and Movement is an essential resource for scholars and practitioners seeking to understand the evolution and adaptability of Dalcroze Eurhythmics. Its emphasis on practice, diversity, and historical context makes it a compelling addition to current music-and-movement literature. While best suited for readers with some prior knowledge of the field, its insights will resonate widely among educators, therapists, and researchers committed to the interplay of music and movement

Author information

Katja Sutela (she/her) is an adjunct professor and university lecturer in music education at the University of Oulu, Finland. With ten years of experience teaching children with special needs, her work bridges practice and research in inclusive music education. Her doctoral research explored the potential of Dalcroze-based approaches for learners with special needs, and her postdoctoral work examined music education for d/Deaf students, challenging traditional sensory hierarchies in music. Sutela's current research focuses on inclusive and ecosocial perspectives in music education and on theories of embodiment.

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Author contributions

The author contributed to all CRediT (Contributor Role Taxonomy) roles, including review, writing, and final approval.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage

The author used AI for language enhancement (paraphrasing, grammatical correction, document drafting, enhancing readability).

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to report.