MOVE *to the* MUSIC

For string teachers whose students struggle with physical issues, the Dalcroze method could be a revelation. DAVID KETTLE explores its principles of movement training and body awareness, and how to apply them

'CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE TASTE OF A strawberry? Not really. You just have to taste one for yourself – it's an experiential thing. It's the same with Dalcroze.' So says Karin Greenhead, who even after teaching string players using the Dalcroze method for more than 20 years finds it hard to put into words what Dalcroze actually is. For William Bauer, president of the Dalcroze Society of America, there's a good reason for that: 'It's difficult to describe because the experience reaches beyond words. It's not that it's ephemeral – it's a very powerful experience, and very palpable. But it goes beyond the verbal level.'

Dalcroze is a method that many teachers feel has particularly strong relevance to string teaching. But describing Dalcroze looks like it's going to be a bit of a challenge. Still, let's try. For the relative few who have encountered it, Dalcroze teaching probably summons up images of movement, choreography, dancing or skipping to a pulse, or improvising gestures to interpret musical phrases. Or maybe even using skipping ropes, throwing balls, playing with beanbags. It's what Dalcroze is most famous for, and yes, that's certainly part of the picture.

'We call the movement part of Dalcroze the rhythmics class,' explains Greenhead, who is director of studies for the Dalcroze Society UK. 'As a teacher, you're working on everything to do with space, gesture, time, ensemble, rhythm and phrasing – but within that the students are also getting an aural training, as they're following the teacher's improvisations. Their bodies and ears are being trained simultaneously, and they're also improvising themselves, in their responses. So you've got movement, aural training and improvisation happening at the same time – the three pillars of the Dalcroze method.'

IN A TYPICAL DALCROZE RHYTHMICS CLASS you might find a teacher improvising music while you move around a room in time to it, raising an arm or jumping when you hear a certain rhythm. Or together with other students, you may improvise movements based on a recording, each person interpreting a different instrumental part.

'Students get very tied up with their fingers and technique, and forget the grand gestures of what they're doing'

KARIN GREENHEAD

Edinburgh-based Dalcroze and violin teacher Monica Wilkinson points to a strong reason why Dalcroze works first on the body. 'Dalcroze principles mean that people experience music physically, so that they understand it in a corporeal

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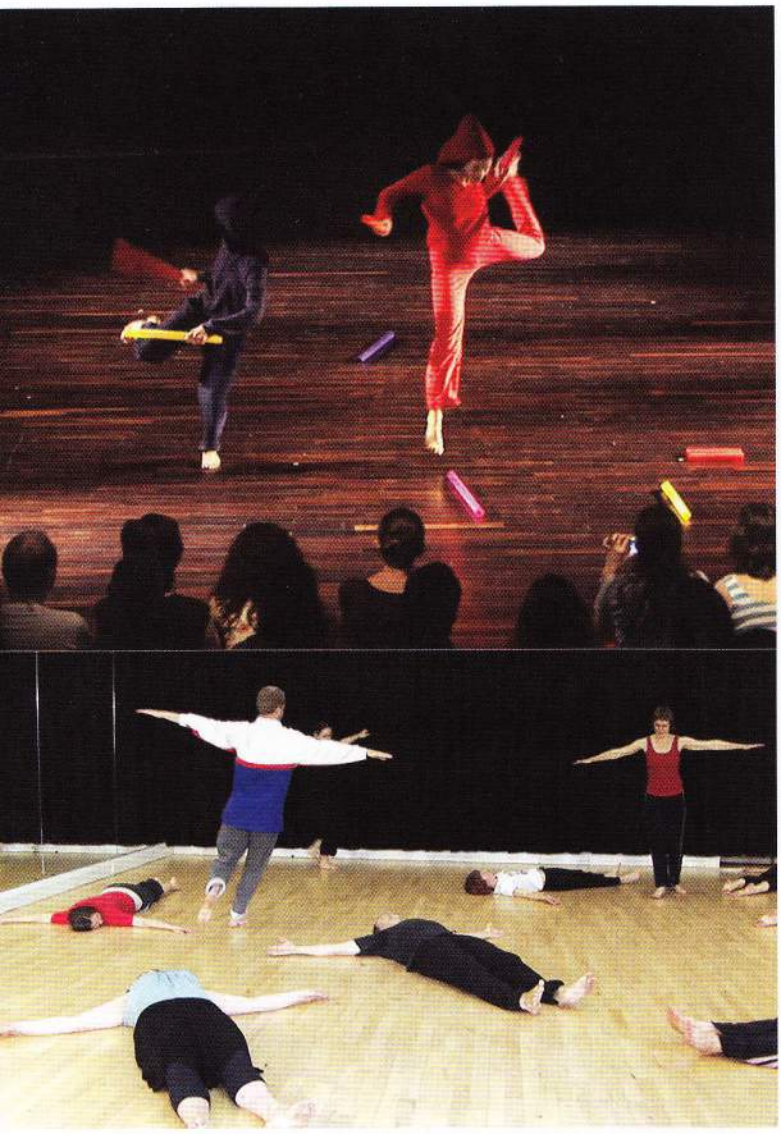


The Dalcroze method can involve movement, aural training and improvisation at the same time

DALCROZE IN ACTION

Violin and Dalcroze teacher Monica Wilkinson explains three exercises to bring Dalcroze insights to your string teaching

Bowing speeds

Rolling a ball along the floor between the hands (or between a teacher and student) is a powerful way of exploring the variety of energies required for different lengths of note using the whole bow (or the portion of the bow you want to work on). Set a pulse and experiment with notes lasting one and two counts, keeping the distance constant. Can you keep the ball rolling for four counts? You can develop this exercise by counting aloud (together or the student alone), then internalising the pulse. With the student rolling the ball, the teacher can respond by playing different note lengths, and the student can even improvise a rhythmic pattern with the ball, which the teacher can then play. Roles can also be swapped.

Articulation

Bouncing balls on the floor (colourful gymnastics balls are always popular, but a tennis ball will do) is an excellent way to introduce the flexibility and rebound required for spiccato bowing. Remember to release the knees so that the whole body experiences the sensation of the bounce. This activity also benefits the left hand in relation to vibrato.

Understanding threes

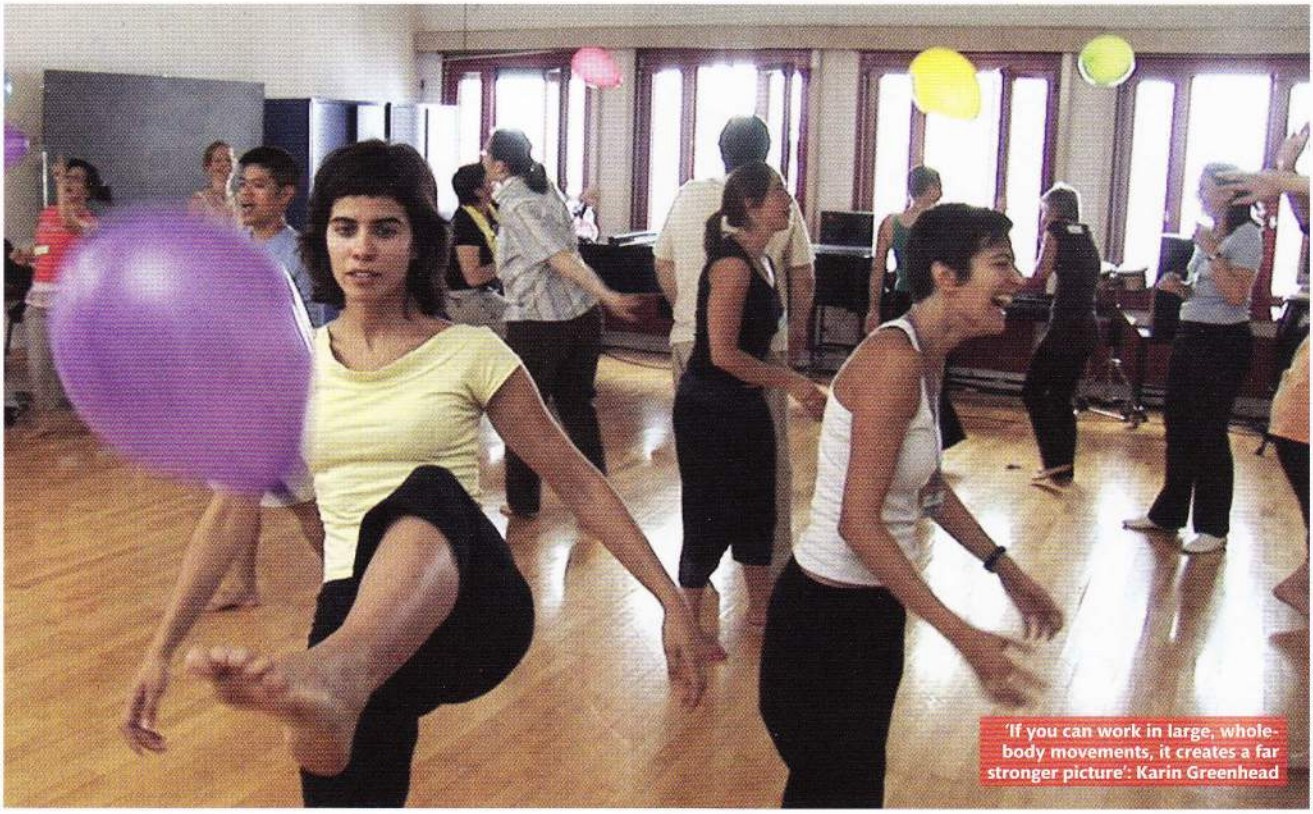
As bipeds, we find playing in two and four time natural. Playing music with three counts, or in compound time, means that the emphasis alternates from side to side. For string players this transfers directly to the often problematic bowing pattern of DOWN–up–down UP–down–up. Experiencing this pattern by stepping in time to music in the relevant metre, showing the strong beats by clapping, means that the student will understand it physically before transferring it to the instrument.

way before they're introduced to the abstract concepts. It's a question of going from what they already know in their bodies, and then explaining to them what it is.' Or to put it a simpler way: 'If you only understand these concepts in your head, it's like learning to swim from a book.'

She gives a straightforward example. 'Think about the difference between simple time and compound time – 6/8 feels like an entirely different world from 3/4 or 4/4. But if you try to teach that in abstract terms from a book, it's very complicated to get across. If you learn songs in different time signatures – without the students knowing what the time signatures are – or march to 4/4 and then sway to 6/8, the contrasts immediately become clear. The students understand them in their bodies.'

Michael Joviala is a New York-based Dalcroze teacher who has combined the method with Suzuki string classes, and he's also editor of the *American Dalcroze Journal*. For him, exposure to Dalcroze rekindled his love of teaching. 'I taught a bit after I graduated, but I burnt out pretty quickly. It had gone dry for me. But when I stumbled into a Dalcroze class, I thought: wow, this is what I've been missing.' And like Wilkinson, his eureka moment came from the direct physical exposure to music that Dalcroze encourages. 'I felt that this was a way to teach students that didn't involve taking them into abstraction first. When we're young, often the first thing a music teacher does is to put a book in front of you and show you some black lines and dots, and try to convince you that that's music. But this works the other way round.'

SO DALCROZE IS A METHOD that uses movement and gesture to encourage a bodily understanding of musical concepts, while tying that in with aural training and improvisation. But what about its specific relevance to strings? In the UK, Dalcroze teaching has developed a strong association with string pedagogy, mainly because of an influential course that Karin Greenhead taught at Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music, from the early 1990s until 2008. The course covered both string teaching and Dalcroze methods, and produced several pedagogues who now combine Dalcroze methods with their string teaching. 'I can't separate the two any more,' ▷



'If you can work in large, whole-body movements, it creates a far stronger picture': Karin Greenhead

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admits Wilkinson, one of those teachers. 'Dalcroze has really permeated all of my teaching.'

But is it the case that Dalcroze methods are particularly suited to string teaching, or particularly useful in conveying string techniques? Or is it simply that they're effective at dealing with issues of general musicianship, which themselves are useful to string students? Interestingly, William Bauer warns against separating the two: 'A teacher has to ask themselves: do I want to produce a string player, or do I want to produce a musician? If you think of yourself as a violinist first and a musician second, a lot of the way you teach will flow from that.'

Nevertheless, there are clearly movement and posture issues in string playing that make Dalcroze specifically relevant, as Greenhead explains: 'If you play the trumpet, for example, you basically use three fingers and you blow – there's not really a spatial element to how you play. But with a stringed instrument you have to make shifts with your left hand, you have to move the bow, and you have to stand or sit and hold the instrument properly. With Dalcroze you can deliberately create movement exercises to improve students' contact with the string, tone, bow distribution and shifting. Students, especially at college, get very tied up with their fingers and technique, and forget the grand gestures of what they're doing. If you can work in large, whole-body movements, it creates a far stronger picture of what it's supposed to feel like for your brain to hang on to.'

Exposure to Dalcroze rekindled tutor Michael Joviala's love of teaching

LISA PARKER

'EVEN WITH STRING STUDENTS at conservatoire level,' Wilkinson says, 'you can deal with some of the physical issues they may have. If they're having difficulty with phrasing or sustaining a tone, for example, you can take it away from the instrument entirely and show phrasing or shape in movement. It's not just a case of running from one end of a room to another – in your movements you can show the intensity of a phrase, the rise and fall, where it might change direction. The student can then take it back to the instrument and understand phrasing in a different way.'

Joviala, too, feels that there are strong connections. 'One area I've focused on is the bow arm, specifically the time–space–energy challenges that players have. It's about timing the bow arm with the phrase – children often find manipulating those finely tuned adjustments of speed and weight pretty challenging. One possible game to try is with kids sitting in a group, throwing a ball to each other so that it corresponds to music being improvised on the piano. If the music is slow and soft, it takes just the right touch to get the ball to their partner at the right time. If the music becomes louder and faster, they have to change the energy or even the distance between them.'

Louise Lansdown, head of strings at Birmingham Conservatoire, UK, has recently made a three-month Dalcroze course a compulsory part of the college's string teaching. She's not a Dalcroze teacher herself but she can see the advantages for string players. 'What I noticed in string players who have been taught Dalcroze is their awareness of the importance of every part of their body when they're playing. Dalcroze gives you such a strong

WHO WAS DALCROZE?

ÉMILE JAQUES-DALCROZE was a Swiss composer and music educator born in 1865. After a broad education that included composing and working in the theatre, and a conducting post in Algeria, he returned to Geneva as a teacher. 'He was teaching aural training at the Conservatoire, and he discovered that his students knew an awful lot of things theoretically that they couldn't actually do,' explains Karin Greenhead. 'He also noticed that people naturally sway or tap their feet to music, and you don't need to be trained to do that. So his idea was: why don't we train that natural response?' He developed his method experimentally, trying out elements on his students at the Conservatoire, and later established his own school in Hellerau, near Dresden, which drew students from around the world. The First World War forced the closure of the school, but his students took his ideas with them when they returned to their home countries, spreading his method internationally.

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze

foundation in your inner rhythm and your natural movement, which is vital because playing stringed instruments is so incredibly unnatural.'

Many string students can immediately feel the benefits of Dalcroze, Greenhead says. She's had conservatoire students explain that it's the only class they attend that's not competitive. 'Elsewhere, other students are always criticising your playing, but here everyone is working together to improve themselves and each other.'

'Even with students at conservatoire level, you can deal with some of the physical issues they may have'

MONICA WILKINSON

But at other times, student reactions can be less positive, leading to challenges for the teachers. 'I teach at a university,' explains Bauer, 'and many students have preconceptions about music education, believing that it's primarily talking about technique. When I ask them to get up and move, some of them are shocked. You have to become a master at managing the reactions of students when they're not expecting to express themselves through movement.'

NEVERTHELESS, there's a lot in it for teachers, it seems. Despite a rigorous training course for a Certificate or Licence in Dalcroze Eurhythmics – 'It's very thorough, and very tough, and it makes you reconsider everything about your musical self,' says Wilkinson – the end result encourages enormous freedom for the teacher in the way that they apply the techniques they've learnt. 'Dalcroze himself said that teachers shouldn't just be carbon copies of him – they should be using these ideas to find their own ways of doing things,' explains Greenhead. 'You end up with a kitchen full of equipment that you can use, applying it flexibly to the situation you're in.'

That in itself creates its own challenges, according to Michael Joviala. 'You have to do so many things in the classroom with Dalcroze – create the music instantly yourself, manage the class, think about what's coming next, watch the students to see if they're getting it. It's so demanding.'

Louise Lansdown points to a more immediate, practical benefit that the method brings to teachers: employability. 'Dalcroze is one of the most economically viable methods for music – because you can teach in a group, it's relatively inexpensive for schools to buy. Many of my students who have Dalcroze certificates have been snapped up for work. Financially, it's an important addition to your qualifications, and it's greatly respected.'

It's still something of a niche activity, though – Greenhead feels that it will never be the 'next big thing' simply because of the complexity of its ideas and the length and depth of study required to become a Dalcroze teacher. But, she explains, there are very active societies in the UK and US, and it's a growing force in music education in Italy and throughout Asia. As part of the Dalcroze Society UK, she has recently set up a Dalcroze Eurhythmics International Examination Board that covers Britain, Canada, Australia, Italy and various territories in the Far East. But as for fully comprehending or explaining what Dalcroze actually is – well, that remains a challenge. 'Sometimes even for a Dalcroze teacher it takes you years to understand what's going on,' admits Greenhead. 'That's because it brings together all the faculties of the person – hearing, feeling, seeing, doing, perceiving. But it does all come together in the end.' ■