Radical Departure: Where did Emile Jaques Get the Idea of Rhythmic Education?

By William R. Bauer

Introduction

Emile Jaques-Dalcroze developed a way of teaching music that challenges several of Western culture's core assumptions. How did he arrive at his unique teaching approach? Here is the standard narrative:

While Professor of Solfège...and Harmony at the Geneva Conservatory of Music, he was both interested and troubled by his students' rhythmic problems. He noticed that one of his students, despite his musical problems, was capable of walking rhythmically. His observation caused him to conclude that people possessed musical rhythm instinctively, but did not transfer these instincts to fulfill their musical needs. This realization marked the beginning of his experiments with rhythmic exercises stepping to the music (Wax, 1973: 3).

Other writers have promoted this idea, in the belief that Dalcroze conceived of rhythmic education when confronted with his conservatory students' unmusical performances. For example, Virginia Hoge Mead suggests that he was building on instinctive features already present in his students' behavior:

While Dalcroze experimented with solfège aural training exercises, he noticed that his students instinctively accompanied their responses with movement. Their singing seemed to set in motion a muscular response – tapping a foot, nodding the head, swaying from side to side, or gesturing the beat or phrase with a hand (Mead, 1994: 1).

Saying: “it is difficult to pinpoint the exact beginnings of Jaques-Dalcroze's unique approach to music education,” Robert Abramson qualifies his assertion; but then abides with the received wisdom by adding “possibly it can be traced to his appointment at age twenty-five, as professor of harmony and solfège at the Conservatory of Music in Geneva” (Abramson, 1986: 27). Two key ideas inform the standard narrative: first, an instinctual rhythmic gift lies dormant within all human beings; and second, established methods of conventional musical education give inexpressive students no way to release this gift in their performance of musical compositions.

Repeating the received wisdom, Claire Elise-Dutoit then takes it a step further, arguing that Dalcroze was going for something far more substantial than merely the improved musical performance of written music:

In 1892 Emile Jaques-Dalcroze was appointed professor at the Conservatoire in Geneva, where he was to remain for eighteen years. The first years of his teaching were a long period of gestation, eventually giving birth to one of those rare educational doctrines, seeking total integration of the human being (Dutoit, 1971:1).

She complicates the picture, however, by suggesting that we can trace the origin of these methods as far back as Jaques-Dalcroze's late adolescence:

In 1903, when he presented Eurhythmics, it had already been in his mind for twenty years. Ever since he had emerged from the 'underground' of College life, his attention had turned to the arts with all the ardour and enthusiasm of those who serve a well-loved cause.
She then adds that, regardless of how far back we look, we will find that “he had never wavered in his ideal” (Dutoit, 1971: 1-2). In retrospect, it is not hard to find ways Dalcroze’s childhood experiences laid the groundwork for his later passions; but at what point did his notions about the “total integration of the human being” begin to take shape?

**A Different Perspective**

In the last few decades, an alternative perspective on the roots of Dalcroze’s approach has started to emerge in the literature, one that emphasizes the importance of a key piece of information about his life and career. In the fall-winter of 1886-87, after receiving a relatively conventional music education in the Western art music tradition, the twenty-one-year-old Emile Jaques accepted a position as assistant conductor of a theater orchestra in Algiers. Born in Vienna and raised in Geneva, the adolescent Emile had thus far enjoyed a comfortable upbringing with little exposure to people or cultures outside of his bourgeois realm of experience (against which he found novel ways to rebel). In order to step into the necessary frame of reference, let us try to forget what we know about anthropology and ethnomusicology, two sciences that were yet in their infancy at this time, and American popular music—which has effectively Africanized global popular culture and forever transformed the way Europeans and their descendants think and feel about non-Western music—and imagine ourselves fellow innocents abroad, taking this journey to the French colonies with this courageous, yet callow, young man.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, when European imperialism was in its heyday, there was no brooking the assumption of Western culture’s moral and aesthetic superiority, and its right to global expansion. To someone fresh from his studies in Paris, North Africa may have seemed a relatively wild part of the globe. Perhaps in this light, the fact that Emile Jaques would have even considered venturing off to a distant land should come as something of a surprise. We know that he did so at the urging of a dear friend named Ernest Adler, a fellow composer whom he considered highly gifted (Spector, 1990: 13; Brunet-Lecompte, 1950: 54). At this time in his life the idea of striking out on his own surely must have excited him; but there is also no doubt that little from his Calvinist childhood had prepared him for some of the sights and sounds he would encounter there.

While many writers have virtually ignored or minimized the significance of Jaques-Dalcroze’s excursion to foreign soil, some have suggested that experiences the young Emile Jaques had during the short time he spent in North Africa were formative—so formative, in fact, that they contributed significantly not only to his maturity as a person but also to the development of his pedagogical ideas. According to Schnebly-Black and Moore, accepting the post in Algiers “proved to be one of the most fortuitous moves of his career” (1997: 5). By suggesting that we can trace the beginnings of Eurhythmics to this time, these authors challenge the conventional narrative. While in Algieria,

Dalcroze made several other discoveries that further impacted his teaching. He was impressed by how comfortable the native Algerians were with odd meters. These involved, for example, five- and seven-beat time. The Algerians also naturally adapted to irregular changes in meter and had a remarkable sense of accelerando and ritardando. He reasoned that these rhythmic sensitivities could become natural to musicians in Western Europe if they were cultivated in students at an early age (6).

Others have reflected the literature’s shift in perspective. Referring to the “Petite histoire de la Rhythmique” Dalcroze wrote for in *Le Rhythme* (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1935: 3-4), Marja-Leena Juntunen writes:

When studying orchestral conducting and working as an assistant musical director in the opera of Algiers in 1886, Jaques got acquainted with complicated rhythms and irregular meters of Arab music. He was impressed by the rhythmic sensitivity of Algerian musicians and started to think that a Western musician could also attain such capacity through systematic rhythmic education starting at an early age (Juntunen 2004: 22)
José Rafael Maduriera describes in his doctoral thesis written for Brazil’s University of Campinas how Jaques-Dalcroze marveled at the lushness of the French colony, situated between pristine beaches and exotic mosques, devoured the oriental flavors, drank mocha, smoked chifa, and closely observed the magical rituals of Africans [Arabs], and watched the contortions of their dances and especially the rhythmic vivacity of their songs (Maduriera, 2008: 48).

He then concludes: “at that time, under Dionysian inspiration, Dalcroze conceived his musical education system.”

Apparently solely on the basis of this source, one author has even gone so far as to claim “Jaques-Dalcroze declared that his education system, especially with regard to the use of polyrhythms, the bare feet, and the rhythmic irregularity, was created in Algeria!” (Ribiero, 2012).

Which of these stories is true? And why does it matter?

Did the idea of using movement to teach music emerge full-blown from Dalcroze’s head when he was a conservatory professor? Or did he realize that music might be taught differently from the way he learned it when, at an early stage in his development as a musician and pedagogue, he encountered strikingly different musical practices in another part of the world? Related to this question, is it possible to fathom the effect the young composer’s exposure to non-Western classical and traditional musics, which he experienced in Algiers and the surrounding region, may have had on his thinking about music and its relationship to society? And, finally, which narrative offers the strongest explanation for Dalcroze’s innovations in educational pedagogy, which constitute a radical departure from conventional music education?

To answer these questions, lets us first consider what some of his biographers have written. In the year Dalcroze died, Hélène Brunet-Lecompte wrote that Jaques-Dalcroze “is fascinated with Arab music and its diverse rhythms” and that he “never misses a chance to observe them” (1950: 56). Citing Dalcroze’s own account in Souvenirs, Notes et Critiques, Alfred Berchtold assigns great significance to the experience: “Above all, Jaques has the opportunity to study the music of the country. And this is very important” (1965: 31). In their descriptions, provocative details emerge that flesh out our impression of the youthful musician at this time. For example, referring to a letter Emile wrote to his sister from Algiers, Berchtold writes: “to give himself a more respectable air…he grew a beard and adorned his nose with eyeglasses, the lenses of which were only ‘window glass’” (Berchtold, 1965:31). Dalcroze instituted other, more substantial changes that reveal his emerging sense of identity. At the advice of his publisher, for example, he changed his last name in order to avoid confusion with another composer who shared his surname, signaling a greater degree of independence from his family of origin. The changes in appearance and in name hint at transformations that were taking place on a deeper level.

From these and other descriptions it is clear that acknowledgment of Dalcroze’s time abroad is not new; rather it is recent authors’ willingness to allow that non-Western expressive culture could have had a beneficial influence. For example, as early as 1915, Michael Sadler—building on Karl Storck’s biographical research—writes: “For a short period his studies were interrupted by an engagement as musical director of a small theatre in Algiers—an opportunity which he used for study of the peculiar rhythms of Arab popular music, which he found unusually interesting and stimulating” (Sadler, 1915; Storck, 1912). Thus while Sadler recognizes Dalcroze’s exposure to and curiosity about the local “popular music” (there is no way to interpret what he means by this term, but surely it’s not meant as praise), his implication that the composer’s encounter with non-Western music constituted a
mere “interruption” of his formal musical training implies not only that it had little discernable impact on his development, but that it was somehow a distraction from the more important matter of writing, publishing, and performing art works cast in the Western musical tradition. On closer examination, this ethnocentric perspective, so pervasive that it has shaped the narrative about Dalcroze’s development of rhythmic education, proves inaccurate; worse, it has weakened our grasp of his contribution and its significance.

A misleading source
Irwin Spector’s account has probably had the greatest impact on English language readers’ perception of Dalcroze’s Algerian sojourn and its significance. In his biography Spector goes out of his way to actively discourage readers from assigning importance to Jaques-Dalcroze’s North African travels, especially with regard to the development of his distinctive pedagogical ideas. “It would be tempting to surmise that Emile studied Arabic rhythms carefully, thus establishing a base for his later rhythmic developments. Apparently this was not the case” (Spector, 1990: 13). Spector accedes that Dalcroze was “intrigued by their [Arab’s] execution of complicated rhythms” (13) and allows vaguely that “the Algerian experience taught Emile to think in different terms than he had been trained to do as a matter of habit” (14); but he creates the distinct impression that, in his expert judgment, Dalcroze’s exposure to Arab musical culture left few traces on the pedagogue’s thinking and later actions.

Tucked in the back of the biography, where he cursorily summarizes Dalcroze’s recollections from Souvenirs, Notes et Critiques (Paris 1942), Spector mentions in passing Dalcroze’s reflections on his African experience: “Rhythmic curiosity, he states, was born in him when he served as a conductor in Algiers; the Arab percussion instruments and rhythm left indelible effects” (284). However, he mistranslates the passage, leaving out a key word. In the original, Dalcroze writes: Ma curiosité des manifestations rhythmiques est née au cours d’une saison que j’ai passé en Algérie...
[my emphasis] (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1942: 39). By Dalcroze's own account, it was his interest in rhythmic expression that was awakened, not merely in rhythm, per se. In any event, by the time we get to this passage, the author has already led us to accept his mistaken judgment that Algiers did not play a key role in Dalcroze's conception of rhythmic training.

**Weighing the evidence**

What reason does Spector offer for his interpretation? First, he suggests, incorrectly, that rhythm is a relatively unimportant element in Arab music, in part because it lacks Western tonal harmony (14). He then submits that Dalcroze's innovations had little to do with Arab music's rhythmic features. Seeing no literal relationship between the rhythms Arab musicians perform and Dalcroze's educational approach, Spector discounts the possibility that, even if such rhythmic elements from Arab music did not carry over directly, other aspects of the composer's experience in Algiers, aspects that resonated deeply, led to significant insights about music, culture, education, and life. Could these aspects have had an impact on his thinking about people's musical enculturation and its potential for promoting “the total integration of the human being?” Spector implies that Dalcroze had insufficient opportunity to encounter non-Western traditional musics while in Algiers (13). The novice conductor's work entailed teaching local musicians Western art music in a city that had been flooded with European settlers during French occupation. However, this does not mean that he lacked exposure to traditional Berber music, or that of the region's various Muslim sects; nor would he have had to become a ghaita player to evidence some measure of influence.

**In his own words**

What did Dalcroze himself have to say about his experiences in North Africa, and the impact they had, both on him and on the development of his ideas? One wishes he had written much more about them. Nevertheless, what he did write gives us several tantalizing clues that suggest he himself valued the time and accorded it more weight in the development of his system of teaching and learning than has been generally granted.

Two years before he died, reflecting back on his life, Jaques-Dalcroze wrote:

> I often think about my winter stay in Algiers and its influence on my career. I was employed as assistant director at the ‘theater of novelties.’ In the absence of teachers, I could have musical, pedagogical, and scenic experiences on my own. It was then that I learned self control, how to adapt to events, and also to recognize the value of Arab rhythms (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1948: 20-21).

In addition to the increased self-reliance he developed while away from home, a common enough outcome of a young person's time abroad, he also came to appreciate Arab music and, in particular, its rhythmic component.
Dalcroze's recognition of “the value of Arab rhythms” undermines the idea that Dalcroze left the Maghreb relatively untouched by its musical charms. If that were so, why would the rhythms have captured his attention? And why would he hint at the experience’s influence on his career?

Alfred Berchtold reports on remarks the composer once made to the conductor Fernand Gigon:

Ah yes! the origin of my rhythmics! I'm conducting a native orchestra. What strikes me strangely was the sense of harmony of my musicians. Although the music that I was teaching them was at four beats, the cymbal players, for example, used five, the flute players three...It was impossible for me to discipline them and to instill in them our [Western] methods. In order to teach the notation of our rhythm, I had the idea to have them perform each beat by a gesture. Also my musicians, before playing, marked the rhythm wanted on a tambourine (32)

Possibly drawing upon information provided in Gigon's own writings (1942), this account has the ring of truth. The use of bodily gestures to aid students in their efforts to read European rhythmic notation and having students play a rhythmic phrase on a hand percussion instrument before taking it to an instrument that plays definite pitch are both practices eurhythmics teachers use to this day, inspired by Dalcroze's example—embodied practices that would no doubt have horrified his straight-laced instructors back at the conservatoire in Geneva. The quote opens up the possibility that Dalcroze himself attributed the origin of rhythmic education to pedagogical experiments he made in Algiers, in direct response to difficulties Arab musicians faced while performing from written music, and not to those of the European students he would teach some five years later.

Having received an ordinary Western musical education, where would Dalcroze have gotten the idea to try these novel techniques? Could his exposure to Arab musical practices have had some effect? Summing up the contents of a letter Dalcroze wrote to his sister, Hélène, Dalcroze's biographer mentions that the composer embarked on a concert tour that took him into regions surrounding the capital:

Toward the end of the season difficulties arose during which the theatre manager was unable to pay his musicians. To recoup funds they organized an ensemble which included Jaques-Dalcroze and they set out to give concerts in other areas. The tour took them to Medea, Hamman, Khiva, Miliana, Blida, and Constantine, and included a return to Algiers for an additional concert. The itinerary covered an area of 60 miles to the south of the capital city and almost 200 miles to the east (Spector, 1990: 15).

In this letter, from which Brunet-Lecompte quotes substantially (56-57), Dalcroze goes into detail about the richness of various experiences he had on this tour; unfortunately he fails to inform us of his musical encounters. More than in Westernized urban areas, Dalcroze would have had a chance to encounter Arabic influences in the outlying regions to the east, south, and west, in the mountains, for example, where Berbers sustained their traditional practices against incursions from Western conquerors.

In Souvenirs, Notes et Critiques, while discussing his influences and reflecting on the general impact his travels had on his developing sense of himself as a person and as an artist, Dalcroze makes reference to his time in Algiers:

Different climates, unforeseen [events] during travel, the disclosure of beauties undreamed of and also the ambiance of a new social milieu can stimulate the artist's creative activity; not to mention the influence of the vibration of the trains and autos on the circulation of the blood and nervous energies, I realize that the revelation of the unknown stirs up our fantasies and that the discovery of works of art of a new style

3 Most of the sites mentioned are southwest of Algiers, with Miliana being roughly 70 miles away; Constantine is actually over 250 miles from Algiers.
strengthens our aesthetic equilibrium. I was able to notice after each of my very numerous sojourns that I made in a foreign country a certain difference in the way of my talking musically. My curiosity in the rhythmic expressions was born during one season that I spent in Algeria as conductor. I found there many occasions to interact with Arab musicians and to study the dissociations of their percussion instruments (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1942: 39).

Echoing what he told Gigon, Dalcroze explicitly states that the opportunities he had to engage with local musicians and explore the way they interacted musically gave birth to his curiosity in rhythmic expression, the centerpiece of his pedagogical system. The term “dissociations” (the original French) may be a reference to the polyrhythms upon which certain religious groups, such as the Aïssawa, built their music.

The key here, I think, is that Dalcroze links his growth as an artist to the expansion of possibilities that his Algerian sojourn and other travels opened up. It was not merely “rhythmic curiosity” that was born in Dalcroze, but rather a profound wonder at his newly awakened expressive language and creative powers, “a certain difference in the way of my talking musically.” It seems likely that, overcoming the physical segregation of Arabs, Dalcroze sought out their company in Arab enclaves located in the ancient, labyrinthine, walled citadel within the city—perhaps visiting the mahchachat, or cannibis dens—(Magrini, 2003:212).4 In light of the wealth of experiences he had, his exposure to Maghreb culture clearly had a transformative impact on him in more ways than one.

In La Musique et Nous, he gives us more detail about some of the powerful experiences he had among the Aïssawa, a sect of Sufiism that incorporates non-Islamic elements in its ritual:

I had the good fortune of again finding these rhythms in Algeria, where I heard lots of Arab music and was able to attend an Aissaohahs [Aïssawa] festival of Muslim fanatics; their dance excites them to such a high degree that they become invulnerable, sprawling on the burning coals and laughing at knife wounds, bites, and injuries made by blunt instruments. Their rhythms are always binary, but the number of their repetitions is varied. At a scansion of four measures of two beats follows a series of seven or eleven, etc. Their dances are extremely violent, their leaps and contortions of an extraordinary originality and their instinct of acceleration is wonderfully developed. Their dance little by little becomes animated accompanied by a crescendo of tom-toms. The accelerando becomes intense and produces a diabolic effect, completed by the sudden silence that follows and during which the dancers allow themselves to fall to the ground. (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1945: 19-20)

He revisits a comparable memory in Notes Bariolées, perhaps even the one described above, drawing further insights of a more spiritual character:

The dances of certain small tribes are marked with an extraordinary feverishness. The boisterousness and persistent sonorities of the tom-tom relieve the tired minds of all inner anxiety, then, little by little, the bodies go into trance and the awakened consciousness takes on a religious appearance (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1948: 96).5

What stands out in this recollection is the association Dalcroze makes between rhythm—and, in particular irregular metric impulses—and the non-rational aspects of human expressive behavior. Perhaps it was to these descriptions that Schnebly-Black and Moore were referring when they considered the impression native Algerians’ “odd” meters made on Dalcroze. Of course, to Arab musicians such aperiodicity of different levels of pulsation, from beat to meter to phrase—as well as their intuitive capacity for accelerando—would have been normative, whereas the foursquare harmonic phrases of much Western music would likely have struck them as odd. No wonder, then, that the freshly bearded, newly bespectacled youth had some measure of trouble in

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4 In his comment about smoking chiba, cited by Maduriera above, it is unclear what substance Dalcroze is referring to.
5 See also Rouget, 1985: 313.
“disciplining” his charges to stay in four beat time and instilling unfamiliar Western musical practices.

Given the rhythmic complexity of their music, it was clearly not from lack of skill in this dimension. Indeed, on the basis of this information Schnebly-Black and Moore conclude that, “philosophically, [Dalcroze] conceived of the Algerians’ performance of rhythm as representative of a deeper human impulse to express the irrational nature of emotion and feeling. He believed that incorporating these irregular rhythms into his teaching would heighten students’ awareness of their inner sentiments.” Significantly, they add: “[Dalcroze] reasoned that these rhythmic sensitivities could become natural to musicians in Western Europe if they were cultivated in students at an early age” (Schnebly-Black and Moore, 1997: 6). In tracing a direct link between substantial elements of Dalcroze’s philosophy and his Algerian friends’ rhythmic instincts, Schnebly-Black and Moore highlight the powerful connection Dalcroze made between kinesthesia and emotion, and between formal musical education and the process of enculturation.

On Dalcroze’s own account, then, it would seem that the standard narrative of his method’s genesis is misguided, in emphasis and in fact; the key realizations that “marked the beginning of Dalcroze’s experiments with rhythmic exercises stepping to the music” (Wax 1973: 3) did not occur to him at the conservatory in Geneva, but some five years before, in an entirely different part of the world. However, these realizations enabled him to notice upon his return to familiar terrain that, unlike the non-Western ethnic groups Dalcroze met in North Africa, Westerners could not “fulfill their musical needs” by transferring their rhythmic instincts into expressive musical performance.

At the heart of Dalcroze’s realizations is the observation, traceable to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, that in disconnecting their minds from their bodies, Western people’s intellectual development had disconnected them from their natural instincts. Hence, when James Lee observes that, in Algiers, “Jaques-Dalcroze first heard Arabian rhythms, and saw them interpreted by human bodies” he is highlighting the challenge to the mind/body duality Dalcroze’s North African experience posed to a young mind initially preconditioned to Western cultural values (Lee, 2003: 13). The fact that those bodies, enlivened by human hearts and minds, were not inhibited by Western cultural constraints, did not escape Dalcroze’s keen eye for observation or his astute intellect.

His Algerian experiences opened Jaques-Dalcroze up to others like them, ones to which he otherwise might not have been as open, and he added to the store of impressions from which he would develop his distinctive approach. In a Hungarian village, for example, where a gypsy orchestra gathered to perform the famous rhapsodies of Liszt, he witnessed similar musical accelerations (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1945: 19-20). He recounts other experiences of non-Western music such as the Arab orchestras he heard at the Paris Exposition in 1889. At the Colonial Exposition in Wembley (London), he delighted in the Burmese orchestra’s triumph: “their crystalline sonorities were determined by rhythmic accentuations alternating at 5 and 7 beats” (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1945: 19-20). One wonders, had he missed the chance his Algerian travels gave him to immerse himself in the starkly different world of North African culture, would he have appreciated these qualities, so outside the norms of Western art music?
Elsewhere, perhaps referring to the latter experience, Dalcroze makes a critical point: “The Burmese dances are singularly suggestive and the powers of invention of the dancers are prodigiously developed. Many of their movements are improvised and their combinations match intimately with those of the accompanying instruments” (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1948: 96). In devising his teaching approach it is doubtful that he got the idea of intimately matching improvised music and improvised movement from Western musical practice. As Robin Moore points out:

in the past hundred and fifty years attitudes towards improvisation in Western classical performance have changed drastically. The mandates of compositionally specified interpretation now supersede those of the instrumentalist. To many, improvisatory expression seems threatening, unfamiliar, or undeserving of interest. This radical shift in performance aesthetic has occurred without incident and virtually without documentation (Moore, 1992: 63).

Dalcroze prioritized improvisation as one of the three legs of his method, making perhaps one of his most substantial contributions to music education—and to dance, through the work of Mary Wigman and others (Manning, 2006). Critical inferences Dalcroze made about the interconnections between mind and body grew from their manifestations in Burmese music and dance, and in Sufi rituals he witnessed in Algeria. As Dalcroze himself stated: “Rhythmic gymnastics tries to establish connections between instinctive bodily rhythms and rhythms created by sensibility or by reasoned will” (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1945: 158; quoted in Lee, 2003: 163).

Conclusions and ramifications for teachers
By setting the above passages from Dalcroze’s writings in relation to each other, we can see that his exposure to non-Western cultures in North Africa, while brief, transformed him, affecting his thinking about himself, about music, music education, and the relationship between music and culture. To an extent widely unacknowledged, Jaques-Dalcroze’s education “in and through music” derives from his time in Algiers, where he encountered people and music that shifted him away from the conventional Western model of music making as the instrumental performance of written or printed musical works. The importance of improvisation in Dalcroze’s approach owes in part to the connections he made with Arab musicians and the opportunity these relationships gave him to learn more about their approach to music making and rhythm.

Several other elements of non-Western music culture may have influenced him. For instance, his exposure to participatory music cultures that integrate dance and music in an all-encompassing experience may have guided him and Adolphe Appia in their approach to the design of the Festspielhaus in Hellerau and the uses to which they put the space within. There was no stage or proscenium arch, for example, to mark a separation between audience and performers (Birringer, 1998:40). The Dalcroze experience is one that offers music as a mode of interacting among participants, in addition to music as a mode of presentation. In North Africa, he encountered music not as something apart from daily life, but rather as a cultural force, an activity woven into the fabric of life, shaping human development, and individual and national character. He encountered vibrant rhythm, improvised on percussion, to incite bodily movement. He encountered the sensuality of cultures quite different from the bourgeois Calvinist Genevoise society of his parents; perhaps as Flaubert did in Egypt, the young Genevan may have unleashed some of the sexual impulses that Europeans learned to repress from an early age (Toepfer, 1997: 83; Gil, 2005: 221-22).
The intellectual soil in which these rare seeds took root and blossomed was laid by another citizen of Geneva, Rousseau, whose fame as an enlightenment thinker has overshadowed his contributions in other areas, particularly in education and in music. A music copyist and sometime composer, Rousseau wrote an influential treatise on education (Rousseau, 1764), the title of which could very well have inspired Emile Jaques' parent's choice of first name for their son. Adding the suffix Dalcroze to his surname, Emile turned Jaques into a middle name, echoing the rhythm of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's name in his. Rousseau's investigation into human nature took many forms, not least of which was his belief in the interlaced origins of speech and music, which evolutionary musicologists are reconsidering as the "musilanguage" hypothesis (Mithen, 2006; Cross, 2003). Rousseau believed that European civilization paid a huge price for its sophistication and extolled the virtues of "natural man." While his depiction of natural man has been demonized as a reduction of non-Western cultural groups to "noble savages," Rousseau understood that European culture's development put it at risk of forgetting fundamental aspects of the human experience to which traditional non-Western cultures still had access (Rousseau, 1764).

It is in the context of this understanding, transmitted throughout Europe in Rousseau's writings, that Jaques-Dalcroze's encounter with North African traditional ethnic cultures and their music may have resonated in the young composer. Dalcroze paid the highest compliment to the non-Western cultures he encountered in Algeria by integrating into his methods such features of their music as embodiment, entrainment, and the transferable intentionality that improvisation makes possible—features Ian Cross has put forward as fundamental to a global definition of music, which runs counter to the narrow Western conception of music as autonomous, organized sounds (Cross, 2009; Cross and Ghofur, 2009)—features that helped Dalcroze bring about a re-unification of music, speech, and movement in Western educational practice.
Stepping into the non-Western musical world that North African culture offered up to him opened the impressionable Emile Jaques up to the possibility that, in forsaking the verbal-musical continuum, rhythmic movement, and improvisation, the written art music aesthetic of the West had disconnected itself from fundamental human ways of being and knowing. When considered from a global perspective, his conservatory students’ difficulties performing written music on their instruments pales in significance to this larger question of what, in fact, constitutes music. That said, Dalcroze’s innovations in educational pedagogy give Western musicians access to their artistry precisely because they shatter the narrow conception of music to which many still cling. Indeed, these innovations continue to experience resistance in educational institutions primarily because music educators steeped in the Western tradition insist upon teaching music as a pure or absolute art “for art’s sake,” music read from the page, and played on instruments, rather than as an interactive medium in and through which we may engage one another directly in the rich interpersonal web of culture—the way most people on planet earth have used music and continue to do so. To the degree that we buy into the conventional model of what music can be and what it can do for all human beings, we fail to realize the promise of rhythmic education as a humanizing practice.

The question of where Jaques-Dalcroze got the idea of rhythmic education touches upon another, one more consequential for Dalcroze practitioners: What factors led him to develop such a distinctive approach to music education? From surveying his early influences it seems clear that many factors shaped the direction Jaques-Dalcroze would take; his unique means of guiding students to realize their innate musical potential and achieve greater creativity, musicality, and artistry did not stem from only one source. However, while the accepted
narrative points to the failure of conventional music education to address students’ inability to communicate with listeners through music, it does not go far enough to explain how Dalcroze arrived at such a strikingly different way of eliciting their expressive responses. Because conventional educational practice prevails to this day, the answer has ongoing relevance for those who practice rhythmic education. Understanding the role non-Western music played in Jaques-Dalcroze’s creation of rhythmical education helps us also see why his approach has wider application, beyond the training of professional classical musicians—why it can serve as a tool for helping all people bring their innate musical gifts to fruition.

As we know, forever altered by his experience, Dalcroze cut short his season abroad and came home to Europe. There, in Vienna, he worked successively under the guidance of Bruckner, Prosnitz, and Graedener; and, when he returned to Paris, he received the “admirable counsel” of Faure, Delibes, Mathis Lussy, and Eugene Ysaïe (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1948: 20-21), absorbing other lessons that would prove critical to his formulation of rhythmical education, both in theory and in practice. But in the winter of 1887, this course of events was not a foregone conclusion. None of these encounters—and the historic developments that ensued from them—would have happened had he not made a crucial decision, a decision that ultimately confronts many young people sojourning abroad, enraptured by the eye-opening wonders of foreign landscapes and seduced by the limitless possibilities these seem to open up:

At the end of the season I was offered the position of director of the conservatory. Before I responded, I consulted an excellent pastor, Rocheblave, who advised me not to accept, saying: ‘If you stay in Algeria, you will not find in that lazy city the means to perfect yourself in your career, and you will feel a decrease of your creative faculties. Return to the continent and resume your studies!’ (Jaques-Dalcroze, 1948: 20-21).

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One Day
A Perpetual 4-part Round in March Time

Allegro q=80-90

January, February, March long; and

April, May, and June may do so too; but

sometimes, yes, sometimes, one

day may seem like it's taking forever (anyway)