

The Earliest Records Show the Angle-Gestures as Movable Do

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Since my promised intensive report on the history of our music eurythmy is not yet done, I want to present at least some of the records that were made by the small group to whom Rudolf Steiner brought the angle-gestures in 1915. These records were published in 2015 and 2016 in the 6th and 7th edition of Dr. Steiner's lectures, *Eurythmie als sichtbarer Gesang, ESG*.^{*} These records are not yet available in English; however, I have been granted permission by the Rudolf Steiner Verlag to quote from them in my writing. So without delay I want to discuss these earliest records here; for they point to a practice that is much different from our current one. ^{*}(*Eurythmy as Visible Singing, EVSing*)

My article for autumn 2021¹ gave (I hope) enough insight into the difference between fixed-do and movable-do practice in singing and eurythmy expression that we might now be ready to grasp Rudolf Steiner's intentions with the angle-gestures, to understand them as tonal gestures tied to the directly-experienced relationships between the members of the scale of any given piece of music. This is movable do. We currently practice fixed-do expression. As I recently mentioned to a colleague, we are missing more than one hundred years of exploration and development of movable-do expression in our practice of music eurythmy. Yet it is there to be taken up, and I wholeheartedly encourage this!

Plain numbers in parentheses refer to pages in the new *ESG*; the translations are mine. German words appear in brackets and discussions are in a different font and color and are set between double bars: || .

On August 23, 1915, as part of the eleven-day "Apollonian Course" for eurythmists, Dr. Steiner presented a sequence of seven angle-gestures for the expression of the scale [die Skala] in eurythmy. For each session, a large piece of black paper was fastened to the board, upon which Dr. Steiner wrote and drew (168). Those in attendance who took notes were Frau Dr. Marie Steiner, Tatiana Kisseleff, Mieta Waller and Erna Wolfram van Deventer. Notably, T. Kisseleff had prior experience in music and dance and had worked with the arts in the rehabilitation of incarcerated people. She had finished a study in law in 1912 (see *How the New Art of Eurythmy Began*, by Magdalene Sieglöcher, p. 105).

The notes of these four show that Rudolf Steiner presented the **major scale** [Dur] that day. Erna supplied notes and sketches for this session in a 1965 letter.^{*} All four recorded that he called the members of the scale, "**prime, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh.**" T. Kisseleff

underlined each name; E. van Deventer and M. Waller added, "**octave.**" Marie Steiner referenced only the first four and entered "etc." for the rest. ||[These designations point to a movable-do sensibility. These are 'do re mi fa sol la ti octave-do,' or 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8. No letter-names are given.](#)|| ^{*}(Erna van Deventer's thorough shorthand documentation in transcription has been lost, perhaps in the Goetheanum fire. 169)

The drawings that T. Kisseleff, M. Waller and E. van Deventer made of the gestures show the angles in equal 30° divisions: prime 0° (arms above), 2nd 30°, 3rd 60°, 4th 90° (arms horizontal); and back up again: 5th 90° (horizontal), 6th 60°, 7th 30°, 8ve 0°. ||[This structuring points to musical realities that are independent of pitch and not dictated by whole and half-steps measurements.](#)|| In addition to the arms, for the 5th, 6th and 7th the legs take angles – 30°, 60° and 30° – and for these they must jump apart very energetically. ||[This leg activity also points to musical realities that are not tied to pitch-tones. What we sense in the scale as it rises to and falls back from octave-do – such as in a melody like "Joy to the World" \(in my autumn 2021 article\) – this now comes to visible expression. The movement of the legs comes directly out of this activity of sol-la-ti in relation to octave-do: the will is engaged in the rise to octave-do, to close the scale in the prime-angle now as the 8ve.](#)|| In 1949, T. Kisseleff recounted that when Rudolf Steiner introduced the gestures, he "spoke about the way to express the **intervals** [Intervalle]." He sketched the equal angles and "had us carry everything out." And for the minor he drew the angle-gestures in profile. (308)

Concerning these expressions, Marie Steiner wrote: "The **relationship** [Verhältnis] of the 2nd to the prime, the 3rd to the prime, the 4th and so on." (173) ||[Without doubt this is movable-do. Her note characterized precisely what Rudolf Steiner pointed to as the core within our tonal musical experience: everything arises and exists in relation to the prime of the scale, to the **tonic**, to 'do' and its octave renewal. It is because of these relationships that the drama of unfolding and closing-with-effort comes about, which is also expressed visibly in the radical difference between the two horizontal gestures – the 4th and the 5th – in which the 4th relates to the prime and the 5th relates to the 8ve.](#)|| (Later on, Elena Zuccoli wrote in her booklet, *From the Tone Eurythmy Work at the First Eurythmy School in Stuttgart 1922-1924, FTE*, p. 13: "In the major octave a backward jump was made, with the feeling of rising to a higher level." In 1949, Hendrika Hollenbach wrote much the same; 310.)

E. van Deventer stated that according to Dr. Steiner's indication or comment, "These forms (angles of tone-eur.) are valid for every/any/each [jede] normal key, major + minor. They are not s, but intervals." In another entry she added, "Intervals not from the keynote, but to be made from one tone to the next." (173, 176) ||[In other words, these intervals are not melodic intervals, but are intervals that pertain to the succession of relationships between scale members that arise out of their relationship to the prime.](#)|| E. van Deventer

also noted that Dr. Steiner had said, “In the long run you must feel whether the movements are to be used as tone or as interval” (176). (To come to terms with what Rudolf Steiner meant by “**tone**” [Ton] in the pure musical sense, I take up interval vs. tone vs. scale degree in PART III of my *Singing and Jumping Opens the Way* report.)

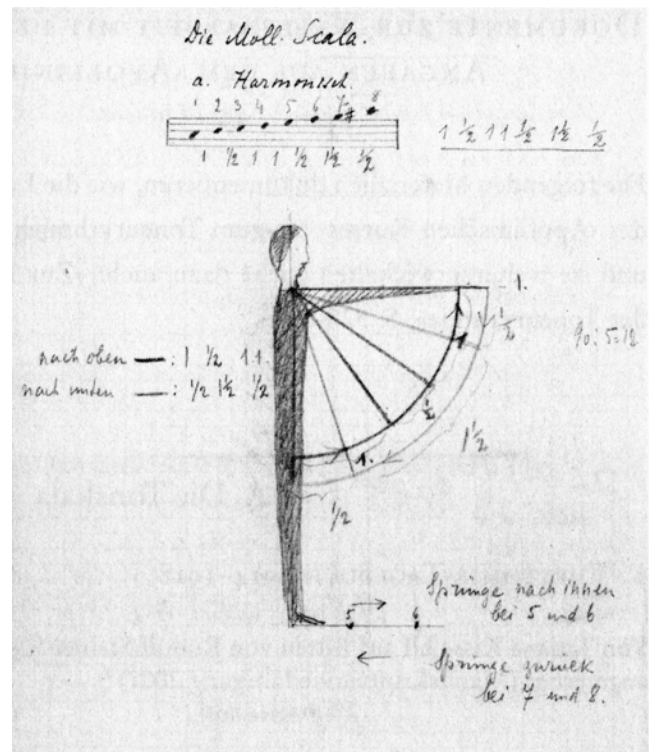
No letter names for the angles appear in the notes for this session. Letter names only appear in E. van Deventer’s charts of the angle divisions that were subsequently made.

On August 26, 1915, Dr. Steiner introduced the angle-gestures for the **minor scale** [Moll]. He gave one sequence, and the records show that he gave ‘C#’ as the **groundtone** [Grundton], as the model prime for the scale. ||With a single scale-form – not two or even three specific forms for pure, harmonic and melodic minor – and with C# as the prime, this would without doubt be movable-do expression.|| T. Kisseleff noted this minor scale as C# D# F# G# A# B# [Cis Dis Fis Gis Ais His],² leaving out the 3rd scale member. She sketched straight arm-angles below the shoulder for C#, D# and F# only; no 3rd. For D#, her figure (with a foot shown) is semi-profile with both arms open in the forward direction – not opening to the sides as in major. For F#, the sketch is not completely clear, but the higher arm is about 15° below horizontal. M. Waller drew straight arm-angles for the first three with the 2nd- and 3rd-angles quite low, and with no labels. In her letter, Erna supplied all of the minor scale angles in a front view, all as straight, below shoulder height, and labeled as prime, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th ... 8ve. ||Movable do.|| The 4th and 5th are about 20° below the horizontal; and the 5th, 6th and 7th have leg angles also, but smaller than in major. Like for major, she stated that “these forms are valid for all minor keys.” (183-85) ||Again, this is movable do. It is striking that all of the drawings show the arms in minor as being unable to open out freely to the sides as does the major. They are quite bound to the downward, somewhat forward direction.||

Marie Steiner and M. Waller noted that the minor is the “polar opposite” of the major (183). The 30° divisions of the angle-gestures are the same. ||This points to realities that are not pitch-defined and not dictated by whole and half-steps.|| But while major is felt and expressed in the zone above the shoulders, the minor is felt and expressed below the shoulders; and the upper tetrachord jumps go forward, “inward,” and do so “painfully.” Furthermore, the difference between the forms of minor (**pure, melodic, harmonic**) is not a change in the angles, but a change in expression. E. van Deventer noted in her 1965 letter, “The melod.[ic] minor key as soft/yielding/delicate/tender [weich] feeling, the harmonic hard as icicles.” ||These are experiential realities, not-defined by whole and half-steps or by pitches.|| She recorded again – as for major – that “with minor also, every/any/each movement can be interval or tone....” (185, her underline).

T. Kisseleff had written that “at the end of the course, we drew the tones of C major with differentiated distances

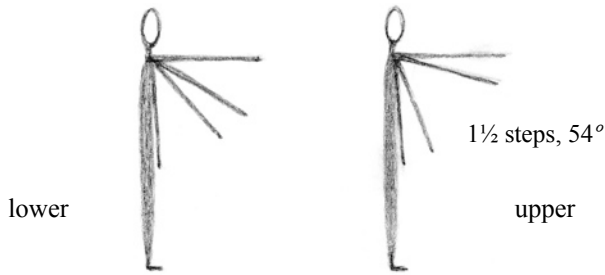
[Abstände] for the half tones between E and F and between B and C” and “did the same for the A minor scale” (309). And in her “Eurythmie-Tagebuch 1914-1918,” she made sideview drawings (no date) showing precisely-adjusted arm angles for major and for harmonic and melodic minor. The ESG team indicated that Rudolf Steiner had asked her to prepare these drawings “for himself and for Marie Steiner.” She marked the angles in major with the letters for C major, but did not mark the angles in the minor. It is clear that A is the prime-angle in the minor, because for each drawing she provided a written scale on a staff, in C for major, in A for minor with sharps shown. (305-06) Here is the drawing for harmonic minor:



These drawings of carefully-measured angle distances require some work to understand; for they present different angle-structures for minor than for major, unlike those that Dr. Steiner gave in the Apollonian Course. In the major, the adjusted 18° angles come (like today) between the 3rd and 4th (labeled E and F) and the 7th and 8ve (labeled B and C). In the harmonic minor these come between the 2nd and 3rd, and the 5th and 6th. With A as the prime, the 4th- and 5th-angles are D and E, not F and G. This oddity is no issue in minor if the pitch-tone, ‘A,’ is simply the *model* prime; for then the D and E angles are the *model* 4th and 5th, and the drama between the lower and upper tetrachords is always expressed. So, as movable do these drawings for minor are totally fine. But are they fine as fixed do? This is important!

These minor drawings, made expressly at Dr. Steiner’s request (305), cannot be applied as fixed do, as is our common angles-practice. How do we know this? We must

carry out what is shown. I have re-sketched the drawing for harmonic minor, to separate the lower and upper tetrachords:



In fixed do, the prime-angle is fixed to the pitch-tone, ‘A.’ With the one-and-a-half-step distance between the 6th and 7th, plus the three half-steps, the ascending harmonic minor scale will be: A B C D E F G#A – note that the ‘sharp’ of G is expressed by the 54° distance, not a bend. The angle remains straight. Then to express the C minor scale in fixed do, we begin with the 3rd-angle (the ‘C-angle’ in what is shown, *not* the same angle as in major): C D E F G#A B C. It will open with the lower tetrachord structure of major and have a gap of 54° between its 4th and 5th. To make it be harmonic minor, we must ‘flat’ the straight E-, G#- and A-angles. But the ‘flatted’ G#-angle will still be very close to the A-angle and 54° away from the F-angle *and nothing can fix this*. As fixed do, *every* expression of the harmonic minor scale (and of the melodic minor) other than A minor will be afflicted with severe internal abnormalities like this. These early sketches correspond *solely* to movable-do expression; and they show conclusively that adjusted angle-sizes and the assignment of letter-names does not indicate or compel a departure from movable-do expression: as Rudolf Steiner said, any tone can be written on [auf] a C* (written as C); and likewise, every pitch-tone can be expressed with the prime-angle when it is the prime. *(96, Lect. IV, 3/7 in)

E. Zuccoli wrote (*FTE* 19): “Because the tonic was expressed by the vertical movement in every key ||movable do||, there arose certain difficulties with regard to the modulation during the course of a musical piece. The question arose as to how one could express the sharpening or flattening of a tone.” ||In movable-do expression, we do feel the need to show the experience of moving from one scale and key to another. For instance, in modulating to the dominant, the existing 4th is cast off and a new, non-scale pitch-tone enters to serve as the new 7th that leads to the prime/8ve of the dominant. During the transition, we easily show this by bending (breaking) the old 4th-angle. Once the new tonal center is established, the new scale is expressed with the angles prime through 8ve as movable do. In modulation to the subdominant, the new, non-scale pitch-tone sounds instead of the old 7th, and it will serve in the role of the 4th to secure the new lower tetrachord. The bend in the old 7th will break off its role in relation to the existing prime.|| In 1924, Rudolf Steiner presented lawful spatial relationships that express harmonic movements. Keys visited

in the dominant and subdominant directions relative to the home key would be characterized by these spatial aspects. (*EVSing*, Lect. V, 5/7 in.)

Dr. Steiner indicated a right-angle bend in the normal straight angles of the scale for the expression of non-scale members, for ‘sharps.’ H. Hollenbach recorded that she (for herself and the Dornach eurythmists who were working with her since about 1920) “asked how then would the lowering through the flat be done, how for example the G-flat should be made.” He answered that one could do F-sharp. She/they were astonished. Not satisfied, they returned and showed him a softened bend for the ‘flat,’ which he allowed (314). ||Rudolf Steiner did not propose the differentiation. And just like angle sizes and letter names, this change does not compel a departure from movable-do expression.||

The question of how fixed-do practice arose and why Rudolf Steiner did not oppose it is complex. I have found nothing indicating that he ever proposed it.* What I can say is this: in movable do, the angle-gestures correspond to *relationships*. They do not correspond to the named notes written on the page as they do in fixed-do practice. And precisely for this reason, when pieces are taken up that are no longer simple and limited to the home key, movable-do expression will at first be more difficult to approach, freed as it is from the named notes and the score. *[I discuss this question in my autumn 2023 article, “My Responsibility to the Onlooker in Music Eurythmy,” and in my report, *Singing and Jumping Opens the Way to a Vital Music Eurythmy Foundation*, PART III, beginning with the BASICS section.]

There is much more to reveal and discuss from the newly-published records, but this will need to be enough for now. Two last notes: singing in movable do is a tremendous help in preparing ourselves for the expression of pieces in movable-do eurythmy. Further important points can be found in the article by composer and choral director, Michael Kaulkin, “The Case for ‘Movable Do’ in Classroom Musicianship,” on the internet.

NOTES:

¹ I rewrote the autumn 2021 EANA article cited here to make what is happening during modulation even clearer. You may see it posted at our website in the artistic category: “Fixed and Movable Do in Our Eurythmy: Does It Matter?”

² In German, pitch-tones have convenient single-syllable letter-names (with two exceptions). Rather than having to say, ‘D,’ ‘D-sharp’ and ‘D-flat,’ one simply says ‘D’ (‘day’), ‘Dis’ and ‘Des.’ With this, fixed-do solfège is easy, thus promoting the conception of music as a matter of audible, frequency-measured, named and notated pitch-notes rather than tonal roles and relationships. In this chart, ‘sharps’ are shown above and ‘flats’ below:

Cis	Dis	E-is	Fis	Gis	A-is (ah-iss)	His	Cis
C(ay)	D(ay)	E (Ay)	(è)F	G(ay)	A (Ah)	H(ah)	C(ay)
Ces	Des	Es	Fes	Ges	As (ahss)	B(ay)	Ces

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