

Music Eurythmy in 1915 and Now: What Happened?

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It is not so often that eurythmists offer lay classes in music eurythmy (a.k.a., 'tone' eurythmy). With this in mind, as a eurythmist and as a former pianist for eurythmy, I would like to provide some background that might help community members understand better what they see or could potentially see in eurythmy presentations of pieces of music.

It was only in 2015 that the original notes and sketches from Rudolf Steiner's presentations on August 23 and 26, 1915 were published (see Eurythmie als sichtbarer Gesang, EsG,¹ only in German as yet). The birth of music eurythmy occurred on these dates. On August 23, he introduced the expression in eurythmy of the tonal scale in its major mode. Tonal scale? If you have seen the film, *The Sound of Music*, you will have heard Julie Andrews as Maria von Trapp leading the children in the "Do-Re-Mi" song. The song consists of the musical journey from 'do' up the scale to 'octave do': "Doe, a deer, a female deer; ray, a drop of golden sun; me, a name I call myself," and so on. The scale, then, is: 'do re mi fa sol la ti do' – eight steps. *In music, 'do' is also called the 'tonic' – the step from which the scale extends upward and to which all of the scale members relate.* This formative-structure of eight steps is called the 'tonal scale.' The tonic is also called the 'prime.'

Without our realizing it, the formative-structure of these eight scale steps (or scale *degrees*), with 'do' as both their point of outset and their culmination in the 'octave do,' *is the foundation of most of our melodies.* This formative-structure constantly informs the melodies regardless of the notated 'key.' And one can recognize which melody note is 'do,' though it might require cultivation of our musical sensitivity in order to do so with confidence – a goal well worth pursuing.

We might not be aware of it, but during their unfolding, melodies can also *shift* which melody note is serving as 'do.' With sensitivity one can detect that such a shift has been made. Even in this simple "Do-Re-Mi" song, the melody *gives notice of shifting* which melody note is 'do.' It does this several times in quick succession, but doesn't carry the shifts through for more than a moment each! Musical phenomena such as this are what create a beautiful complexity in tonal music.

On p. 170ff in *EsG*, one can see the sketches that were made on August 23, 1915 that show the set of angle-gestures that Rudolf Steiner introduced that day.² These gestures are carried out with the arms at specific angles to the body, from narrow (0 degrees) to wide (90 degrees). This set of gestures

is truly a revelation. As expressions of the tonal scale in major, the sequence begins with the narrowest angle and opens to the widest. Then it goes from the widest back to the narrowest, **but doing so with the active jumping of the legs.** With no fuss, the musical formative dynamic of the tonal scale is brought to expression. The active jumping in the ascent to the 'octave-do' is here **indicated in bold:**

do re mi fa sol la ti octave-do
narrow-open-open-wide wide-closing-closing-narrow

With this, one can feel *and now see in gesture* that this musical scale dynamic and structure is characterized by *two sets of four*. In music, these are called the *lower tetrachord* – 'do re mi fa' – and the *upper tetrachord* – 'sol la ti do.' And the reason that I call this eurythmy gesture-expression a 'revelation' is that it reveals how the first four steps keep their musical relationship to the lower 'prime-do' and how the upper four are actively reaching upward toward the 'octave-do' in pronounced relationship with it.

The notes that were made on that day, August 23, 1915, indicate that Steiner named the members of this sequence of angle-gestures, "prime second third fourth fifth sixth seventh octave." Marie Steiner was also present; and she noted that this expression pertains to "the relationship of the second to the prime, the third to the prime, the fourth, etc."³ – "etc." meaning, on up the scale: the fourth in relation to the prime, the fifth to the prime, sixth to the prime and so on. *The expression is all about the directly-perceived musical relationships within the tonal scale.* Steiner designated no specific pitch-tones at all. And he explicitly stated that this sequence of angle-expressions applies "to every normal major and minor key"⁴ (the minor angles being done all below the shoulder). He indicated no alterations nor any need for alterations;⁵ and he added that these gestures are not expressions of note-values, of durations.⁶ What these statements mean is that the gestures do not correspond to the named notes that are written on the staff or page as 'natural,' 'sharp' and 'flat'; and that they do not correspond to the sounding of longer and shorter pitch-tones as marked by note-values such as quarter-notes, whole notes, eighth notes, etc. *In short, the expression that Rudolf Steiner presented stays entirely within the purely musical. It transcends the audible-material and notated aspects completely.*

As documented by the eurythmist, Elena Zuccoli, in the early years the narrowest angle expressed the prime in every key. And the eurythmists carried out their work with attention to how each given melody moves within this formative-structure of the tonal scale, and how the angle-gestures open and close in relation to the experienced prime and its octave.⁷ Each tonal melody does in fact have its distinct way of 'breathing' (as I call it) within this formative scale structure. And in eurythmy this archetypal phenomenon could now be expressed. (As an aside, modern melodies that

avoid this tonal structure by establishing no prime, no tonic, no 'do,' are another matter entirely and pose a completely different challenge for their expression in gesture!)

The remarkable journey of each melody within the structure of the scale is what the gesture-expression of 1915 made possible, especially because *the upper tetrachord activity is clearly revealed by the striking energy of the legs*. Is this what we see in presentations today? No. Why not? And what is it that we see?

A change overtook this expression of music in eurythmy fairly soon, perhaps by about 1920. What I firstly want to say, is that complications do arise when melodies unfold such that there is a shift concerning which pitch-tone is serving as the prime, the tonic – as I mentioned above. But this does not have to present any trouble for eurythmy. It only requires us to understand what is happening, to become musically-proficient in recognizing what heralds these shifts and be able to follow them and express them. It seems to me, however, that this did pose big problems early on.

When a shift is under way, the established relationships within the tonal scale that support which pitch-tone is serving as the prime are interrupted. And it is often the case that it is *either* the relationship-of-the-4th-to-the-prime *or* the relationship-of-the-7th-to-the-prime that is altered, that is broken off. (I am keeping to just the basic possibilities for such processes.) One can perceive that something has changed, is not right, when this happens. And at a certain point where the melody would have been expected to close to the established prime (or its octave), it does not. Instead, it closes with a full sense of tonal rightness and of primeness, but with a different pitch-tone serving as that prime. *The relationships have shifted*. A new prime and tonal center has been established. This process is called 'modulation.'

Early eurythmists would have been in need of a way to express such changes. In the case of the relationship-of-the-4th-to-the-prime being broken off, this comes about because the *next-higher non-scale neighbor* to the 4th has entered the music. And it *loosens* the existing formative-structure and begins service in the role of the 7th-in-relationship-to-the-5th, *causing the 5th to be experienced now as the prime*. To give expression in eurythmy to what is happening, during the transition the angle-of-the-4th will be sharply bent at the elbow to express this new *non-scale* member, the next-higher neighbor of the 4th. But once the transition (modulation) is complete, the new scale can be expressed with the *normal* sequence of angles, prime through octave. As music theory would elucidate this, if the existing scale is thought of as having 'C' serving in the role of the prime, then the 4th of the 'C' scale, 'F,' would be replaced by 'F-sharp.' But the eurythmy expression of tonal music and of the tonal scale involves the *perception of relationships*, not of designated pitch-tones or 'keys.' I

strongly believe that this is why Rudolf Steiner identified the angle-gesture expressions as 'prime, second, third,' etc., *not* giving them note-names like 'C,' 'D' and 'F-sharp.'

The 7th is a powerful agent in determining which pitch-tone is serving as the prime. The whole upper tetrachord and especially the 7th *lead to the intended octave-prime*. One can feel this. If the relationship-of-the-7th-to-a-new-prime is established, that's all it takes in order to shift the tonal center (the 'key'). And also, if that new relationship is broken off, that's all it takes in order to shift back to the former tonal center. It is marvelous! (Perceptive listeners can even note that the set of brief, threatened modulations in the "Do-Re-Mi" song *intensify the rise to the octave-do of the song*.⁸)

In the eurythmy expression of tonal music, I believe one should *always* be able to discern and feel where the prime is, especially when phrases are ending. But rather than really following these transitions within the formative tonal structure,⁹ eurythmists began to assign the named notes of the 'C' scale to the angle-gestures. For instance, the note 'D' was assigned to the angle-of-the-2nd, which from then onward was used as the 'D-angle.' *The angle-gestures were no longer pure expressions of the steps of the scale*. Sharp elbow-bends and softly-rounded elbow-bends were then added to all of the straight angle-gestures as *fixed* gestures meant to represent the named and notated 'sharps' and 'flats.' With this new and comprehensive fixed-notes system, the angle-gestures became expressions of durations, note-values, although nowadays, the gestures are often done as a growing-into and fading-out-of the angle forms. The equal 30-degree angles of the gestures were divided into larger and smaller angle sizes,¹⁰ meant to signify whole and half steps – i.e., showing pitch measurements, though this new system oddly fails to show the whole step measurement between the wide, horizontal 'F-angle' and the wide 'G-angle.' And by-and-by, the jumping in relation to the upper tetrachord has been largely dropped. Perhaps quite rightly, because now it is only in the written key of 'C' that the jumping corresponds to the *actually-perceived* upper tetrachord. In every other designated key, the jumping must conflict with the truly-perceived tonal scale structure. However, with no jumping one cannot see and feel when it is, that the melody is reaching toward the octave-prime or descending from it. The jumping would lead us in our feeling-perception to where the octave-do is. But now, *any* angle-gesture, *straight or bent*, could be the prime or the octave-prime, so how can we perceive which gesture it is?¹¹ And the bending and straightening of the arms does not clearly relate to the heralding of tonal shifts (modulation), so we cannot clearly discern these musical events, either.

These are the gesture traditions that have grown up over the last century. I am lost; and I speak as a musician, too. Modern eurythmy is not helping me when it carries out

movement traditions like these. And maybe my offering of these explanations will help others, too, if I am not alone in feeling lost when attending performances.

There are a couple more observations that I would like to offer. It is possible that some people have distinct experiences of specific pitches, and also of specific keys possessing distinct qualities. If these experiences are in fact objective and universal – as for example the formative tonal scale structure *is* – expressing these qualities could be of value. Yet, to me it remains clear that the angle-gestures which Rudolf Steiner introduced in 1915 in expression of the relationships of the tonal scale in both its major and minor mode, would *not* be an appropriate expression for experiences that are *not* based on the scale-degree relationships, but are based on something else. That 'something else' would need to be fathomed and understood and its rightful expression discovered.

Concerning the *quality* of each piece of music, I believe we would always need to ask: is this quality the result of the 'key' in which it is written – 'E', 'A-flat,' etc. – or does it lie in the nature and movement of its melody, its range of notes high or low, its tempo, its harmonic character, etc.? I would suggest that these other aspects are usually the case, and that when the piece is transposed (rewritten) and played in a different 'key,' we still do experience *those same qualities*; and the entire musical structure of the piece remains. This is in fact how we recognize the piece! And I would say that if the quality of the written key is really, truly deemed to be an *objective and universal fact*, the expression that belongs to that quality would need to be found.

And lastly, if I hear the pitch-tone 'D' without knowing that it is 'D,' and I do not experience a gesture-impulse from within myself that would truly lead me to the angle that I have learned to call the 'D-angle,' where is my justification for performing this angle? For me, bringing a specialized gesture forth for each individual named note is at present an impossibility. And even if it were possible for me, the idea of seeking and presenting specialized gestures for the named, written notes is irrelevant: adding them in would only detract from what really matters in light of the *relationship*-structures of tonal music. So instead, I am working quietly along, to unfold a eurythmy expression of music in accord with what Rudolf Steiner first presented in 1915. And perhaps in the coming season I will finally give a public presentation or two about this earliest impulse for music eurythmy, which has not yet come to fruition, which died in the cradle. I have published articles and reports on this impulse and on the early records. These writings and the references for what is briefly recounted here of the history are all at my website now. See the complete lists at the end of the "Revelations" page there:

www.eurythmyfoundationmatters.website.

Here is this sequence of angle-expressions for the tonal scale in its major mode, amended here to show *both* legs for the second, third and fourth, from Elena Zuccoli's booklet, *From the Tone Eurythmy Work* (see it for more sketches):



¹ *Eurythmie als sichtbarer Gesang, EsG (Eurythmy as Visible Singing, EVSing)*, 2015/16 edition, Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Basel, Switzerland.

² See at the end of this article. Mieta Waller's sketch from *EsG*, p. 172, is shown in the *Section for the Performing Arts Newsletter* for Easter 2016, Nr. 64, p. 16, <https://srnk.goetheanum.org/fileadmin/srnk/XRBRE/RbE64.pdf>. (Note: the second sketch on p. 16 concerns the minor mode, but it was fashioned by Tatiana Kisseleff on a later date, not on the day of Dr. Steiner's August 26, 1915 presentation of the minor. Her sketch is very unlike what he had presented. The arms no longer sag below the horizontal level, the angle divisions are changed and she intended the angles to stand for named notes, not preserving the scale-step expression that Steiner had given. Furthermore, what she drew makes no sense in practice; and my article for the *Eurythmy Association of North America Newsletter*, Spring 2022, addresses this.

³ See *EsG*, p. 173.

⁴ Ibid; see note by Erna van Deventer (néé Wolfram), p. 173.

⁵ See *EsG*, p. 185. In minor only the feeling changes, not the gesture-structure: melodic is "delicate/yielding"; harmonic is "hard as icicles."

⁶ *EsG*, p. 176, "Sie sind nicht Notenwert."

⁷ Elena Zuccoli, *From the Tone Eurythmy Work at the First Eurythmy School in Stuttgart, 1922-1924*, p. 13.

⁸ Bent angles would show the tonal shifting. If a modulation is carried out, a lawfully-differentiated sense of space can provide the means to express what has happened. R. Steiner made brief, potent suggestions for this in *EVSing*, Lect 5, 5/7 in. For very complex pieces it would be best to express *other* elements such as pitch or chordal colors and not attempt angle-gesture expression at all.

⁹ See drawings that were made some time after August 23 and 26, 1915: Hendrika Hollenbach, *EsG*, p. 312; Tatiana Kisseleff, *EsG*, pp. 305-06.

¹⁰ See H. Hollenbach's note, *EsG*, p. 313.

¹¹ In his March 8, 1923 Stuttgart lecture, 6/7 in (see in *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*), Rudolf Steiner spoke of the experience of the 5th, 6th and 7th in relation to the development of the human faculties of Imagination, Inspiration and Intuition. These levels of higher cognition require focussed effort to achieve. Our tonal music reflects this, repeatedly engaging in the effortful ascent of the 5th, 6th and 7th, reaching upward to achieve the octave. The definite and energetic presentation of this experience and this necessity in our Age of the Consciousness Soul has been *dropped out* of the eurythmy expression of music.