

My Responsibility to the Onlooker in Music Eurythmy

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Reviewing the early records: what do they show?

What is the onlooker's experience of our current angle-gesture expression?

Transforming our eurythmy practice: A clear expression of tonal experience as originally presented by Rudolf Steiner in 1915

We have been living through the extended centennial period of the birth of the art of eurythmy, stretching from 2012 into 2024. This gives us a golden opportunity to review and test the worthiness of how this art has grown up. What is the condition of its roots? Colleagues are taking up these questions; and especially of note are some recent reader's letters in the *Section for the Performing Arts Newsletter* from the Goetheanum.¹ I am deeply grateful to find these matters addressed candidly there. My serious renewal of work in eurythmy began at the end of 2012.

In music eurythmy, it is crucial to ask, why did the practice grow up in the way it did? It is clear from the records that were made of the beginning of the angle-gestures, that these gestures are the expression of the tonal scale and its seven steps of relationships. First hand records from August 23 and 26 of 1915 have been published in the new *Eurythmie als sichtbarer Gesang (EsG, Eurythmy as Visible Singing*, but this edition is not yet in English). There we see that Frau Dr. Marie Steiner noted what Dr. Rudolf Steiner said about their fundamental nature: "The relationship of the second to the prime, of the third to the prime, of the fourth etc." – i.e., each of the scale members is in relation to the prime. And Erna van Deventer (née Wolfram) noted that these relationship-expressions are valid for both the major and the minor mode of the tonal scale.² This makes complete sense to me as a musician.

I have been actively sharing my renewed work and research in music eurythmy. My article, "The Agrippa von Nettesheim Positions: Rudolf Steiner told Lory to Jump!"³ concerns the kinship of the Agrippa positions to the dynamic of the lower and upper tetrachords of the tonal scale. And in "The Singing and Jumping Exercises – Real Sound-Experiences Lead to Real Gestures," published as PART IV of *Singing and Jumping Opens the Way to a Vital Music Eurythmy Foundation*,⁴ I shared the work that can be done together with a companion to stir our direct experiences of the tonal scale and the relationships between its members. We can prove to ourselves 'from within' that

these angle-gesture expressions of the tonal scale are soul-spiritual facts that arise out of the formative scale structure itself (in German, the 'Gebilde'). We can confirm that Rudolf Steiner did not think out a sign-language for the tonal scale in movement – not at all.

Reviewing the early records: what do they show?

So, why did the early eurythmists abandon these tonal scale expressions and instead of this expression, begin to apply the angles to named pitch-tones? I ask this because I recognized the factual necessity of these tonal expressions when I first met them (you may read my account in *Singing and Jumping*, PART I). And I recognize from the records, that this supersensible necessity in expression was clear to Rudolf Steiner, too; and in summary, this expression has nothing to do with named pitches and materialistic measurements of whole- and half-steps, but expresses the prime, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, and again, prime (octave) of the tonal scale. He made this especially clear when he took C-sharp as his 'for-example' prime for the minor expression of the scale, in which the angles are all straight, sagging below the shoulders and a bit forward, as "the polar opposite" of the major. E. van Deventer noted what Rudolf Steiner said about them: "These forms are valid for all minor keys. They express painfully. The arms are stretched forward. The jumps appear forward. All movements inward = painful. The melod.[ic] minor key as soft/yielding feeling-sense, the harmonic hard as icicles".⁵ And these expressions are valid for all minor keys, just as the angles above in major are: they "are not note-values/durations";⁶ they do not stand for notes played on an instru- ment.⁷

This was the beginning. Were there any reasons for causing these gestures to represent pitches instead? Briefly recounting the early development, as in ESG: an elbow bend was made for 'sharpening'; then the Dornach eurythmists rounded it for 'flattening'.⁸ These expressions of non-scale members that enter the stream of the melody do not compel the tonal angles to be used to represent notes in the music. The 30-degree angles were adjusted (not Rudolf Steiner's idea).⁹ But since the basic expression of scale relationships remains and the re-division applies in all keys, this change does not compel a shift. After the August 1915 course, the eurythmists drew the angles with letter names.¹⁰ This, too, does not compel a shift: letter names as used in music theory and as Rudolf Steiner used them¹¹ simply elucidate the laws that govern all keys; so the narrowest angle is called 'C' ('A' in minor), but it still expresses the prime in every key. Hops replaced springing the legs apart. To reflect low and high, the prime in major could be expressed forward rather than above; and the octave in minor, sagging forward rather than down. For quick notes, small angles could be done at the elbows or wrists (also for

above the octave). None of this compels a shift to using the tonal angles to represent named notes.

Elena Zuccoli wrote that in the early practice, the narrowest angle always made visible the prime; and the melody was felt to open and close in relation to the prime.¹² (I feel this movement as a kind of breathing.) Then, “[b]ecause the tonic [prime] was expressed by the vertical movement in every key,” there arose certain difficulties with regard to the modulation during the course of a musical piece.¹³ In modulation, non-scale members enter the music; and bent angles give expression to these tonal experiences. For instance, in modulation to the key of the 4th (the sub-dominant, IV), a non-scale member supplants the existing 7th-to-the-prime; and the angle-of-the-7th bends, breaking off that relationship. This new member will serve as the new 4th-to-the-prime; and when the new key is settled, the normal angles prime through octave can express it. Hence, even modulation does not compel an assignment of the tonal angles to named pitch-tones.

It remains unclear why the shift was made. and why Rudolf Steiner did not confront it. Three things may well have bearing on this.¹⁴ Firstly, from Reinhard Wedemeier: “Elena Zuccoli answered when I asked her how absolute tones came about: ‘Because one was too lazy.’”¹⁵ I would say not so much lazy, but rather, musically weak; i.e., not knowing how to experience the tonal scale with real depth of feeling-perception, and therefore lacking the capacity to enter and grasp tonal events vividly and bring them to expression, especially within the amazing processes of modulation. Following the audible notes, as written, was the only thing possible in many of the pieces that the eurythmists chose for themselves. Some are alarmingly complicated musically – not for novices! Secondly, my sense is that Rudolf Steiner himself might not have fathomed yet, how to help the eurythmists with what they were missing: as he said in 1912, the birthing of eurythmy requires “the wisdom of the whole world.”¹⁶ We can see that his 1923 and 1924 lectures on music and eurythmy are directed toward awakening these tonal experiences, making it possible for us to surmount and discard the notated pitches and enter the pure music itself.¹⁷ And thirdly, Dr. Steiner always respected the freedom of the eurythmists as artists.¹⁸

The angle-gestures that express the tonal scale came as part of the 1915 Apollonian course. On March 8, 1923 in Stuttgart, Rudolf Steiner brought the Dionysian expressions of the self-same tonal interval-experiences as movements in space: the interval-forms, prime through seventh. He also referred to these intervals as steps, “Stufen.”¹⁹ And in *Eurythmy as Visible Singing*, Lecture 7, he brought the bones-sequence gestures for these tonal experiences, again as fully-human Dionysian expressions. Nowhere here did he fix these expressions to named pitch-tones.

If our experience of the scale and its interval-steps were strong, I believe that we would feel deeply disturbed when we make gestures that conflict with the tonal scale-experiences that are right then at work in the music, guiding and governing the melody and giving rise to its harmonies. If we really experienced the scale relationships, we would feel how disharmonious it is to present the angle-of-the-prime when the experience-of-the-prime is not present to us in the music in that moment. We couldn’t do it!

What is the onlooker’s experience of our current angle-gesture expression?

For the onlooker, what happens when these *tonal* gestures are presented as representations of pitch-tones? – such that the narrowest angle will always represent ‘C,’ and the widest no-jump angle will always represent ‘F,’ and so on. Sensitive perception can make us aware that if the actual prime of a melody is shown in eurythmy by any other angle-form than the narrowest angle, the onlooker will indeed be musically confused. Lory Maier-Smits had asked Dr. Steiner if she might do the vowel, *i* (ee), with her arms outstretched left and right. He answered that the visible form that she presents matters and must be considered: if *i* is shown outstretched left and right, the onlooker will see the form of the cross, *e* (ay), not *i*. He counseled her to avoid this gesture for ee.²⁰

Do we find the same danger for the onlooker with the visible forms we present in music eurythmy? Yes, absolutely. As an onlooker I suffer greatly from this when I attend performances. If, for instance, the actual prime of a melody is shown with a horizontal angle without a jump (because it is ‘F’ in the score and we have assigned the angle-of-the-4th exclusively to F), I see the wide form-of-the-4th, not the narrowest angle, the form-of-the-prime. And though the eurythmist might attempt to place a real prime-experience in the bones or behind or around this horizontal angle-of-the-4th that is being presented as F (i.e., the eurythmist attempts two divergent tonal expressions at the same time), this is no remedy: the overt form dominates. If the onlooker has a sensitive perception of the prime in the music, they will not be able to resolve the conflict between the visible 4th-form and their actual experience of the prime. The onlooker has no way to understand why they are being shown this overt 4th-angle when the 4th-experience is not present at that moment in the music. And adding to this confusion, since eurythmists jump so little now, is this overt form meant to be a G/5th or an F/4th?²¹ One can also hear that a jump may now be added to the no-jump angle-forms! According to this idea, the 4th-angle as F may be shown with a jump if the 5th, 6th or 7th is present in the music – yet which of these is meant? And since jumping or not jumping is in fact intrinsic to each of the tonal angle-forms, with a jump added to it, this 4th-form vanishes, doesn’t it?

As an onlooker, I feel repeatedly thrown off by these circumstances, unable to get my musical bearings. The needs of the onlooker, as Rudolf Steiner said, must be considered; and with this angles-system these cannot be considered, nor can they be met.

In reality, the angle-expressions always reveal the seven tonal scale relationships. These distinct relationships are what is ‘absolute’ in tonal music. A single pitch has no specific tonal relevance. And in the medieval period, the same named pitches did not serve as tonal music like today.²² And in our music now, the very same notes in the score can be major or minor – for example, F-major and D-minor use the same pitch-tones. It is only by merit of the formative scale structure of relationships that we know which it is!²³ The *scale members* ‘say’ which pitch-tone must serve as the prime. Hence, ‘C’ cannot be ‘the’ prime; and assigning ‘absolute’ pitches to the tonal angles makes no sense.²⁴ I must instead experience absolute *tonality*. And in doing this, I have found that these tonal steps of the scale can be felt-sensed-perceived as ‘tones’ in and of themselves, completely independent of any identification with specific pitches. If to the contrary of this, I posit the idea that with each of the tonal angle-gestures I am expressing the nature of the ‘being’ of a particular named pitch, the truth for me is that this ‘being’ is something I have never experienced. And a primary guiding principle for me is that to the best of my ability, I will not present gestures for sounds – or for any phenomena – of which I have little or no direct experience. Allowing myself to perform gestures which are untrue for me is unhealthy. And there is a huge difference between experiencing a learned gesture meant for a certain phenomenon and experiencing the phenomenon itself. And once again, the angle-gestures are only valid as tonal relationship-gestures within the scale; this is their source, not the system of note-names, notation on the page and keyboards, fingerboards and levers on instruments, all of which serve the material necessities of audible music-making.

**Transforming our eurythmy practice:
A clear expression of tonal experience as originally
presented by Rudolf Steiner in 1915**

In 1924, near the opening of *Eurythmy as Visible Singing*, Lecture 1, Rudolf Steiner stated his concern about exactly this, the need for direct experiences; and he made a striking declaration which in this overarching centennial period I am striving to answer:

Here, however, it is above all things necessary that bare gesture-making and movement-production in eurythmy be transcended, that within the sphere of eurythmy – also in speech eurythmy – the real sound will in fact be felt-sensed-perceived [empfundem].

In working as I do to answer his call, I am also certain that this is the only way that I can prevent breeding confusion in my onlooker.

Singing the opening of Bach’s Arioso for solo oboe and sinfonia can help make the difference clear (see more on this Arioso, BWV 156, in *Singing and Jumping*, Part III, “Fixed Do and Movable Do in Our Eurythmy: Does It Matter?”²⁵):



To follow the tonal movement of a piece within the formative scale structure, I have found that singing the scale steps of melody lines (also the bass) with numbers is the best place to begin. It is essential to actually DO this in singing and in gesture, many times, to fully experience it. The richness of the tonal scale-step experiences and gestures will only open to us if we truly grasp our pieces through them. Note: for the tonal angle-gestures, in standing, as in the beginning (1915), I express prime, 2nd and 3rd forward; jump 5th, 6th, 7th; small jump to achieve the octave (with a sense of stepping up backward²⁶); and high wrist angles for high over-the-octave scale-steps. Here is the sequence of scale-steps in the Arioso melody:

3 4 5 6 2 3 4 5 | 1 8 6 4 2 7 5 4 3 4 | 3 2 1

With this motif that opens with the 3rd, repeats with the 2nd and completes with the prime, I feel peaceful, freed.

But if I sing the numbers so that they correspond to the pitches – where ‘C’ is the sole prime – then the sequence is completely different. I will need to account for ‘B-flat’ as the next-lower neighbor to 7, ‘sev’n’; and to sing this I will darken the vowel, ‘sayv’n.’ I note it as, ‘<7.’²⁷ Note: for 5, 6 and <7 as gestures, jumping is obligatory to their nature. I will sing:

6 <7 8 2 5 6 <7 8 | 4 4 2 <7 5 3 1 | <7 6 <7 | 6 5 4

By giving expression to the melody in this way, tied to the notes, I find that I no longer express my experience of this motif that descends 3rd, 2nd, prime – a tonal event which I do perceive. I have entangled it in the upper tetrachord, creating disorder. The tonal shape of the melody and its breathing within the formative scale structure (Gebilde) is now blocked. With sensitive perception I find that I feel unwell inwardly when I sing this and do this as angles. As a musician, I have worked to make the physical, audible, written notes disappear so that the music will come to life. But here I am perpetually identifying them, fixated on them.

I know that it is believed that we express a richness when we use the angles to show the notes of each written key in the Circle of Fifths that belongs to 'C'; so we learn to do them this way.²⁸ The idea is that each of the notes, now as angles, take roles in various keys; e.g., in this Arioso that is notated in F major (although on Baroque instruments in modern ensembles that use A415 instead of A440 as the tuning standard, it sounds as F-flat major/E major), since 'B-flat' takes the role-of-the-4th, the 4th as a tonal fact is not shown. It is supplanted by the desire to show that B-flat takes this role; so the narrow bent jumping-angle is shown. This B-flat will take the role-of-the-5th in the key of E-flat, the role-of-the-3rd in G minor, and so on.

But in the Arioso, why do I care about the B-flat? Of course, in order to be true to the scale relationships of the melody within the desired range of the physical oboe, the oboist must sound the correct audible, materially-measured notes.²⁹ But the piece did not modulate to the subdominant (IV) one stage away from C, to require this B-flat; so for me, at the opening of the Arioso I feel no direct connection to the key of C as the tonic (I). Instead, the directly-experienced tonic and Circle of Fifths of the piece itself governs. And simply hearing a B-flat does not prompt in me this narrow, bent, jumping gesture. Hence, I account for this note abstractly, as a technical, material-notational necessity.

In the past, in order that an angle such as this would nevertheless not feel abstract, I have practiced imagining that I am touching something with my fingertips (we were shown that we can do this, to be sure that the gestures will feel real). But in this centennial period, I ask: does the onlooker want to see pretense from me? My answer is: no. My responsibility as a eurythmist is to provide experienced truth; and in tonal music, this must be unambiguous tonal truth. This means that in each melody, I must with devotion express the formative breathing of the tonal scale-steps – and also the melodic intervals between them. And when I do this, no efforts of imagination are necessary; for the vivid tonal experiences themselves will prompt the raising of my arms into these particular expressions!

To each of you who will join in unfolding this long-neglected impulse with earnest resolve and care, I want to say: thank you. If you have questions, my contact details are at the EANA.org website. A tutorial document about this purely tonal impulse is available from me; and please see my other articles and reports on music eurythmy in which I seek to open the door for us into the experience of absolute tonality that is the living foundation of our tonal music-Gebilde.

¹ *Section Newsletters*: Nr. 76, R. Wedemeier; Nr. 77, K. Rennert. Also see F. Lindenmaier's article in Nr. 64.

² *Eurythmie als sichtbarer Gesang, EsG*, 2015/2016; Rudolf Steiner Verlag, Dornach, Switzerland. p. 173 (This new edition of *Eurythmy as Visible Singing* is not yet available in English.)

³ *Eurythmy Association of North America Newsletter*, spring 2020; EANA.org.

⁴ See at EANA.org, artistic category.

⁵ *EsG*, p. 185.

⁶ *EsG*, p. 173.

⁷ See *EsG*, p. 170ff, for these descriptions.

⁸ H. Hollenbach; *EsG*, p. 314.

⁹ *EsG*, p. 313.

¹⁰ T. Kisseleff; *EsG*, p. 309.

¹¹ *Eurythmy as Visible Singing, EVSing*, Lect. 4, middle: his use was "as is customary." Felix Lindenmaier confirmed this in detail in "Rudolf Steiner and the Music Theory of his Time," *EsG*.

¹² Margrethe Solstad also affirmed that the prime-angle was the prime in every key. See halfway into her article "From the Beginning Time," in *Der Toneurythmie Kurs von Rudolf Steiner* (Stefan Hasler, editor). Note: T. Kisseleff's *Eurythmie Tagebuch* drawings for minor only work when the narrowest angle is always the prime. This is movable-do expression. In fact, the angles *cannot* be done as fixed do. If we try to fasten the angles that she showed to specific notes – as is our custom – the expression becomes a chaos for us which cannot be remedied. *EsG*, p. 306. See my article, "The Earliest Records Show the Angle-Gestures as Movable Do, *EANA*, spring 2022. (A much-shortened version of this article is in the *Section Newsletter*, Nr. 78, Easter 2023.)

¹³ E. Zuccoli, *From the Tone Eurythmy Work at the First Eurythmy School in Stuttgart, 1922-24, FTE*, pp. 13, 19.

¹⁴ It is also very likely that important early eurythmists had training in fixed-do in their musical background or had little or no experience singing melodies in movable-do solfège. If so, they might have easily expected and persistently assumed that eurythmy expression must be fixed-do. Movable-do expression fosters a deep awareness and experience of the scale-relationships in every moment of the music. A fixed-do practice does not achieve this because it just gives note-names (ascending, C Cis D Dis ...; descending, D Des C Ces ...). See Part I of *Singing and Jumping* and begin with the BASICS section. The remainder of PART III of that report (not completed) will present much more thorough discussions of the early records and of the developments since then.

¹⁵ “The primary catastrophe in tone eurythmy”; *Section Newsletter*, Easter 2022, Nr. 76, pp. 81-82.

¹⁶ Magdalene Sieglöcher, *How the New Art of Eurythmy Began*, p. 30; Verlag am Goetheanum 1993, Temple Lodge 1997.

¹⁷ See Rudolf Steiner’s March 2, 1924 Nachrichtenblatt report: “[T]he need arises to thrust off everything that is unmusical in music and to carry ‘pure music’ into the realm of the visible.” See in *EV Sing*.

¹⁸ *FTE*, p 6.

¹⁹ See 5/8 into the lecture, *The Inner Nature of Music and the Experience of Tone*, *INM*, GA 283. Note: My work for *Singing and Jumping*, PART IV has shown that the scale-step intervals (structural) and melodic intervals (between) are the same interval-experience. Note: in music, scale ‘steps’ and ‘degrees’ are the same thing.

²⁰ *Eurythmy: Its Birth and Development*, GA 277, p. 208, note 62.

²¹ See *INM*, March 8, 1924. The strong and direct expression of the fifth, sixth and seventh is of the greatest importance to all humanity in our time. This is now completely lost.

²² See the BASICS section in Part 1 of *Singing and Jumping*, EANA.org. And if specific pitches were actually to be expressed, I am convinced that the expression must not be derived from the seven tonal relationship gestures.

²³ Note: in addition, in eurythmy practice the expression of the earth-bound nature of minor in the region below the shoulders has to a great extent been abandoned. Melodies in minor are now shown freely above the shoulders just as melodies in major would be. Hence, not only are onlookers confused by the use of the tonal angles to signify named notes: the onlookers are further confused because they cannot sense from what they see, whether the melody is major or minor. What is the point of the visible expression then?

²⁴ In *EV Sing*, Lecture 2, halfway in, Rudolf Steiner had said, "You have a gesture which absolutely presents the third-experience." I am not aware of any similar statement from him, that a gesture could arise that absolutely presents the experience of a named note.

²⁵ See *Singing and Jumping*, PART III at EANA.org, artistic category.

²⁶ Elena Zuccoli, wrote: “In the major octave a backward jump was made, with the feeling of rising to a higher level”; *FTE*, p. 13.

²⁷ See a complete chart and directions in PART III, cited above. For the tonal scale in minor, the numbers 1 through 8 express the *natural* minor scale and then changes are made for the harmonic and melodic minor. In general, the vowels brighten to ‘ee’ for the next-higher neighbors, and they darken to ‘ay’ for the next-lower neighbors; y is pronounced, ‘eye,’ and è is short, as in ‘set’:

ween	tee	thry	feer	feev	seex	seev’n	eet
one	two	three	four	five	six	sev’n	eight
wayn	tay	thray	fayr	fayv	sayx	sayv’n	èt

²⁸ In eurythmy, the scale itself is no longer understood as a singular phenomenon. Instead it is divided into a multitude of scales. This is so much the case that in the English edition from Anastasi (2013/2019) of *Eurythmy as Visible Singing*, in Lecture 1 right at the outset, Rudolf Steiner's clear reference to the singular scale is changed to the plural! It is retrofitted as “scales.” In these lectures, it is striking that Rudolf Steiner never used the plural in relation to the scale. Note: The singular scale has two modes: major and minor.

²⁹ What if a clarinetist were available as the modern soloist instead of an oboist? Since the clarinet always sounds a whole-step lower than written, the melody would need to be scored for it in ‘G’ rather than ‘F.’ Hence this ‘B-flat’ in the Arioso melody would appear as a ‘C’ to the clarinetist. Doesn’t this fact also – along with the fact (already cited) that the piece when played on Baroque instruments sounds roughly a half-step lower than written, compared to modern instrumental tuning – beg us to ask the question: what angle-gesture should a eurythmist do for this note, played by the clarinet? For the fixed-do system, how do we decide whether it should be ‘B-flat’ as sounded or ‘C’ as written? What is our justification for the fixed key we choose for our expression of this Arioso melody? In movable do there is no mystery concerning what the real experience is: our expression will be the angle-of-the-4th for this note, for it is the 4th scale-step in the scale-Gebilde of the Arioso melody. And there can be nothing abstract about this fact within our experience, once we have entered livingly into the nature of the tonal music-Gebilde.