

'One-for-one' in Eurythmy: Slavery or Marriage?

Alan Stott, GB-Stourbridge

"Nature (sense and intuition) always unites, intellect always divides; but reason unites once more."
F. SCHILLER, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, No 18.

"Are we not here to make the transitory permanent? This we can only do if we know how to value both."
J.W. von GOETHE, *Maxims & Reflections*.

"Thinking can go but half way... To know the whole truth we must likewise ACT; and he alone acts, who makes—and this can no man do, estranged from Nature. Learn to know thyself in Nature, that thou mayest understand Nature in thyself."
S.T. COLERIDGE, *Correspondence, Blackwood's Magazine*, October, 1821.

For years eurythmy has been dismissed as a mere illustration of what is heard. We hear the sounds 'b' and 'oo' (it is said), and we simply see the gestures for them. The journalistic slogan 'one-for-one' (*i.e.*, note-for-note, sound-for-sound) coined in recent years in central Europe is nothing new. It is intended as a withering *criticism* of eurythmy—seen as a mere 'spelling'—yet ironically points to its potential *glory*. Eurythmy, a language of incarnate movement and gesture, shares all the elements of spoken language: thoughts, moods, vocabulary, grammar, right into the very sounds of speech. Yet it reaches beyond a naturalistic level by revealing the dynamic that is present *within* language—'what is in speech', as Steiner puts it. The methods of eurythmy reach deeper than a subjective reacting, by a study of the elements of language and their mutual relationships *in connection with and revelation of the whole human being* (Coleridge's "total man").

Steiner put his energies into developing eurythmy. Today, we have to reckon with activities, which, due to all sorts of inadequacies, are sometimes termed 'not-yet-eurythmy', with compromises and even attempts to discredit the art. Here we attempt some initial comments on the 'one-for-one' criticism, addressing both the immediate and the persistent sides. It is a fallacy to imagine the moral issue can be side-stepped, and a double fallacy to suggest that progress is automatic.

First and second innocence

Firstly, on the level of a curriculum summary, language consists of consonants and vowels, parts of speech, and so on. As students of language, eurythmists study them. It is also true that a meal consists of ingredients that can be described in a recipe, a descriptive menu-card or listed in a shopping list—but they are not yet the meal. The material of the act of verbal communication, like ingredients, represents the empirical level. The artist—and, in the comparison, the cook—is left out of account. To concentrate on *one* aspect will always suggest a caricature. Clearly, the sounds of speech, the notes of music, the individual colours, and so on, may be itemised, yet the whole is greater than its parts. The transitions and relationships between them also exist, by which they become words, melodies and paintings. Here we obviously experience the artist in his/her creative process; yet artists are already deeply at one with all the elements of their art. A mastery frees up the limited concerns of learning to acquire it. The committed sportsman, however, never loses interest in improving his

technique. Steiner¹ points out that the soul of the eurythmist works “not *behind*” but “*in* the technique”. Clichés do not belong to living art; renewal comes only from within. The actor who identifies with his part, the musician who ‘becomes’ the music he/she is performing, and the eurythmist who recreates, let’s say, a poem—in all the arts it is well known that levels of achievement exist. The immediate ‘one-for-one’ criticism of eurythmy, consequently, is superficial.

Secondly, in facing the *persistent* side of ‘one-for-one’ criticism a priceless gain can be secured. This criticism can become what the musician Artur Schnabel called “productive scepticism”, that is, it challenges demonstration—here lies the potential glory of art. For the question, ‘Is it art?’, after all, is legitimate, and it obviously lurks behind the persistent side of the criticism under review. Inherited gifts and talents, as is well known, do not survive unchanged. But the path of practice to acquire what performers call a “second innocence” (the musicologist Alfred Einstein’s “second naivety”), a new spontaneity, is *also* there to be cultivated. In a knowing-doing, we can learn to *love* both the ‘what’ and the ‘how’, the technique and the artistry. This path of practice of “the musical arts”, is based on transformation—that is, a death process essential to produce *new life*.² This path of appropriation, of *identifying with all the elements*, provides the only reliable answer to the question concerning the essential element of spontaneity, or creative risk, in mature art. Interpretative artists (performers) are no less ‘original’ than other creative artists (writers and composers).

Technology and life

‘One-for-one’, an example of the widespread reductionist, impudent and mocking ‘it’s-only...’ attitude, hardly represents a serious criticism of the processes of art, of education, or of any activity worthy of the name of life. This simplistic attitude, offering a false security, is made rigid in a slogan that represents a premature judgement. It concentrates on one obvious thing (the ‘what’) at the expense of everything else (the ‘how’). To be correct—as pointed out above—it also arbitrarily limits the ‘what’, attempting to caricature a language of gesture as a series of positions. Ultimately, however, the sounds and notes are there as reference points, whether we mean spoken language and audible music, or visible speech and visible singing.

A restrictive attitude is useful only for such things as devising a system of semaphore signals, for ‘painting by numbers’ and for computer programmes. It is only the intellect whose nature compels it to take one thing at a time. ‘One-for-one’ is consequently tenable in technology and *only there*, whether we instance the rapid succession of innumerable stills on celluloid or the latest digital techniques. With a computer, only an approximation of a curve can be simulated (by linking innumerable tiny tangents) not a real, curved line. Technology can only produce the illusion of movement. We can be grateful for technology on many counts, but the tail does not wag the dog. ‘One-for-one’ is redundant as a summary, whether of eurythmy—where genuine curves and genuine movement take place from start to finish—, or as a principle for any art, or, indeed, of any human activity. Rudolf Steiner sums up everything at the very beginning of his lecture-course *Eurythmy as Visible Singing*.

The onlooker not only perceives the movement or gesture that is presented by the eurythmist, he also

perceives what the eurythmist is feeling and inwardly experiencing. This makes it essential that the eurythmist is feeling and inwardly experiencing... the portrayal of the sound of speech... [and] the portrayal of the musical sound.

Admittedly, existing simplistic artists and simplified approaches are expressively inadequate—but why do some people today call eurythmy ‘classical’? Is it justifiable for us to apply the categories ‘new’ and ‘old’ to the actual art, ‘visible speech’ and ‘visible singing’? Neither poetry, music nor eurythmy are subject to a ‘best before’, or ‘sell by’ date.

True style arises out of an adequate expression of these artistic categories or elements; it can never be applied from outside, unless we include pastiche. But speech itself is certainly ‘old’, even *primeval*, which is another way of saying it is *ever new each time we use it*. “Every time we speak we transpose ourselves into the cosmic evolution of man as it was in primeval ages.”³ An inner eurythmy, according to Steiner,⁴ has been present in human creativity for millennia. It was present unconsciously in Paradise.⁵ It belongs to everyone as their birthright.⁶

It will become clear that the human being is really an intermediate member between the cosmic letters, the cosmic sounds, and those human sounds and letters which we use in our poetry. A new art will come about in eurythmy. This art is for everyone.

The modern autonomous art of eurythmy aims to reveal ‘what is’. Words are not labels, and musical sounds are not arbitrary; on the contrary, these things are the primary means known to human beings to reconnect with full reality. If our blanket terms ‘classical’, ‘new’ and ‘old’, and ‘one-for-one’ are empty, emotional and artistically useless, they do not reach the standards of a “necessary cultivated criticism” of the profession.⁷ Consequently, these blanket terms should be abandoned.

If mockery cannot undermine the foundations of eurythmy, ‘visible word’ (echoing Augustine, *On the Gospel of John*, Trac. 80.3), then it suggests that those foundations could be solid rock. God himself does eurythmy, and thereby creates “the beautiful human form”.⁸ If speech reflects our being, are moves claiming to advance beyond speech itself attempts to jump out of our own skins? This calls for further consideration.

The living word

This apologetic concludes that eurythmy has nothing at all in common with a ‘one-for-one’ philosophy of banality, but everything to do with the sublime revelation of ‘the One’. (The Czech educationalist Comenius, or J.A. Komenský (1592–1670), gave impetus to the ‘one-for-one’ mentality by advocating abstract systems—the alphabet of symbols ‘A-is-for-apple’, and so on.) Following Goethe’s⁹ “true method of poetry”, the universal is seen in the particular, or rather, the particular is seen *as* the universal. Nevertheless, much can be learnt from criticism—attempts which are ‘not-yet-eurythmy’ do exist. Criticism overreaches its aim; eurythmists fall short of theirs. Despite what can be read in the prospectuses of some eurythmy schools, eurythmists do not move *to* poetry and music; eurythmy is not an illustrative art. However, if the executant is unsuccessful, or if the audience, for whatever reason, is out of sympathy, it might often *appear* as continuous arm-gesticulation and much floor-travel. The

same applies to piano-playing and poetry recitals—the former might *appear* as merely bashing the ivories, and the latter might *appear* as self-intoxication by uttering strings of vocables. To get beyond these things, readjusting the phenomena—that is, chasing fashions—will hardly guarantee a lasting advance in communication. Since, then, art either succeeds or it fails, will the question concerning the next chapter in eurythmy simply solve itself?

Whatever the view of posterity on the phenomena of today, it seems clear that the question is not simply one of piety—let mock piety and all posing fall away!—but it is a question of *artistic wholeness*. The challenge will not disappear. It came to Shakespeare, Wordsworth and other writers, and to Bach, Beethoven and other musicians.¹⁰ It is, claims Charles Williams,¹¹ “common to all men” and “the only interior crisis worth talking about”.

It is that in which every nerve of the body, every consciousness of the mind, shrieks that something cannot be. Only it is.

Cressida [Troilus and Cressida] cannot be playing with Diomed. But she is. The Queen [Hamlet] cannot have married Claudius. But she has. Desdemona [Othello] cannot love Cassio. But she does. Daughters [Lear] cannot hate their father and benefactor. But they do. The British Government [of Wordsworth's day] cannot have declared war on the [French] Revolution. But it has. The whole being of the victim denies the fact; the fact outrages his whole being. This is indeed change, and it was this change with which Shakespeare's genius was concerned.

When the state of affairs is made to appear its contrary, and language, twisted in its meaning, appears to be saying the opposite, then we recognise the Spirit of Deception at work. Words divided from their primary meanings indicate a moral degeneration, leaving an opening for duplicity and falsehood. The great artists witness to the only way through their crises—not to suffer a split and become resigned, but to remain whole and thereby to achieve a new, authentic spirituality. Blake's Milton says:

“All that can be annihilated must be annihilated

That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery”
(*Milton* 40:30, 31)

Spiritual honesty demands a holocaust of the self; its usual name is forgiveness. Love alone can achieve it. Both the Rosicrucian Verse and Steiner's Foundation-Stone Verse speak of dying into life. The eurythmical artist, the critic and the audience are at one in wanting to see neither limbs, nor technique, but *the living word*. The living word, as R. Guardini¹² also attests, is initiatory and creative, and beyond analysis. The eurythmical artist from his heart and with his limbs and technique can but invite its presence. The Fourth Evangelist—to whom appeal is made in *Eurythmy as Visible Speech*, lecture 1—uses the verb translated as ‘abide’ (John 15).

“Eye-music”

Steiner¹³ explains:

In eurythmy the soul actually moves in the limbs, whereas in dancing the soul first gives itself to the limbs, and the limbs are then placed into the necessary spatial forms. That's why the human being is lost in the movement, whereas in eurythmy, when it

accompanies music, the human being first properly reveals what he is in soul and spirit...

In normal speech, also when conveying the poetic element, actually the heart speaks only in a reflection through the head. Eurythmy calls up the heart to speak through the whole human being, and in dealing with speech what is only thoughts is actually to be repressed as something inartistic... What lives in eurythmy is so to speak the heart devoted to the world.

In meeting our situation today, it may be found that Steiner's terminology and descriptions could benefit from some re-formulating. In his initial explanations (GA 277a), he linked to Goethe; later he tried to say something new for each occasion (GA 277). For those working in English, too, eurythmy should certainly be related to poets and thinkers writing in that language. Steiner's artistic example and advice are unequivocal. His aim is quite contemporary—to renew art from its source. “Art is the reflection of the spirit in the sensory world.” “Art is eternal; its forms change.”¹⁴

Wordsworth (‘Airey Force Valley’) already speaks of “eye-music” in recapturing an experience of unity—which is the work of the imagination:

“A soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs,

Powerful almost as vocal harmony

To stay the wanderer's steps and soothe his thoughts.”

“A soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs” creates, and is the symbol of, the dream unity. It also describes what happens when watching eurythmy: the eyes are invited to subordinate their objective coolness and engage sympathetically, as the ears do. Then felt gesture, issuing out of the imagination, can speak. Here two things can be recognised. Firstly, musician, speaker, eurythmist and audience are *not isolated in the artistic event*.¹⁵ Secondly, the wished-for ‘clean slate’—if it is not to be a loveless abstraction—was and is the original, primal beginning of speech-sounds in eurythmy. The IA O-exercise is indeed the fundamental clean-slate for eurythmy, including music eurythmy (*viz.*, the major and minor melodic streams and the transitions in all music). These vowels represent the Greek pronunciation of the name of the Deity, Who comes among us precisely to fill our human emptiness. Upon this basis, the New Mysteries of love are founded, which primarily involve recognition of initiative—that of my neighbour in the family of humankind. Whatever the initiative, it will have social implications.

In summing up eurythmy (see above), Steiner¹⁶ uses the phrase “the heart devoted to the world”. This describes a wedding, which at the same time is the most profound image in the New Testament. The wedding, of course, is of the human mind with reality; the latter Goethe, Schelling and the Lake Poets called “nature”. This sums up the redemptive Logos philosophy; and was to be the theme of a great “philosophical poem” Coleridge proposed that Wordsworth should write. It was the philosophy of the poet, a revealer of “what is”—a poem “On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life”—anything more ambitious can hardly be imagined. Wordsworth, we know, responded “with a *Prelude* to the proposed main theme and an *Excursion* from it”. Coleridge's letter;¹⁷ it could also be said, points to a philosophy of eurythmy. For the non-sensory side of nature (*natura naturans*—‘nature naturing’), of which the visible form (*natura naturata*—‘nature natured’) is a parable and from

which state of innocence humankind has fallen, is none other than the human supersensible or moral world. During an introduction to a performance that included works by Goethe, Steiner¹⁸ concludes:

"We certainly penetrate deeply into nature's secrets when we seek these secrets in this language of form which we are endeavouring to reveal in eurythmy."

And again: "By perceiving the movement of the eurythmist, you actually sense / sniff (*uttern*) nature everywhere" (recalling the doctrine of non-duality, *advaita*). "Consciousness", writes Owen Barfield,¹⁹ "is not a tiny bit of the world stuck on to the rest of it. It is the inside of the whole world." And Blake, too, would have been the first to recognise eurythmy, 'visible speech', as the poetic imagination in action, offering a way of practice to bring to life *what is*. The path, in Middleton MURRY's²⁰ words, is the Goethean "conscious submission to Nature in its unique particularity, a process of increasing differentiation in the objective reality and in the subject responsive to it". In other words, thinking with the whole body²¹ is not an illustrative, abstract 'one-for-one', but a comprehensive picture, a parable and a prophecy of "the All-One-Being"²² itself.

1. R. Steiner. *News Sheet*, Dornach, 20th July, 1924.
2. R. Steiner. *Study of Man*. GA 293. Lectures X & XII. RSP 1966. P. 144. The latest tr. *The Foundations of Human Experience* AP 1996, p. 167, is faulty in the critical passage. The verbs are 'mumble, whisper' (not 'growl, murmur'); also "outwardly" qualifies the dancing (not the singing). Read: "In this way the outward dancing movement is changed into singing and into inner music." Clearly, the resulting inner music, the soul's own expression, is the source of the arts of music and of music eurythmy.
3. R. Steiner. *Eurythmy as Visible Speech*. GA 279. Lecture 1. Dornach 24th June, 1924.
4. Steiner frequently refers to a "hidden eurythmy" in speech" (e.g., GA 278, Lecture 3). *Cf.*, GA 156, Dornach 7th October 1914: "There is something of a hidden eurythmy in the way Herman Grimm [1828–1901, Goethe scholar and biographer] wanted to lead his life, and how he had the wonderful ability to transform...". GA 279, Lecture 13: "Now eurythmists must naturally be able to feel, from the way in which a poem works on their organism, whether it is suited to eurythmical expression; whether, that is to say, they can answer the question: 'Was the poet himself a eurythmist? Did he possess in himself that something which I wish to express in form and movement?'. GA 278, Lecture 5: "[T]he forms of Oriental architecture... really did transpose music into movement...".
5. GA 161. Lecture Dornach. 9th January, 1915. Z69 RSL, London.
6. GA 156. Lecture Dornach. 7th October, 1914. Tr. A.S. RSL.
7. Ernst Reepmaker. RB 36. Dornach 2002. P. 7f.
8. GA 279. Lecture 1. The foundations are solid, the principles are complete, given with full respect for artistic freedom by the author of *The Philosophy of Freedom*. The eurythmy lectures are not given as artistic recipes, which is a contradiction in terms. These points are demonstrated in two full commentaries on GA 278 and GA 279

accompanying the ET's (Anastasi Ltd, GB-Weobley 1998 and 2005).

9. Goethe. *Sprüche in Prosa*. Ed. R. Steiner. Tb 14. Freies Geistesleben. Stuttgart 1967. P. 202f.
10. J. Middleton Murry. *Heaven—and Earth*. London 1938: Am. Title *Heroes of Thought*. J. Messner 1938: also Books for Libraries Press. Freeport, N.Y. 1971; Hertha Klugge-Kahn. *Johann Sebastian Bach... Mössler*. Wolfenbüttel & Zürich 1985; Helga Thoene. *Johann Sebastian Bach Ciaccona... Düsseldorf* 2004; Wilfrid Mellers. *Bach... Faber*. London 1980; W. Mellers. *Beethoven... Faber*. London 1983.
11. Charles Williams. *The English Poetic Mind*. OUP 1936. P. 59.
12. Romano Guardini. *The Humanity of Christ*. Random House: Burns & Oates. London 1964. P. 36f.
13. R. Steiner. Introduction. Dornach 15th July, 1923. GA 277. P. 377f. Tr. A.S.
14. R. Steiner. News-sheet, June 8th, 1924. R. Steiner. *The Arts and their Mission*. GA 276.
15. Rather than articles, the readership of this *Newsletter* claim that news is preferred. Here, then, is my news, overheard after a eurythmy performance in Sweden, 2005: "The music was in my heart; the eurythmist was on stage; I was sitting here. Yet the eurythmist was in my heart and I was on the stage!"
16. See Endnote 13.
17. Reproduced and discussed in J. Middleton Murry. *Things to Come*. Jonathan Cape. London 1938². Pp. 187–204: also in *Countries of the Mind*. Second Series. OUP 1931/37. Pp. 45–62. See also M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*. Norton. New York 1971.
18. R. Steiner, Introduction Dornach, 14th Dec., 1919. GA 277a. P. 121. Introduction 28th Dec., 1923. GA 277. P. 415. *Cf.* *Brihadaranyakan Upanishad* 2: 4: 13.
19. Owen Barfield. *History, Guilt and Habit*. Wesleyan. Middletown. Conn. 1971. P. 48.
20. J. Middleton Murry. *Heaven—and Earth*. P. 230.
21. R. Steiner, *Rosicrucianism and Modern Initiation* (GA 233. Lecture, Dornach. 12th January, 1924): "When, as is the case in *The Philosophy of Freedom*, thinking becomes concrete, becomes real, then it goes over into the whole human being." The exercise 'Light bears upwards...' was introduced.
22. R. Steiner. *The Philosophy of Freedom*. Chapter 5: "In so far as we sense and feel (and also perceive), we are single beings; in so far as we think, we are the All-One Being that pervades everything." The 'blind seer of Scotland' George Matheson (*Landmarks of New Testament Morality*; Nisbet. London 1888. P. 151), affirms: "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see MAN, is an aphorism which is implied, though not expressed [in so many words], in Christianity" (but *c.f.*, Ps 82:6, John 10:34f., Luke 20:36, John 12:36, 17:2, Acts 1:4, Eph 5:8, I Thess 5:5, Col 3:1, I Pet 1:4, I Jn 2:20). Matheson's statement stands in the mystical mainstream of Joachim of Flora, Ficino, Eckhart, Shakespeare, Swedenborg, Blake, Jung, Steiner, and others.