

A VISIT TO JAPAN

In the fall of 2002 I visited Japan for two weeks to give papers at conferences and to visit places where children were learning to music and dance. I think of the following paragraphs on television for children, a music store preschool program, a visit of musicians to a children's cancer ward, a trip to a small primary school on the island of Kameshima, and hearing High School bands on stage at the new Kyoto railway station, as good examples of "what is being done" but also glimpses into the future given to me through a traveler's crystal ball.

The television shows designed for children I tried to look at every morning. They seemed to go by very, very quickly: a five minute program of too cute, minimalist cartoon figures; 10 minutes of a cheerful smiling boy-man and a cheerful smiling girl-woman leading a big gang of variably interested little ones in singing songs, bouncing in time, and making gestures in synch with their leaders; a big, shaggy, green, dance-minded monster called JB (for James Brown as Big Bird?) who was part of another team of musically minded young adults teaching children how to move, groove, sing and converse in both Japanese and English. I particularly liked JB's friend Eric, an American with his baseball cap on backwards, playing a new game each day with a little boy and a little girl who sang a song with him about the game. Every day a new game, a new song with Eric strumming guitar, a new pair of kids, new words in English and Japanese: a lot accomplished in two minutes of TV time. Eric demonstrated that it is normal to create a funny song for any situation, showed that you could sit around and make up a song every two minutes, 30 songs an hour, if you were having fun, and if you wanted more songs. Proliferocity personified. All the TV shows for children I saw had musicking elements, performing elements, constant invitations to imitate and participate. None of these children's TV shows running in a long sequence were burdened with commercials!

My colleague David Hebert and I visited a music store in Tokyo where mothers brought their 2 to 3 year-old toddlers for classes. I learned, after observing two of these classes, that I was watching a Japanese version of Dalcroze movement and music training. Whatever Dalcroze proposed a hundred years ago in Europe was right on for Japan now! Everything was fun. Lots of encouragement to synchronize, no pressure. Different instruments offered. Colored scarves to wave and colored balls to bounce and a coloring book to use during a break for expressing the visual equivalents of performing. Good balance of music and dance. Plenty of moving and grooving. No recordings or media. Live piano player supplying varying moods and tempos, sudden cues to start and stop. They asked me for criticism and comments and all I could say was that I wished all mothers and children could have this and with more cultural traditions integrated into the playtime.

In Osaka, Prof. Shin Nakagawa took me to the cancer ward in the university's teaching hospital where a team of young musicians distributed instruments to children and their mothers or caretakers. We sat in a circle and jammed, mostly quite gently, trying out our noisy toys, but sometimes we got wild and loud too. Eyes were lighting up with the pleasure of sounding, a suddenly emerging sense of togetherness as we arrived at

a common pulse and tempo, children appreciating adult skills, adults marveling at what the little ones can do, children testing out the flow of it – will the group continue if I stop? Oh, yes. . . . the sounding goes on, I can get back into this. Very simple discoveries without language. Moments of pleasure and discovery without worry about being sick. In groups of three or four we went to rooms of patients and in one room we collaborated with a little boy in making up a song, a song, that I, for one, wanted to keep on singing forever. It had "hooks," nice sounding words, great melody. I was so proud of us. And so was he.

We left the hospital and traveled that night to the coastal town of Toba City where we took the ferry to Kameshima in the morning. Prof. Nakagawa had put a notice in a music journal announcing my visit and interests; Prof. Satoko Nakanishi responded to the notice. She had persuaded Prof. Nakagawa that this was one experience I should not miss if I wanted to know about elementary school programs that integrate the arts in children's lives. And indeed, Prof. Nakagawa and I were happily impressed by the vitality and originality of the singing-drumming-dancing-dramatizing performances at Kamishima Primary School. With support and facilitation of Tsukasa Nogaito and Tadashi Hayashi these children have built many of their own instruments, or reclaimed and recycled "instruments" from the island's beaches, learned the basic techniques of taiko drumming as a support for inventing their own stories and performing them, created a sequence of dramas that are clear, animated, connecting the children to water sounds, the octopus, lobsters, shrimp, and ways of living from the sea that have been the island's economy and ecology for a long time. What an achievement! And it was all put together in just two years, getting started in 2000.

The only comparable visit I've made in the USA was to a small one room school in South Egremont, Mass. a few years ago where a "Leap and Learn" program was well underway, Thirteen or fourteen kindergarten and first grade children were dancing their letters and numbers, performing natural cycles like "water/vapor/rain/placid pond," finding pleasure in learning through music-dance participation. Kameshima's entire elementary school has about 30 students, ages 6 or 7 to 11 or 12, and I suspect that this island school is far enough away from "central administration" that they could try to implement the new "traditional music" requirement ahead of schedule and in a thoroughly innovative way involving all the students in the school. Small is beautiful. A one room schoolhouse in the US, the isolated island school in Japan, can do what big schools in big cities can't seem to do.

On my last day in Japan I visited Kyoto to tour the Buddhist temples and gardens with Prof. and Mrs. Yamata. Just after getting off the train we explored the huge new station and half way up the string of escalators there was a band stand with 40 or so high school students setting up to play. Like almost all school bands in Japan these days this one was 96% girls and playing with energy and precision. I witnessed performances by three bands and they were all powered up by a young woman playing a jazz drumset, aided by other female percussionists with groove creation and maintenance on their minds. "Proud Mary" done by proud Junko, proud Hiro, proud young women, great arrangements of Ellington tunes played with finesse, and as we were leaving one band

was tearing into the themes of Beethoven with a rock'em, sock'em, beat that rolled Ludwig over and made him tell Tchaikovsky the news.

Why would anarchist Ivan Illich have been so pleased by these instances of musicking in Japan? Speaking of the ancient Greeks Illich notes "Music was the essential blending of beauty, truth, and goodness, a cosmos-reflecting sound – not primarily inner or outer, not representing a purely aesthetic standard or an abstract moral rule – instilling in the listener a distinct bearing or attitude that grasped the nature of the sound proper to this place and this place alone." (1994:14) "Proud Mary", Duke Ellington, old Ludwig from the Beetfield getting bounced around in the brand new and colossal Kyoto Railway Station seemed like the right sound in the right place to me. True, the girls had been disciplined and schooled to do this, but heads were bobbing, whole body involvement visible and audible, confident soloists who were probably not improvising much, but sounding as if they would be taking more chances soon, were there to proclaim their connectedness to each other, to the audience, and to the cosmopolitan cosmos of Japan 2002. The children of Kameshima reflected their island's ecological cosmos to me with an Aristotelian unity of time and place that took my breath away, made me want to weep with joy. Moms and tots cruising along with the Dalcroze system at the music store are vividly in my mind over two years later, a treasured memory of anarchy in action for me, but for them just "daily life," "quotidien," "mundane," "making the sounds proper to this place and this place alone." Or so it seemed to this listener. Similarly, the visit to the cancer ward and the visits to schools (that I have not described in detail here) filled me with hope that every hospital, every school, every institution, in every locality worldwide can nurture performance ensembles (plural) that grasp "the nature of the sound proper to this place and this place alone." "Instilling in the listener a distinct bearing or attitude."

primary communication is here and now

Pat Campbell:

The Japanese directives in music education are multiple, including emphases in creative composition and the study of international music genres. But Dalcroze Eurhythmics has also been in play for a long while. Kunitachi College of Music is Dalcroze-central for the training of musicians and music educators in the pedagogy, and many of the major players in the Dalcroze world have guested in classes there. Likewise, Japanese musician-educators in search of further Dalcroze experience have trained in the American centers for Dalcroze in New York (at the Dalcroze School, and the Manhattan School of Music), Boston (The Longy School), Pittsburgh (Carnegie-Mellon University), Ithaca, NY (at Ithaca College), and in Seattle (at or near the University of Washington). Some years ago at the Longy School, at least 20 Japanese students and teachers came and stayed for a week (and some for a month), joining us in our classes in movement, eurhythmics, solfege, and piano improvisation. At the risk of generalizing and stereotyping, I would wager that the Japanese visitors were graceful where I was lumbering, continually inventive at the piano where I was stuck in comfortable patterns that worked for me, light and flexible in vocal tone where my vibrato sank its teeth into

every pitch that passed by, and ever so quick in solfeging themes from symphonies, quartets, sonatas, and even traditional tunes. We were keen to listen to and watch those who were “musical to the max” and it was easy to see the Japanese as models for our own Dalcroze development.

* To find out more about the Dalcroze training, and even for contemplating short-term workshop experiences, contact the Emile Jacques-Dalcroze School of Geneva, Switzerland <http://www.dalcroze.ch>, the Dalcroze Society of America <http://www.dalcrozeusa.org/>, and the Japanese Society for Dalcroze Eurhythmics <http://www.j-dalcroze-society.gr.jp/>.