

The Collapse of Hellerau 1914

by KARL LORENZ

REPORT FROM GENEVA

AT THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE "GENFER PROTEST"

After attending the Geneva Holiday-course 1974, Karl Lorenz, the Chairman of the "Bundesverband Rhythmische Erziehung" wrote this article, which appeared in the autumn brochure of "Rhythmik in der Erziehung" in 1974. Translating it, I have abridged the letters of Harald Dohrn and Jaques-Dalcroze as well as the report by Prof. S. Ostrowski.

Thea Nay, London

Hardly a visitor devoted to culture can feel Indifferent to the charm of Geneva. The monuments of the historical town tempted me. As I saw the impressive fountain at the harbor shooting 100 meters into the air when I walked over the Pont du Mont Blanc, I had to think of Wolf Dohrn, who, sixty years ago at the foot of Mont Blanc, met his death following a skiing accident. That day, February 4, 1914, was perhaps one of the blackest days in the history of Eurhythmics, whose star had risen radiantly in the Bildungsanstalt at Hellerau near Dresden.

Two congenial men, the music professor Emile Jaques-Dalcroze from Geneva and Dr. Wolf Dohrn (13 year's younger), business director of Deutsche Werkbund and one of the founders of the first German Garden city of Hellerau, had met by coincidence in 1909. Less than two years later the foundation stone of the Bildungsanstalt Jaques-Dalcroze was laid in Hellerau (April 22, 1911), and already in 1912 well-known personalities from all over Europe came to Hellerau for the Festival.

Here in Geneva on the Pont du Mont Blanc I had both of them on my mind. Not 1000 meters from here was the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze, the place of work of the founder of Eurhythmics in the after-Hellerau time, and in the distance, surrounded by a veil of mist, was the summit of Mont Blanc where Wolf Dohrn was killed at the height of his career, 36 years old. Hellerau, as a pedagogic center, where horticulture, handiwork, and creative activities helped to make the "human being more human," owed much to Wolf Dohrn, and this will only be known when his biography is written. The powers of fate, which had poured out their good gifts so extravagantly over Hellerau, robbed this institution far too early of its founder and prevented the artistic director, Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, from developing his ideas, so important to the future.

At the end of June, three months after the tragic death of Wolf Dohrn, Jaques-Dalcroze left for Geneva to conduct the festivities of the Centenary celebrations of the city. This festival was connected with an historical event which is still of great importance today to the liberty-minded inhabitants of Geneva. However, the

Centenary festivities, which Dalcroze was to conduct, were overshadowed by the outbreak of World War 1.

Jaques-Dalcroze was of Swiss nationality, but he was also Artistic Director of the German Bildungsanstalt Hellerau, with a ten-year contract to last until 1920, under normal circumstances, Jaques-Dalcroze would have had to return to Hellerau after the war to continue his work. However, I did not guess, that, soon, here in Geneva, I would receive a document, which made me conscious of the great tragedy of those days.

What had happened at the beginning of World War I to affect the future of Hellerau? The German army stood in September 1914, before Rheims, and the unbelievable happened; the Cathedral, this magnificent example of Gothic architecture, was bombarded. An outcry of anger went through the International Press. However, one newspaper article, under the heading, "Genfer Protest", hit Hellerau fatally - it was signed by Swiss artists and writers, among them, Ferdinand Hodler and Emile Jaques-Dalcroze and it stated:

"We, the undersigned, deeply shocked with regard to the unjustified attack on the Cathedral of Rheims feel, that a barbaric act has been committed, which hits humanity in one of its most noble and artistic witnesses."

War laws did not permit monuments to be included in actions of war; a bombardment was permitted only if, for instance, a church tower was misused as an observation post. In fact, just this had happened, maintained the Germans, while the French denied it.

At the beginning of October 1914, Harald Dohrn, who had taken over the management of Bildungsanstalt Hellerau after the death of his brother, wrote to Jaques-Dalcroze:

"...nothing worse could have happened to the stability of the 'Anstalt', but also to your, name and all that was connected to this name in Germany. With your signing the Protest, I saw with one blow everything destroyed which had been built up with great sacrifices regarding means and work."

Jaques-Dalcroze was greatly distressed by this letter and in his reply he said, among other things:

"...even if there had not been this Protest there would have been something else; one was not kindly disposed towards me; I was doomed from the start."

Hellerau, now without Wolf Dohrn and Jaques-Dalcroze, was only a shell. Jaques-Dalcroze never returned to Hellerau. With the signing of the Genfer Protest, the lights went out over Hellerau. One of the great educational ideas of our century was for the time, being wrecked by two coincidental happenings. The German Eurhythmics teachers, without their central Institut, faced difficult times. However, back to Geneva, 1974. One evening I met the Berlin Dalcroze graduate Kathe Jacob, who had left Germany during Hitler's times and has been living for some years in

Israel. Twelve years ago we met when I was able to help her with the publishing of her book on Eurhythmics. Animated by the Gene coffeehouse atmosphere, I brought the conversation around to the Protest, which sixty years ago had done such harm to Eurhythmics in Germany. Kathe Jacobs spontaneously interrupted me and said she could give me an authentic report on the bombardment of Rheims, written by her 87-year-old friend. I was very surprised and it took only a few days until the report was in front of me. I am copying it here with the permission of the author:

"I, the undersigned, stood in the First World War in the German army before Rheims. Our battalion had a protected position, yet, an artillery duel developed between the French and the Germans; the German position was heavily bombarded. Of the sixth battalion, only three men survived - the other crews, some in the trenches, were buried alive (the same happened to the writer of this report but he remained unharmed.) The suspicion that the enemy observation took place from the towers of the Cathedral was confirmed. This was against International Law and so the command to bombard the Cathedral was justified to avoid further heavy losses of life. I take full responsibility for the correctness of this report."

Signed: Prof. med. Dr. Siegfried Ostrowski Ehrenprofessor fur Chirurgie an der Freien Universitat Berlin W., Surgeon Tel Aviv, Israel.

Seldom has an eyewitness report marred me as much as this one. My thoughts went back to September 27, 1914 when Jaques-Dalcroze signed the Protest. How would he have acted if he had known the facts? What would have happened to Hellerau if he had returned there, after the war, as Artistic Director? However, what use are all the "ifs and buts'."; history cannot be subsequently corrected. Moreover, in the future, no one will be able to give a satisfactory answer to the question of Pilatus, "what is truth?", as long as the same event can be looked at from different angles, with different interpretations. I had to think of the passages written by Jaques-Dalcroze to Harald Dohrn September 29,

"When I think how causes of war are of little interest to our individualities - how they are against all intellectual and artistic interests, I cannot understand why people don't protest war in every country. The war, which is responsible for all barbaric acts everywhere without difference of race and culture and against the will of men who know, that only in times of peace culture can flourish. I know Germany 's culture, Hellerau, was a triumph of it. Therefore I remain faithful to Hellerau."

It was the tragic blows of fate that destroyed the early enterprises of Hellerau, sixty years ago. But the idea to choose rhythm, as one of the elements of education is more powerful today than ever, Dalcroze have both in their way, pledged themselves to work for this idea. And if Hellerau should once more be newly created in Europe as a "laboratoire dune humanite nouvelle," then both their names will be inseparably connected with it.