

Can Eurythmy Live Online?

Creating and evaluating EurythmyOnline.com – a personal eurythmy site

by John Beck & Cynthia Hoven

For over a year, I have been working on breaking through the digital barrier to create an online eurythmy experience. After long and hard and creative work, I finally launched the website yesterday, Michaelmas 2014. I would be delighted if you would take a look: EurythmyOnline.com. There are over 50 video recordings teaching people basic warm-up exercises, rod exercises, spatial movements, vowels, consonants and also a few soul exercises. Take some time to look at the site, check it out, get the “flavor” of what I am doing by reading the texts, trying some of the freebies, downloading the pdfs. —Cynthia Hoven

Times change—whatever that actually means—and we find ourselves in situations that demand choices, made on our own responsibility. When Ita Wegman, MD, proposed to move her medical practice from Zurich and open a clinic in Arlesheim, Switzerland, near the Goetheanum, she of course asked her teacher and advisor Rudolf Steiner to approve or disapprove the plan. *Which he declined to do.* When she went ahead and months later was ready to show him the facility, it's reported that he promptly started to help write the promotional brochure.

Eurythmy

Rudolf Steiner created eurythmy, or discovered it, or revealed it, or all of those and more. It seems to stretch deep into the grounds of existence as well as playing a part still hard even to imagine in humanity's future evolution. Eurythmy is a performance art, a healing art, a teaching art. Perhaps it is the flowing substance of life itself finding its newest expression, by invitation, through the wakeful and devoted human being?

So it is entirely natural that eurythmists have worked very hard to engage and manifest all that Steiner and Marie Steiner-von Sievers established of eurythmy in their lifetimes, and draw a line there. There is, after all, real opposition to a human evolution into freedom and love.



Spiritual Realities

Rudolf Steiner made very clear that humanity today is locked in a struggle to become aware of great cultural-civilizational-evolutionary forces. He identified these with real “spiritual beings,” conscious and intentional entities working at a higher stage of development than present-day humans. Some of them strengthen us *in the long run* by trying to draw us onto their own paths.

Our current strongest opponent, reported Dr. Steiner, is a being for whom Steiner used the old Persian name “Ahriman.” Ahriman’s gifts and capacities help us release great physical powers and create material abundance. He helps us become hard-headed and objective. It also seems that his inclination is to remake the world on a mechanical basis; that is the kind of perfection that is within his powerful but one-sided understanding. Life in nature and free individuality in the human being do not fit within his understanding of cosmic purpose. If we do not recognize the force of his identity and intentions, then we will believe that it is we ourselves who want to merge human beings with machines, eliminate our messy free choice, and pursue an endless, painless, deathless physical life.

So would we subjugate this still-new art of eurythmy to Ahriman?

Freedom and initiative

But then there is the equally large question of human beings’ taking responsibility for their actions and choices. And times changing, whatever that means. YouTube and online videos are the first point of reference for younger generations, and trained eurythmists willing and able to teach are few and far between (and must struggle to make a living). What do you do then—or rather, now? Do you

protect and defend, or step out and take risks?

Cynthia Hoven directed the eurythmy training program at Rudolf Steiner College, near Sacramento, California. When the program had to be closed for financial reasons, she was faced with personal needs as well as professional choices. She wrote a remarkable book on eurythmy. She worked with young people on new social visions. And she came finally to the conclusion that she might be the right person to create an online eurythmy learning resource. Service to eurythmy and to other human beings, and the challenges of her own professional and karmic path, are now fully intertwined. What follows is in Cynthia Hoven's own words... —John Beck

A personal mission statement

I'd like you to see my personal mission statement. Just in case it sparks. I wrote it about 18 months ago, before I got started in earnest, to keep me focused. I like looking back on it, both in the times when I am getting paying customers and in the times when I'm instead getting dozens of non-paying customers—because just knowing that they're doing eurythmy makes me sing.

Eurythmy Online Mission Statement

Eurythmy is an art form that is inspired by, integrates, and makes manifest our divine nature in body, soul, and spirit.

Eurythmy is a path of embodied spirituality.

This program is a bold undertaking to present an online eurythmy curriculum through e-courses, CDs, and video recordings, with uncompromising integrity, overcoming the limitations of technological media.

The primary purpose of this work is to make eurythmy and also the studies of anthroposophy and the arts that spring from it available to thousands of people, in service of humanity and the planet earth.

The secondary purpose is to create a vibrant and thriving business for me, selling lessons, and also teaching live eurythmy classes and other courses.

The third purpose is to create career opportunities for others to lecture and teach in this program.



Cautions and concerns

For many many years I was as conservative as anyone else could be about the thought of filming eurythmy. I knew that Rudolf Steiner disapproved of movies. I know that in films you can only see the image of things—in two dimension—and not the thing itself. I consider that in watching films we tend to become inwardly passive and merely receive the images as they are presented to us. I know that in film we have only the illusion of having a real person talking to us: we don't have the other person really with us, with blood and breath and body. I know that these are all true because the medium cannot carry the true element of the living etheric.

In time, however, I began to wrestle with other questions. Would it be possible to help eurythmy become more well-known by crafting a beautiful website? How could I help eurythmy become more of a cultural reality, and not something that belongs only to the trained eurythmists? Every person can sing or speak or play a bit of an instrument or paint: why shouldn't everyone have some access to eurythmy? Is it possible to bring eurythmy to people who live in remote places and will never meet a eurythmist? What about people who do a bit of eurythmy at a workshop and want to do more, but can't quite remember how?

As I entertained these questions, I realized how much I want to participate in creating a new openness around eurythmy—as in fact I had begun by writing my book about eurythmy.¹ I know it is a modern path of movement meditation (with great initiatory teachings for those who go deeply into it), and that I want to be part of making sure that it lives and doesn't just wither away because it is not known or because it is held too tightly by some who claim to “possess” it. Why shouldn't a group of people do *Hallelujah* at a faculty meeting? Why shouldn't friends do a bit of eurythmy themselves? Hopefully they will do some and then go on to look for a eurythmist who can teach them properly. In saying this, I don't want to detract from the value of a eurythmy training! Trained eurythmists should be like graduates of Julliard, or black-belt Tai Chi masters. But everyone can do a little bit!

So I resolved to start the website, but I recognized that I would have many obstacles to overcome. How could I present the lessons in such a way that the viewer would be able to overcome the limitations of the medium? Would it be possible for me to create narratives that

¹ Eurythmy: Movements and Meditations; A Journey to the Heart of Language. With illustrations by Renée Parks.

would enable people to internalize a lesson so deeply that they could recreate and enliven it from within themselves later on? What an exciting thought! I knew that because I have taught so many thousands of people, I would be able to introduce all of the lessons—threefold walking, contraction expansion, rod exercises, all the vowels and consonants: all 55 lessons—in clear, clean, poetic, inspirational language.

And so I dared myself to take on the task. And I feel that I have done as good a job as possible in the work. What remains to be seen is how well people will be inspired to take it up. What is missing in the lessons is the spark and the joy of working with a class of people, the contagion of having a live teacher carry you. What the lessons offer is an opportunity and a challenge for people to become self-motivated in their personal practices. How many people have the inner endurance, the inner power to commit to work on themselves in this way? I feel that this is the greatest limitation on the website.

The website contains four free lessons and over fifty paid lessons. About twenty to seventy people a day visit the website, and they linger for an average of 3.5 minutes—meaning some stay quite a bit longer. I judge that quite a few people are doing the freebies and that makes me very happy. Some people have purchased the special sequences, and some have purchased the whole set of lessons, designed to be enough for one lesson a week for a year.

For the most part, the feedback is immensely positive from those who are using the lessons. People are so grateful that I have freed eurythmy up for them to access on their own. Some have cried when they thanked me: they have loved eurythmy so much, but haven't been able to continue on their own and longed for something like this. A few anthroposophic doctors have thanked me profusely for the work! Some eurythmists have expressed reservations, but others have thanked me and watch the lessons themselves before teaching their own classes because they find my style inspiring.

I was especially moved by a woman who works with women in trauma in Lebanon. She said she would never be able to find a eurythmist there, but she can use some of my offerings to help people become centered and feel peace. Here is another item of feedback:

We are a group of three women in Perth, Australia. Tomorrow morning we will embark together on your module for the Consonants. I have worked with your Freebies each day for a few weeks and find the gentle, methodical guidance very helpful. From there, creative



ways to deepen the practice are able to spring forth. It is so different from a class where several different elements are covered at one time. I feel this gently unfolding method will entrain a model of simplicity which will lay a strong foundation in each of us as individuals, and carry over into our shared movement.

Eurythmy Online—What does it mean?

It seems like only yesterday that I thought it would be madness to ever consider creating an online eurythmy website. Why? Eurythmy is all about *living, moving presence*. And that simply isn't communicable through the computer. For all their bells and whistles, their fabulous color effects and images, and their capacity to transmit gazillion-bytes of information faster than the speed of thought, computers only give the appearance of reality. Computers live on the surface of things: they perpetuate the world of *maya*.² They cannot give us the true experience of being in the warm presence of another person.

Eurythmy, on the other hand, opens the door for each of us to celebrate communion with our own spirits, and with the world-spirit that has created all. And every instance of eurythmy must be permeated with *presence*: with your presence, with spirit presence.

When I teach live classes, one of my most important responsibilities is that I am fully present throughout the lesson to *witness* the best and highest in each one of my students. In honoring the fact that each person is a child of God, an active spirit presence awakening to their infinite spirit potential, I am inwardly attentive, patient, supportive, and generous. And through this act of witnessing, I see that everyone is beautiful when they do eurythmy.

And so: when I decided to create EurythmyOnline.com, I had some tough questions to face.

Would it be possible to create recordings that were so carefully crafted that I and my students would be able to overcome the electronic media? Searching for a solution, I carefully instruct people to watch the videos only as long

² In ancient Hindu-Vedic tradition, the experience (later a teaching) that the sense-perceptible world is illusory, only the manifestation of the work of spiritual beings. —Editor