Frank Martin's *La nique à Satan*: The Dalcroze Connection

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Abstract

This presentation focuses on the creative affinity between Émile Jaques-Dalcroze (1865-1950) and fellow Swiss composer Frank Martin (1890-1974). Early in his career, Martin forged close ties with Dalcroze's Eurhythmics method, and in 1926, he enrolled in Dalcroze's Geneva-based Institut Jaques-Dalcroze. He graduated with a Diplôme in 1928 and taught there as a professor of improvisation and rhythmic theory until 1937.

During Martin's tenure as professor of rhythmic theory and improvisation at Dalcroze's Institut, he composed the score for La nique à Satan. Martin conceived of a popular theatre piece that included singing, mime, dance and elaborate costumes. He involved numerous Institut teachers and students in the Geneva première on February 25, 1933. Martin also dedicated the vocal/piano edition of the score to Dalcroze.

This talk will explain how the songs in Martin's composition resemble some of the prominent aspects of Dalcroze's Eurhythmics method. The eurhythmic subjects of irregular beats, anacrusic rhythms, complementary rhythm and bodily gesture correspond with important aspects of Martin's score. The presentation also includes footage from a 1998 performance of La nique à Satan by the Swiss ensemble, Choeur d'Avully.

Introduction

It's a great pleasure to be a part of this group of papers that explores post-*Rite* artistic currents. My purpose today is to explore the connection between Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and fellow Swiss composer Frank Martin. I will discuss this connection in the context of Dalcroze's eurhythmics method and its affinity with Martin's theatrical piece, *La nique à Satan*.

Who is Dalcroze?

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze is a twentieth-century composer, pedagogue, pianist and essayist who is commonly associated with a method of education known in the English-speaking world as Eurhythmics. To Dalcroze historians and Swiss citizens, he is also fondly remembered for his significant contribution to the *festpiele* or *fête* tradition. Dalcroze was often commissioned to write the music and help create the story-line for these large-scale productions which celebrated various aspects of Swiss daily life.

According to Dalcroze biographer Irwin Spector, the *fête* probably grew out of the tradition of the 16th-century religious mystery play, and was later championed by the famous Swiss reformers Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Johann Heinrich

Pestalozzi (1746-1827). *Fêtes* were open-air, popular spectacles with large numbers of amateur participants who came together to celebrate Swiss culture through stories, song and dance.[1] Dalcroze was an important contributor to this tradition and composed the music for many *fêtes*, including, *Festival vaudois* (1903), *Fête de Juin* (1924) and *Fête de la Jeunesse* (1923). Dalcroze's *Fête de la Jeunesse* featured movement, dance, children's choirs, original songs and instrumental music. Many of the songs that Dalcroze composed for these spectacles became part of the folklore of the Suisse Romande.[2]

For Dalcroze, the tradition of Swiss popular festivals provided an important opportunity for him to advertise his educational method.[3] He also recognized their societal benefit to his fellow Swiss citizens:

> ... the study of the laws which govern collective gesture and movement, laws which form an integral part of any system of rhythmic exercises, deserves special consideration of all my compatriots who are gymnasts, singers or sportsmen. More than in any other country, in Switzerland popular spectacles involve the participation of numerous people, and the happy influence of these "Festspiele," [quotes his] to employ the German term, has long been recognized by our psychologists, pedagogues, and even theologians.[4]

Thus, Dalcroze's method and his ability to create large-scale *fêtes* directly connected with the Swiss public and no doubt helped pave the way for younger composers who wanted to contribute to the momentum of Swiss cultural nationalism.

In the early 1900s, with his attention increasingly focused on Eurhythmics, Dalcroze often connected his compositions to his pedagogical ideas. In 1903, Dalcroze presented his pageant, *Festival vaudois*, which chronicled much of the history of canton of Vaud in song, procession and dance. The production featured an amateur cast of thousands – including a 350-voice children's choir. Dalcroze reminisced, "it was while preparing the *Festival vaudois* that I had the chance to study in depth the question of the relationship of body movement and changes in space and time."[5] [6] Other Dalcroze compositions that complemented his Eurhythmics method included children's songs with movement activities, piano *études* and vocalises. In 1904, one year after the success of *Festival vaudois*, Dalcroze gave a talk at a conference of composers in Berne and argued that Swiss composers ought to create a national style of composition which would unite the richness of Swiss folk music with scenes and ceremonies from daily life.[7]

Eurhythmics

Émile Jaques-Dalcroze believed that the most important instrument to train was the human body. Dalcroze began to develop Eurhythmics in the mid-1890s after he became a professor of harmony and ear-training at the Geneva Conservatoire. Eurhythmics exercises consisted of bodily movements that trained the student to feel music's rhythmic and expressive parameters. His complete method included exercises in ear-training (i.e. *solfège*) and improvisation.[8]

Who is Frank Martin?

Along comes Frank Martin, twenty-five years younger than Dalcroze, and a Swiss composer who is often associated, alongside Arthur Honegger, with Swiss modernism. Martin is perhaps best-known for his large-scale choral and orchestral works and for his significant experimentation with Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone method. However, at an early stage in his career, he experimented with complex rhythmic procedures and had a close connection with Dalcroze.

Martin's Awareness of Dalcroze

Martin's knowledge of Dalcroze stems from his childhood. Because he spent his early years exclusively in Geneva, Martin might well have been familiar with Dalcroze's songs. Historian Jacques Tchamkerten asserts that Dalcroze's songs achieved popularity beginning with the 1893 publication of *Chansons romandes*, and in 1965 Martin reminisced about hearing Dalcroze's songs as a six year-old boy in Geneva in 1896:[9]

> In his [Dalcroze's] youth at the National Exhibition in Geneva in 1896, he was a singer and, with a few artist friends, he founded the Sapajou cabaret. I was too young then ... to go and hear it, but we hummed his songs ...[10] [11]

Martin's reference to the Geneva Exposition reveals the extent of Dalcroze's popularity – the event attracted two million visitors. To celebrate the exhibition, Dalcroze created *Poème alpestre*, which was a festival play or *Festspiele*. This successful event featured a large choir, orchestra and many songs for both adults and children. As an up-and-coming young composer, Martin would certainly have known Dalcroze through their mutual membership in the Association of Swiss Musicians, of which Dalcroze was a founding member and an extremely active and vocal advocate of new Swiss music.

Martin's close connection to Dalcroze

In 1923, Martin wrote a testimonial to Dalcroze's work in which he used the term *gymnastique rythmique*, and described the body as the seat of rhythm.[12] The description revealed his knowledge of and affinity with Dalcroze's ideas.

After attending the three-week summer Dalcroze course in August, 1926, Martin studied full-time at the *Institut Jaques-Dalcroze* until 1928. In June 1928, he graduated with the *Diplôme*, which is the highest level of Eurhythmics certification, and enables one to teach the method to future teachers. It is significant as well, that the atmosphere at the *Institut* during the 1920s was characterized by the frequent creation of theatrical pieces which featured aspects of the Eurhythmics curriculum. From 1928 to 1937, Martin served as professor of eurhythmics and improvisation at the *Institut* and wrote many essays and delivered lectures on the value of Eurhythmics for performers and composers. He achieved such prominence, that Dalcroze later invited him to be his successor when he no longer could direct the *Institut*.

La nique à Satan - introduction

Early in Martin's tenure as professor of rhythmic theory and improvisation at Dalcroze's *Institut*, he composed the score for the theatrical work, *La nique à Satan*.[13] As I hope to explain, *La nique à Satan* has much in common with not only Eurhythmics but also with Dalcroze's tradition of creating *fêtes*.

The narrative was written by Swiss educator/poet Albert Rudhardt (1894-1944), a Genevan schoolteacher and poet who asked Martin to compose the music. Rudhardt was commissioned by a local men's choir to create a story that would involve both children and adults.[14] He conceived of a popular theatre piece that included singing, mime, dance and elaborate costumes.

Perhaps because he felt the connection between this theatrical work and the Eurhythmics method, Martin involved numerous *Institut* teachers and students in the Geneva première on February 25, 1933. Martin also dedicated the vocal/piano edition of the score to Dalcroze himself:

> To Mr. E. Jaques-Dalcroze, my patron of Eurhythmics, patron also of song and popular spectacle, of which his genial invention enabled us to a make a better presentation of this work. With my admiration, respect and deep friendship. Frank Martin.[15] [16]

According to Alfred Berchtold, Dalcroze, in turn, was magnanimous in his praise of *La nique à Satan*. In his book, *Émile Jaques-Dalcroze et son temps* (2000), Berchtold included Dalcroze's toast to Martin's work:

> United like a back and a shirt—Overlapping tonalities—Oriental modes combine seamlessly with the songs of our land. [17] [18]

Like Dalcroze's spectacle, *Notre petite vie à nous* (1928), *La nique à Satan* celebrated children. In an essay, Martin explained its purpose:

> Rudhardt's idea was to create a popular spectacle where children played a dominant role ... the children would be the heroes and the adults would be misled ... the entire production would be mimed with numerous songs ... songs for men, ladies, but above all, songs for children.[19]

The story is set in a 19th-century village. *The Beaux Esprits* (or snobs) and the *Bons Garçons* (workers) quarrel but live together in relative peacefulness. There is also an old sorcerer named La Bergougne and an idealist poet named Jean des Lunes. Jean des Lunes plays on a magic flute and is a great friend to the children (perhaps like a Peter Pan figure). One day the sorcerer comes to the village and pronounces that fire, storms, and thunder will plague the village. *Les Beaux Esprits* hold a council assembly, but are unable to decide what to do about La Bergougne's pronouncements. *Les Bons Garçons* decide to stay and laugh at *Les Beaux Esprits*, who after endless discussions, finally leave the

village. *Les Bons Garçons* are visited by evil messengers who convince them to follow the devil. However, the children and Jean de Lunes return to defeat the evil messengers and all groups return to the village to celebrate.[20] The production's satirical nature and general theme of the triumph of good over evil mark it as a populist work and it was well received by the public at its premiere in the Grand Théâtre de Genève on February 25, 1933.[21]

Here is a short video clip from the prologue. You will see interesting movements (from different planes) and gestures that have a connection to Dalcroze Eurhythmics work.

Martin's rhythmically inventive style underscores the story's lively and satirical elements. The opening song, *Chanson des Beaux Esprits* is a foxtrot with many rhythmic procedures that are important aspects of Dalcroze's method. Martin cited the foxtrot as a dance form with interesting rhythmic possibilities in his 1926 Eurhythmics lecture, "La mesure et le rythme."[22]

He begins the song with repeated quarter notes in the accompaniment which, like many Dalcroze exercises, establishes a metrical underpinning over which more interesting rhythmic procedures can unfold:[23]

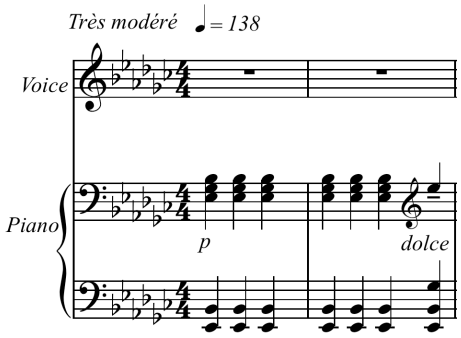

Figure 8.11: *Chanson des Beaux Esprits*, from *La nique à Satan*, mm. 1-2

When the *Beaux Esprits'* vocal line enters at m. 3, Martin writes anacrusic phrases that create a sense of forward motion. The syncopated, accompanying figures in the piano's right-hand part, (played by a sax in the orchestral score) imply a 3+2+3 eighth-note subdivision, which was a common pattern in Dalcroze's exercises on irregular beats in his 1916 Eurhythmics manual, *La Rythmique*:[24]

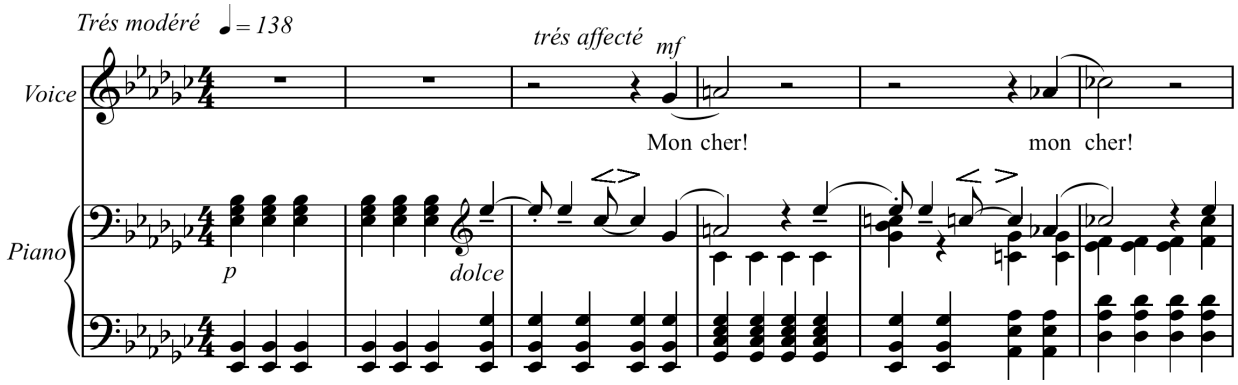

Figure 8.12: *Chanson des Beaux Esprits*, from *La nique à Satan*, mm. 2-6

I would like to draw your attention to Dalcroze's lesson plans taken from a 1926-27 volume of lessons which corresponds to the same year that Martin began taking classes under Dalcroze at the *Institut Jaques-Dalcroze*. There are three Eurhythmic subjects from Dalcroze's curriculum that Martin explores in his lesson plans:

1) *Anacrusis*: notice how many variations of one-beat *anacruses* there are in Martin's lesson plan. He uses the concept of *anacrusis* often in the songs of *La nique à Satan* – especially in *Chanson des Beaux Esprits*.
2) *Les syncopes*: even though Martin had some familiarity with American jazz, his kinesthetic knowledge would have been increased with an exercise such as this *syncope*, which has almost the same rhythm as what he wrote in *Chanson des Beaux Esprits*.
3) *Mesures alternées*: alternating measures (in English), which Dalcroze employed in order to enlarge the student's sense of what was metrically and rhythmically possible. Notice the changes from compound meter (dotted eighths) to simple meter (this feature is also related to the Dalcroze subject of *mesures inégales* or unequal measures).

Valse Des Beaux Esprits

When *Les Beaux Esprits* question whether they should stay in the village or flee, Martin creates a song with the eurhythmic concepts of *anacrusis* and complementary rhythm. He begins the song, *Valse des Beaux Esprits* with anacrusic rhythms in both the piano and vocal parts. The opening staccato quarter notes in the bass voice occur on the weak second and third beats of the 3/4-meter measure and are unresolved, because Martin writes quarter-note rests on the downbeats of these measures.[25] This structure highlights the indecision of the *Beaux Esprits*, who cannot decide whether or not to leave the village. The weak beat quarter notes in the bass voice also serve as a complementary rhythm to the piano's B-flat downbeat bass notes in the opening few measures. At measure 18, the anacrusic quality of the tenor voice entry provides forward motion and further emphasizes the indecisive quality:

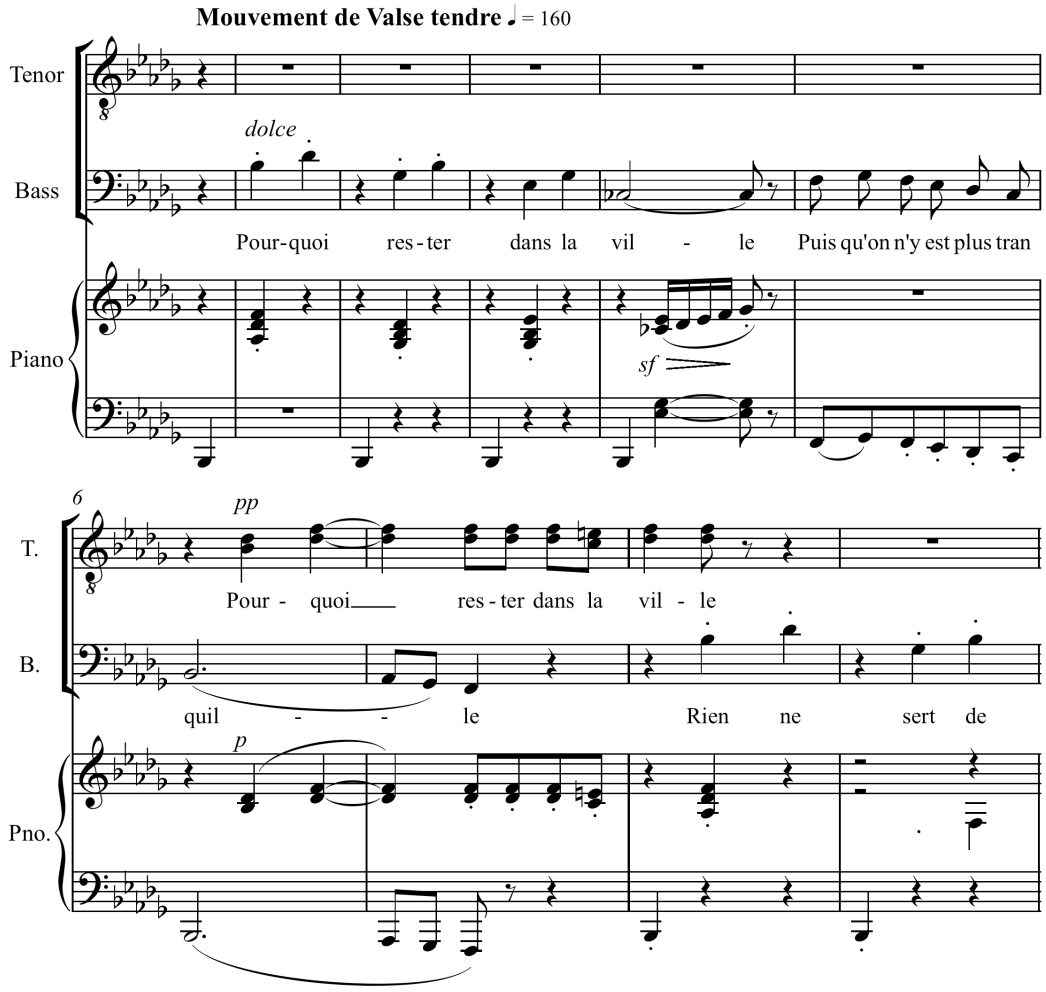

Figure 8.13: Tenor and bass parts and piano, *Chanson des Beaux Esprits*, from *La nique à Satan*, mm. 11-20

In his treatise, *Les games et les tonalities*, *le phrase et les nuances* (1907), Dalcroze highlights the *anacrusis* (or upbeat part of a phrase) as a subject worthy of focus. In the book, *Rhythm, Music and Education* (1921), he refers to the *anacrusis* as the "motor impulse" of music.

In the song, *Marche du Cirque*, Martin creates rhythms with nonsense syllables. These onomatopoeic syllables imitate the sounds of musical instruments that one might hear in a circus band. In a 1998 production of *La nique à Satan*, the actors sang the song with gestures that imitated various musical instruments:[26]

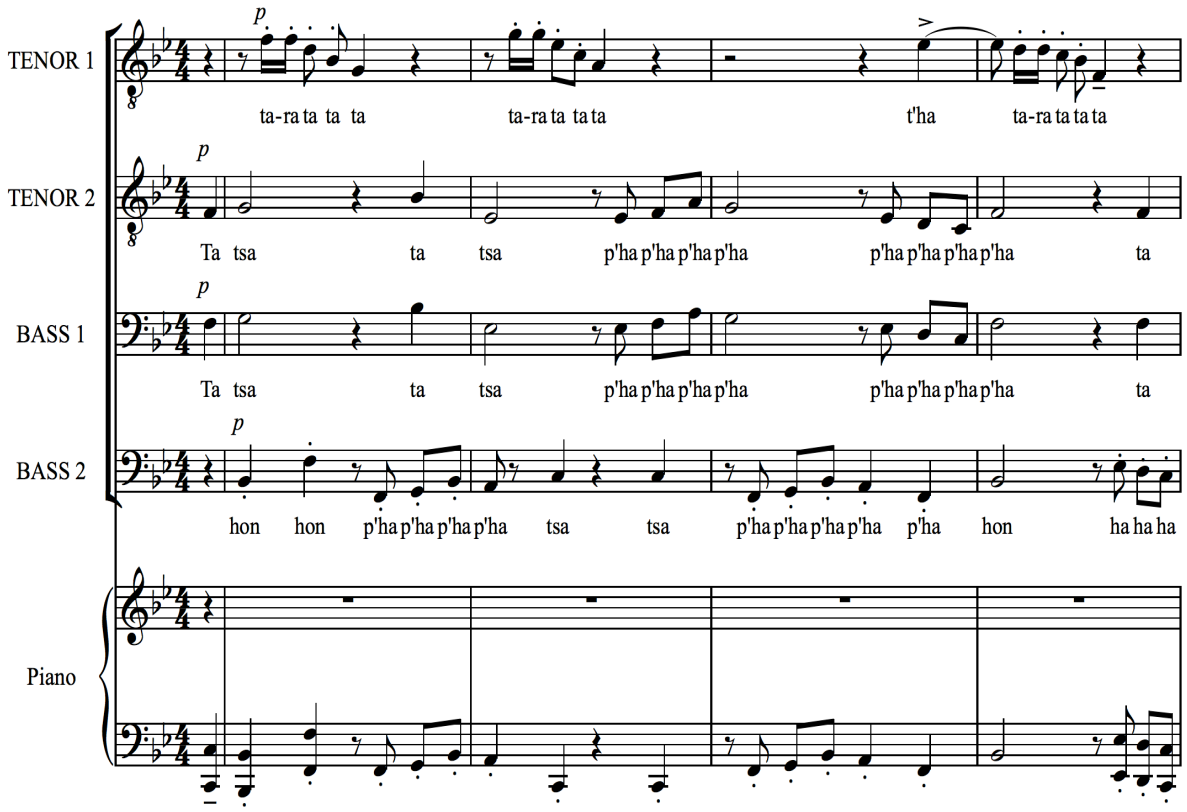

Figure 8.14: Tenors, basses, piano (reduction), *Marche du Cirque* from *La nique à Satan,* mm. 4-7

The anacrusic figures in Tenor 2 and Bass 1 are complemented by the Tenor 1 voice. The energy of the upbeat two sixteenth-note, two eighth-note and quarter-note phrases, complement the sustained phrases of Tenor 2 and Bass 1.

Likewise, in some of his activity-based songs for children, Dalcroze also created onomatopoeic syllables that imitated musical instruments or animals. In his 1939 children's book, *La jolie musique*, Dalcroze wrote the following exercise, recommending that "children while singing, imitate the gestures of the instrumentalists:[27]

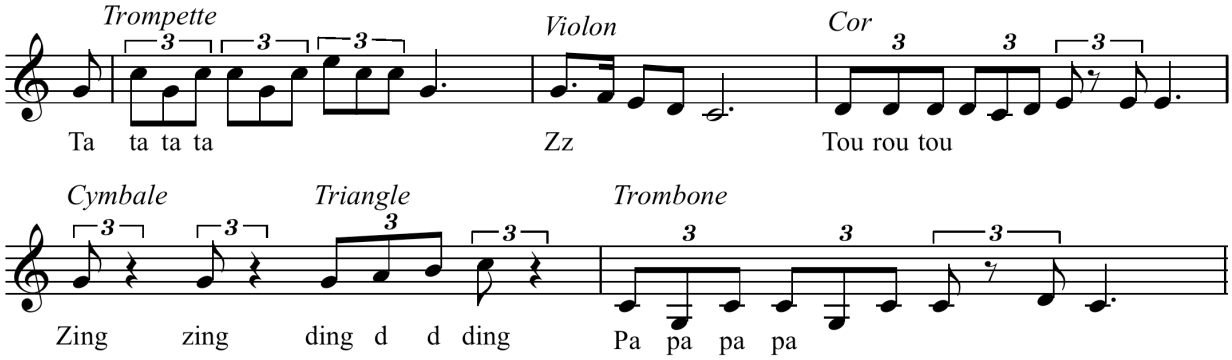

Figure 8.15: Dalcroze children's exercise from *La jolie musique* (1939)

The concept of complementary rhythm was also important in Dalcroze's training, because it helped students to experience contrapuntal texture in a practical manner. He would often divide students into groups whereby one group would intone long notes and the other group would improvise phrases to fill in or complement the first group's long note values. In more complex exercises, he would present several contrapuntal possibilities. Some of these rhythmic *contrepoints* would overlap the given theme. We see it at work in *Marche du Cirque*, with the instrumentalists vocally filling in the long notes of tenor 1 and bass 1.

In the preface to his catalogue of Dalcroze's vocal compositions, Jacques Tchamkerten suggests that Martin was influenced by Dalcroze's 1928 children's spectacle, *Notre petite vie à nous*:

> It is probable that Frank Martin had a memory of this work [*Notre petite vie à nous*], which is full of amazing findings, when he composed in 1931, *La nique à Satan*. [Notre vie] anticipated it with the clarity of its melodic contours, the boldness of its rhythms and by its sheer verve.[28] (2000, viii)

In *Notre petite vie*, we have a collection of songs for children. One of which contains irregular rhythms, *anacrusis* and complimentary rhythm and might be what Tchamkerten had in mind when he talked about how Martin was influenced by this work.

Listen to the following song, *Les braves compangards*. Notice the one-beat anacrusic start in the piano and voice. There is also complementary rhythm and syncopation between the right and left-hand of piano. It is also noteworthy that Martin employs changing meters, which were such a prominent feature in Dalcroze's Eurhythmics work. There are many other examples in *Notre petite vie*, but I do not have time to talk about them today.

Conclusions

1. Martin's *La nique à Satan* has an affinity with Dalcroze's eurhythmics method in the areas of *anacrusis*, complementary rhythm (or *contrepoint*), onomatopoeic *solfège*, syncopation, irregular beats, changing measures and movement and gestural stage work.

2. Martin, through his boyhood and adulthood exposure to Dalcroze's *fêtes* – including Dalcroze's children's work, *Notre petite vie* – was inspired to create *La nique à Satan* in this tradition.

3. Martin's immersion in Dalcroze Eurhythmics played a significant role in his search for a more rhythmically vital style of composition of which *La nique à Satan* is but one example.

[1] A detailed explanation of the Swiss *fête* or *Festspiele* tradition appears in Irwin Spector's *Rhythm and Life. The Work of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze* (New York: Pendragon, 1990), 56-61. Another source is Edouard Combe's chapter, "Le Festspiel" in the book, *La Suisse qui chante* (Lausanne: Éditions R. Freudweiler-Spiro, 1932), 197-227.
[2] Irwin Spector, *Rhythm and Life: The Work of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze* (New York: Pendragon, 1990), 62, and Bernard Reichel, "Les chansons d'Émile Jaques-Dalcroze," in *Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: L'homme, le compositeur, le créateur de la rythmique* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1965), 51.
[3] Dalcroze's talent for self-promotion was described to me by Isabelle Hirt, archivist at the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva. Jacques Tchamkerten, a renowned Dalcroze scholar, also shared this idea with me.
[4] Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, *Rhythm, Music and Education*, Trans. Harold Rubenstein (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921a), 220.
[5] Alfred Berchtold, *Émile Jaques-Dalcroze et son temps* (Lausanne : L'Age d'homme, 2000), 70.
[6] This quotation also appears in Selma Odom's dissertation, "Dalcroze Eurhythmics in England: History of an Innovation in Music and Movement Education," (University of Surrey, 1991), 54. As noted by Odom, the original quotation is from Dalcroze's article in the Tribune de Lausanne (June 17, 1928).
[7] Irwin Spector, *Rhythm and Life: The Work of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze*, 45-46.
[8] Dalcroze also wrote many treatises, including the multi-volume work, Méthode Jaques-Dalcroze: Pour le développement de l'instinct rythmique du sens auditif et du sentiment tonal (Neuchâtel: Sandoz, Jobin et Cie, 1906-1908).
[9] See Tchamkerten's introductory essay in the publication, Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: catalogue thématique des chansons, rondes et mélodies (Geneva: Papillon, 2000), 32.
[10] Frank Martin, "Introduction," in *Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: L'homme, le compositeur, le créateur de la rythmique* (Neuchâtel : Éditions de la Baconnière, 1965a), 8.
[11] From Frank Martin's preface to Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: l'homme, le compositeur, le createur de la rythmique (Neuchâtel: de la Baconnière, 1965).
[12] This testimonial was also discussed in chapter 2 (see pages 50-51). Martin's testimonial originally appeared in a 1924 special edition of Dalcroze's journal, *Le Rythme*. It was reprinted in the publication *Écrits sur la rythmique et pour les rythmiciens, les pédagogues et les musiciens* (Geneva: Éditions Papillon, 1995), 5.
[13] The English translation is thumbing one's nose at the devil.
[14] The Swiss men's choir was La Lyre de Carouge, which still exists today.
[15] Société Frank Martin, *Frank Martin: L'univers d'un compositeur* (Boudry, Switzerland: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1984), 22.
[16] Martin's handwritten dedication to Dalcroze appeared on a single copy of the edition for voice and piano. The dedication was reproduced in *Frank Martin: l'univers d'un compositeur (*1984). The original edition with Martin's handwritten dedication is located at the Centre international de documentation at the Institut Jaques-Dalcroze in Geneva.
[17] Berchtold, *Émile Jaques-Dalcroze et son temps*, 208.
[18] Berchtold does not give a source for Dalcroze's toast. As of September, 2011, I have been unable to locate it.
[19] Frank Martin and Maria Martin, *A propos de... commentaires de Frank Martin sur ses Œuvres* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1984), 18.

[20] I am indebted to Maria Martin for my synopsis of the work. My discussions with her in January, 2009, and her work, *Ma vie avec Frank Martin* (1990) aided my understanding of Martin's La nique à Satan.
[21] Parisian writer and psychologist André Berge wrote a glowing review of *La nique à Satan* in Les Nouvelles littéraires (18 April, 1933). As mentioned in chapter 3, he was a close friend of Frank Martin's.
[22] He delivered the lecture at Dalcroze's 1926 Congress on Rhythm.
[23] The original score for voices and wind instruments, piano and string bass is located at the Paul Sacher Stiftung in Basel, Switzerland. I have notated excerpts from the vocal/piano reduction that was published by Éditions Henn in Geneva. See the bibliography for a more complete citation.
[24] See pages 37-38 in La Rythmique (1916).
[25] Although Dalcroze wrote many examples of anacrusic patterns in his method books, he did not make a detailed analysis of the different types of anacrusic structures. Mathis Lussy, Dalcroze's mentor, however, classified an anacrusis with an unresolved downbeat. He referred to this structure as an anacrusis décapité. For further information, see *L'anacrouse dans la musique moderne* (Paris: Heugel, 1903).
[26] See the videography section in the references for more information concerning the 1998 version of La nique à Satan.
[27] Émile Jaques-Dalcroze, *La jolie musique* (Le Locle, Switzerland: Huguenin, 1939a), 42.
[28] Jacques Tchamkerten, *Émile Jaques-Dalcroze: Catalogue thématique des chansons, rondes et mélodies* (Geneva : Papillon, 2000), viii.

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