

## **Gabrielle Roth's 5-Rhythms - Music, Dance and Therapy**

Fulvia Anca CONSTANTIN<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** *The reason for choosing this subject is the strong emotional impact that is experienced as a result of participating in Gabrielle Roth's 5-Rhythms dance therapy modules. Apart from the shamanic meditation included in Gabrielle's working that allows transcendental experiences, the combination music – movement is vital, the rhythms unleashing various emotions, controversy, creativity, and imagination. Through that unique dance oneself could be rediscovered and reinvented, recognizing its spiritual part that is manifested only through faith. Therefore, this therapeutic dance opens infinite possibilities of motivation, knowledge and self-development. Gabrielle Roth's 5-Rhythms is a novelty dance therapy in the Romanian therapeutic spectrum, an experimental work with effects on the rebirth of the inner child and the unification of body, mind and soul.*

Keywords: *Gabrielle Roth, rhythm, music, dance, therapy*

### **1. Introduction - Generalities about Music, Acoustics and Music Therapy**

Music is seen as a vibratory energy that is diversified in multiple forms, "an expression of the spirit in motion," (Koechlin de Bizemont 2005, 32), a "voice of spheres," as Pythagoras called it. The value of music in meditation and therapy comes from the fact that it "takes the consciousness from the immediate reality, leading it to a calmness from which it flows and returns to" (Dewhurst-Maddock 1998, 88).

"Music, like love or electricity and other elementary forces, can not be defined and this is its particular merit," said Petru Vintilescu (1937, 211). It is the merit of the force that affects people. In this paper, the point of interest is not the nature of music but its particular connection with the human soul and body, with the human psyche. "In the vibrations of sound and harmony, man softens his soul, for [...] the mystery of music is as deep as that of the universe" (Achim 2001, 13).

---

<sup>1</sup> Transilvania University of Braşov, fulvia.constantin@unitbv.ro

For the purpose of this paper, talking about sounds and rhythm is more important than talking about melody and harmony, especially because of the vital pulsation existing in the 5-Rhythms. Sounds are described as acoustic vibrations that have three aspects in their definition: *physical* (vibration production and propagation to the hearing organ that acts independently of human consciousness), *physiological* at the level of organic sense (receiving the vibrations by hearing and transmitting them to the central nervous system where the sensation is formed), and *psychological* within the human being, in his consciousness, in the affective-emotional area. (Ursutiu 2014, 3)

Although the sound is all that surrounds and delights us, it also is the image of the human soul, "an organization of an infinite number of associated harmonics" in a perfect balance. (idem, 79) High harmonics (fixed intervals succession to fundamental sound in a certain order of succession) are the correspondences of happy, bright, love, belief, thankfulness, hope, joy, words with positive frequencies, unlike the inferior harmonics (inverse phenomenon) in which the unhappy feelings of the soul are found (e.g. hate, despair, doubt, pain and sadness,) feelings accompanied by negative frequency words that weaken, impoverish or even produce pain to the body. These opposite feelings coexist in each of us in order to maintain the balance for a love without selfishness, for a conscious hope and a sadness without pessimism.

## **2. The Therapeutic Value of Music and Dance**

The recognition of the therapeutic value of music is based on neurological, physiological and psychological scientific research, as well as on the knowledge and analysis of the characteristics of music and sounds used in terms of frequency, thus vibration.

The importance given to dance seen as a therapeutic movement or body psychotherapy is the return to one-self, to the wisdom of our own body. It allows the development of emotional and spiritual intelligence. By harmonizing mind, soul and body we pass the threshold of serenity, solving conflicts and difficulties at the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. We join a world of infinities, of bio-psycho-socio-spiritual unification. In this manner, the 5 - *Rhythms* developed by Gabrielle Roth represent a technique of initiating the healing and balancing of our own body. It is designed to experience the connection with the spirit through the body. Each rhythm is a „world in itself, an aspect of the human being”, and all five rhythms together favour regaining balance. (Roth 1998, 38)

The main goals of the *5-Rhythms* Therapy include:

- Reintegration: vitalization, integration, activation and motivation through movement, or improvised movement.
- Facilitating, preserving, and developing interpersonal functioning with regard to improving socialization techniques, imitation and participation in group cohesion.
- Providing a supportive and safe framework to facilitate the disclosure of emotional issues (Roth 1998, 39-41).

Basically we talk about the *body awareness* (free expression, self-awareness, body control and body image improvement), *catharsis* (body expression that brings suppressed emotions), *interpersonal communication* (development of non-verbal communication skills), the *awareness of the movement* (that causes physical and psychic changes) and *communication with the unconscious* (awareness of repressed emotions, unidentified feelings, instinctual needs, unfinished conflicts or suppressed memories) (Roth 1998, 41-43)

### 3. Who is Gabrielle Roth?

Gabrielle Roth was an American dancer and musician with a special interest in shamanism. She created the *5-Rhythms* in the late 1970s, being followed by many supporters of this dance therapy approach. Gabrielle founded a New York experimental theatre company with which she started to experiment the *5-Rhythm* movement, taking "the rhythm of a haven, the movement of a medicine, and energy of the language." (Roth 1998, 27)

Fascinated by the rhythms and cures, Gabrielle Roth said on the subject: "Disease is inertia. Healing is movement. The shamanic work is about the dance coming from within. If you put your body in motion, you will change. You are made to move: from flow to staccato, chaos in verses and back to the silence from which any movement comes. If you leave your heart in the will of the movement, you are open to the risk and adventure of feelings, let them flow, you will change. Tears turn into smiles, and rage in hugs [...] Spirit in motion heals, rotates inside and outside the body, brings the consciousness from inertia to ecstasy. Open to spirituality and you will be transformed. (Roth 1989) And more..." "Each one of us is a moving space, a space of divine mystery. And while we spend most of our time in an ordinary existence, most of us are eager to connect to this space within us, to pass through it to the ecstatic states of consciousness in order to be fulfilled." (Roth 1998, 62)

#### **4. Gabrielle Roth's 5 Rhythms – When Music Merge with Dance**

The *5-Rhythms* is a type of physical exercise designed to release the body and soothe the mind, so we can have the experience of connecting with the spirit through the body. Gabrielle Roth decomposed the 5-phase wave, which he calls flowing, staccato, chaos, lyricism and tranquillity. Every phase is an universe full of discoveries, resources, lessons and tools that make life more fulfilled, more efficient, happier.

"If we look at the people around us, we notice that they are rather absent, disconnected from reality. Often they give us the impression that they are moving, but their mind is completely different, their bodies go forward, but the minds seem to think of something else (most commonly speaking on the phone). We get used to going quickly and we are not present in our own being. We are caught in an inertia that makes us repeat the same movements once again, and once again, and once again. And this is manifested not only at the individual level, but at the level of our entire society. We have a way to be busy, but we show a lot of excitement, which looks like a loss of balance. We do not take too long to stop, to get in touch with where we are. And this causes a break between us and our body, between us and the rhythms of our body, as well as between us and the natural world with its cycles. We have lost contact with what we actually are, where we come from and how we work. We leave so busy our minds that we forgot our bodies, we abandoned them somewhere on the road."[...] The dance of the five rhythms moves our bodies in a conscious way, and this helps us find our balance. When talking about illness, we are actually talking about a way out of the state of balance (depression and illness are generally due to lack of balance.) By this type of dance we turn to ourselves, we begin again to learn to listen to our body and we feel what is happening in our body. We begin to listen to the understanding of your own body. "(Roth 1998, 83)

"Unfortunately, we usually live in the rhythm and time of the mind that is very fast, the thoughts fly fast, while our body moves only at the speed with which it was designed to go. When we start dancing, we focus attention on body messages and slow down; this slowdown helps us to remember that we are connected to the earth, to remember that we are dependent on our physical world (could we manifest without our bodies?) When we only live in our minds we forget by the connection we have with

the physical. The dance of the 5-Rhythms is a real re-education and thus a process of personal development. Each rhythm is a world in itself, an aspect of the human being, a quality of energy that puts the person in contact with certain aspects that can be studied by movement. Put together in a certain sequence, the rhythms produce a wave of energy that passes through the depth of the being, it spreads to the edges of it, to fall precisely in the midst of it." (Roth 1998, 87)

### 5. An Experiment with Gabrielle Roth's 5-Rhythms

The 5-Rhythms chose by Gabrielle Roth are: flow, staccato, chaos, lyricism and stillness.

- *Flow* is associated with fear and courage, mother and childbirth, earth, body, dance, incorporation, strength.
- *Staccato* is an unleashing of energy that leads to reunion: anger and forgiveness, father and childhood, fire, heart, music, expression, power of love.
- *Chaos* is a search, an expansion and a constraint; it makes connection with sadness and renunciation, ego and adolescence, water, mind, poetry, obedience, power of knowledge.
- *Lyricism* begins to structure, contrive, and binds us to happiness and recognition, world and maturity, air, soul, muse that inspires us, creative actions, the power of visions.
- *Stillness* brings the joy of fulfilment, the settlement that we confound with compassion, with spirit and death, with the mystery, a shaman or healer, with meditation, and the power of healing. (Vancea 2009, 83)

The dance of the 5-Rhythms can be danced by any interested person; there are no imposed moves or rules to achieve and follow. This dance is accessible to anyone who is conscious of its body. The free movement unlocks the natural ability of the body to dance. From one rhythm to another, the excessive tensions are released, the blocked energy is put into motion and we become simultaneously relaxed and full of energy. We rediscover and become aware of our beauty in its totality. The beauty of human beings has no quality standards; they were imposed by society for narrow reasons. We are perfect and unfortunately, we often forget it. Through this technique we can return to the consciousness of our human beauty and perfection.

The story of those five rhythms is explained as follows: "In the flow, the dancer will form a connection with gravity and space, concentrating on her feet and going through a continuous motionless and endless circular movement. Similar

to early contact, this is a stage in which no clear figures have yet been formed. Staccato appears, and the rhythm becomes clearer, as do the movements. This dance is sharp and has a direction with angular and concentrated movements - contact and shape. Chaos is the top of the sequence, inviting a wild and ecstatic, but yet grounded dance. Chaos is beside God," Gabrielle used to say, and, trembling and releasing, the dancer could, as in full contact, gain a clear sense of itself and something. (Roth 1998, 114-115)

As the music is listened and felt inside an enlightened experience of what we are is achieved. Light, playful and repetitive are the themes of the Lyrical rhythm, followed by the ultimate rhythm Stillness, a dynamic silence in which the dancer gradually moves into shapes. "I'm thinking of the two last rhythms as post-contact and retreat. Just as in life, there are days when flow does not flow at all. Maybe you cannot find a direction in Staccato. We are rigidly in chaos, overwhelmed by intensity. And later, you find yourself wanting to fly lightly and playfully, like a lyre butterfly, but to stumble upon yourself and the others. Similar to the paradoxical theory of change (and practice of meditation), you, the dancer are encouraged to move with any gestures. If you cannot flow, pull your inertia on the dance floor - notice how it is. If your dance brings resistance, feelings, thoughts, emotions, the practice is to move around and find a way to express, explore and breathe through and with every movement. Personally, I often find myself bored with dancing the regular, the remaining dance and then I have the choice to experiment. And I am doing it. [...] All of a sudden I feel good, so good." (Roth 1998, 124)

Trying to prove Gabrielle's saying we invited 10 subjects to experiment the *5-Rhythms* (summer, 2018). The space was chosen as being proper for dance therapy. Music (the original 5 - Rhythms of Gabrielle Roth) was listened from the beginning to the end, and the directions given were "Close your eyes and do what you feel like doing. Let the music flow through you, take its rhythm. Leave the thoughts; leave the problems and the pain. Be yourself, be the music!" Out of 10 subjects 8 respected the direction and finished the exercise and had a more or less profound experience. At the end, the subjects were asked to explain their experience in words and to illustrate it in a drawing. The result of the experiment was amazing. All the subjects felt changes during the exercise. They were more or less powerful as the exercise was doubled by measurements with the *MindWave* set, the answers were proved by the fluctuation of the frequencies. Mindwave is a wireless, Bluetooth driven set that has a couple of sensors that measures the level of relaxation//meditation and attention/ concentration related to listening to music/.

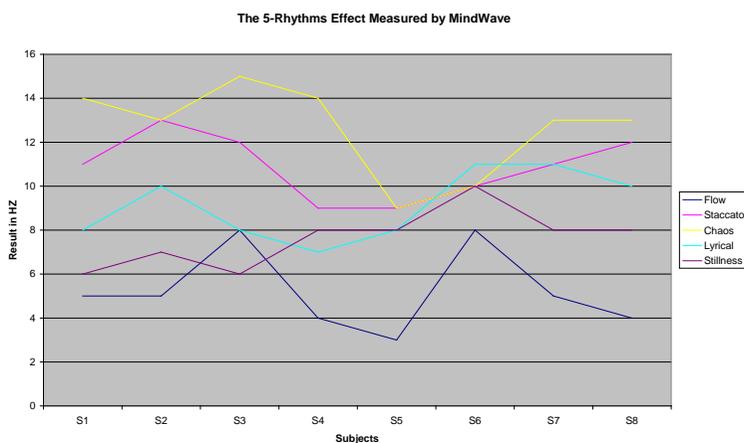


Fig. 1. *The 5-Rhythms Effect Measured with MindWave*

## 6. Conclusion

Dance and movement therapy pursue self-awareness, emotional expression, releasing tensions and blockages embedded in body memory and regaining body expressiveness and spontaneity. Awareness, understanding of fresh experiences (or retouched) determines their integration into the personality structure. More than this, working in a group can reveal things that relate to the relationship with the self, the others and the world. The 5-Rhythms of Gabrielle Roth are an exercise of music and dance therapy that favors the development and expression of one-self. It is method that spreads, being accepted as part of the practice that is life.

## References

- Achim, Dorin. 2001. *Muzica malefică și muzica benefică [Maleficent Music and Benefic Music]*. București: Editura Satya Sai.
- Dewhurst-Maddock, O. 1998. *Terapia prin sunete [The Sound Therapy]*. Translated from English by Amelia Croitoru. București: Editura Teora.
- Koechlin de Bizemont, D. 2005. *Magia vindecării prin muzică, Edgar Caycè – Muzicoterapia [Magie de la guérison par la musique, Edgar Caycè - Musicothérapie]*. Translated from French by Nicolae Constantinescu. Editura PRO.

- Levitin, Daniel J. 2006. *Creierul nostru muzical – Știința unei eterne obsesii* [*This is your brain on Music, The Science of a Human Obsession*]. Translated from English by Dana- Ligia Ilin. București: Editura Humanitas.
- Roth, Gabrielle. 1998. *Published interview* ([www.5rhythms.com](http://www.5rhythms.com))
- Roth, Gabrielle. 1998. *Sweat Your Prayer, The Five Rhythms of the Soul -- Movement as Spiritual Practice*
- Ursuțiu, Doru. 2003. *Acustica medicală – Note de curs* [*Medical Acoustics*]. Brașov: . Tipografia Universității Transilvania din Brașov.
- Vancea, Florin. 2009. *Introducere în terapia prin dans* [*Introduction to Dance Therapy*]. Sibiu: Editura Psihomedica.
- Vintilescu, Petre. 1937. *Despre poezia imnografică din cărțile de ritual și cântarea bisericească* [*About the Hymnographic Poetry of the Books of Ritual and Church Song*]. București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.