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LAURA BASSI AND THE METHOD CALLED “RITMICA INTEGRALE”1

LAURA BASSI E IL METODO CHIAMATO “RITMICA INTEGRALE”

The essay focuses on the figure and the work of Laura Bassi (1883-1950), a preschool teacher operating in a number of Italian kindergartens between the first and second half of the twentieth century. Ms. Bassi developed a method of child education based on the musical rhythm. This essay reconstructs the life of Bassi, illustrates her method called “Ritmica integrale”, focuses on the reception of this method at the time and the difficulties in divulging her pedagogical and didactic concepts.


Key words: Laura Bassi, Pedagogy of Music, Didactic of Music, Early Childhood Education, Musical Rythm.
Parole chiave: Laura Bassi, Pedagogia musicale, Didattica della musica, Educazione infantile, Ritmo musicale.

Integral Rhythms is a childhood education method, formulated and improved by Laura Bassi (1883-1950) starting from the 1920s. Along with the better-known music teaching methodologies of Émile Jaques-Dalcroze and Carl Orff, Integral Rhythms belongs to the family of ‘active methods’, which place the conscious participation of learners at the centre of the knowledge acquisition process. The underlying conceptual premise shared by these active methods is the idea of learning by doing: pupils learn through conscious, thoughtful ‘doing’, which helps them build and consolidate their knowledge (Bottero 2014; Dauphin 2002).

Laura Bassi’s method does not stop at active aesthetic expression, but aims at promoting several different aspects of children’s physio-psychology, such as discipline, memory, balance, and sociability. According to Annamaria Princigalli, who studied the Bassi method in the early 1950s, Integral Rhythms can be linked to the experi-

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1 I would like to give a heartfelt thank you to Tiziana Pironi, for providing me with ample material on Laura Bassi – letters, unpublished manuscripts, photos, newspaper articles –, which was entrusted to her years ago by Gian Luigi Zucchini. An exhibition room on Laura Bassi’s Integral Rhythms, curated by Tiziana Pironi and myself, is currently being prepared as part of the MOdE (Museo Officina dell’Educazione), and will make use of most of these documents. It is expected to release even my article in Italian on the same subject.
ments of the active schools, but at the same time it moves along the lines of traditional school education. Bassi’s method condenses «the positive aspects of two sets of opposing pedagogical trends: those that rely on free expression and on the spontaneity of children, and those that advocate some form of control or educational guidance, of aided, guided activity». The rhythmic pulse, felt and recreated by children «through drawing, movement and word, awakens the activeness of children in all forms: motor, perceptual, and intellectual» (Princigalli 1953, 4).

In Italy, educationalists such as Rosa Agazzi, Maria Montessori and Giuseppina Pizzigoni laid the emphasis, in different ways and degrees, on the teaching of music for pre-school and primary school children. Laura Bassi did not limit herself to emphasize the teaching of music, in particular of rhythm. She thought of musical rhythm as a primary element, on which to build a comprehensive educational activity. Moreover, compared to the methods of Jaques-Dalcroze and Orff, whose purpose is to impart a good musical education, the method of Laura Bassi, despite being based on rhythm, has as its ultimate goal the integral, not specifically musical, education of the individual.

In a typewritten document from the personal archive of Laura Bassi’s sister, Emma Pampiglione, Olivier Chennevelle, a professor at Sorbonne University, claims that without Jaques-Dalcroze Laura Bassi could not have developed her own method. However, the two didactics researchers had started out from different approaches: the educationalist from Geneva, and Conservatory teacher, had set himself the primary aim of teaching music and dance, whereas Laura Bassi, a kindergarten educator, had in mind the needs of early childhood education, and pursued more general goals: to ensure the development of children’s personality; to develop their skills in all sectors; and to allow them to experience the joy of spontaneous expression (Chennevelle 1946).

The life of Laura Bassi

Born in the Province of Perugia in 1883, Laura Bassi moved with her family to Lucca when she was 10 years old. Here she enrolled at the local teacher training school, where she earned her teaching diploma in 1904. In 1905 she also obtained a diploma as “maestra giardiniera”, or kindergarten teacher. In the same year, her younger sister Emma earned a piano diploma with full marks at Bologna Conservatory, under the guidance of maestro Filippo Ivaldi. Laura, too, had started studying the piano in the same conservatory, but had quit because she disapproved of the way in which solfeggio was taught there. Her father Giuseppe Bassi was a well-known, successful physician. Her mother had studied singing and piano with Giuseppe Respighi, the father of Ottorino, and had passed on her passion for music to her daughters (Bellini 2003; Pampiglione Bassi N.D.b; Zucchini 1982).

2 The article is reproduced as a typewritten copy, signed by Annamaria Princigalli, from the personal archive of Emma Bassi Pampiglione.
From her very first years as a teacher in the kindergartens of several Italian cities (Lucca, Mistretta, Lagonegro), Laura began including music in her teaching. The earliest organized experiences of her method, which at the time was called ‘Scuola viva’ (living school), go back to her teaching years in Oneglia (1913-1920), and then back again in Lucca (1920-1927). In 1927 she was recruited as a kindergarten teacher by Giardino d’Infanzia “S. Spirito” in Perugia. In 1931 she was entrusted with a prestigious task: contributing to the establishment of the first Italian kindergarten in Geneva. Laura therefore left for a one-year stay in the Swiss city, where she attended a course in Musical Rhythmics for teachers held by Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. Her acquaintance with the Swiss educationalist, and the in-depth study of his method, were very important for Laura: in this method, she found a confirmation of her intuition about the importance of developing a sense of rhythm in the early musical education of children. It was indeed Laura who advised her teacher to try out the method of calisthenics, known as ‘rhythmic gymnastics’ in Italy, not only on 10-12 year-olds, but on small children, too (Zucchini 1982).

Back in Italy, Bassi made the most of what she had learned and started to build, and write down, the principles of her own method, which she variously referred to as ‘scuola viva’, ‘dinamica musicale’ (musical dynamics) or ‘cinetica musicale’ (musical kinetics). The definition ‘Integral rhythmics’, still in use today, was coined by Giuseppe Lombardo Radice, who praised Bassi’s method in a lecture he held in Locarno in 1938, seeing in it a new, promising educational trend (Bassi 1971, Parte I).

In the second half of the 1930s, Emma Pampiglione (nee Bassi) began to take an interest in Laura’s work. Until 1933 the two sisters had mostly lived far apart: Emma lived in Bologna, then moved to Paris and later to Rome, while Laura lived in the cities where she taught. In the following statement, Emma offers an affectionate memory of the strong, genuine passion, which Laura put in her teaching work:

I got to know Laura as an educator-artist in 1933. I was coming back from a trip to Paris, and had made a detour to Perugia, to give her a surprise. I found her only hours before a benefit display with children at the “Morlacchi” theatre. For me it was a revelation. I used to think she was exalted, ambitious (even in the way she dressed), restless, tragic, and of course I recalled her success as a young girl in Lucca, acting in “La madre ebreà” and in “L’Ave Maria” (the latter composed for her by Renato Macarini Carmignani, Esq.), and her passionate desire to follow in the steps of Eleonora Duse, and the words Ermete Novelli spoke to our father to convince him that Laura, then a girl, should turn to acting. But I would never have thought that she would be able to create such a perfect, uplifting and moving show, in which children did not represent, but actually experienced the things they expressed, and where every detail – orchestra, costumes, light, had been taken care of with sophisticated artistry (Pampiglione Bassi n.d.; Zucchini 1982, 315-316).

From 1934 to 1940 Laura worked in Genoa, at the “Littoria” teacher training school, and from 1937 to 1950 in Rome, at the “Margherita di Savoia” teacher training school. Towards the end of the 1930s she began to organize and supervise educational activities at the gymnasium of Centro Sperimentale “Scuola Franchetti”, directed by Luigi Volpicelli and Mario Mazza, first occasionally and then, from the 1940s on-
wards, on a regular basis. “Scuola Franchetti” could rely on notable teachers, and one of them was Laura Bassi, who proposed educational experiments in various fields. It was in this school that Emma began working side by side with her sister on a regular basis. Together, they organized many public and benefit displays with pupils from several Roman schools (Zucchini 1982).

In 1940 Ricordi published Laura Bassi’s main printed work, the two volumes of Ritmica integrale. Gioco e movimento nella prima educazione musicale [Integral Rhythmics: play and movement in early music education]. Given the prestige of the publishing house, one could have expected this work to enjoy wide circulation among Italian teachers. Sadly, however, the copies kept at the Ricordi warehouse were destroyed by aerial bombings during the war. Ricordi only reprinted the work as late as 1971 (Bassi 1936).

The Bassi method received two main acknowledgements before fading into virtual oblivion: in 1949 the General Director of Arts, Guglielmo De Angelis d’Ossat, notified to the Conservatory of S. Cecilia the appointment of Laura Bassi as a teacher of Integral Rythmics courses. This was a sign of the strong need for renewal felt at the time in the educational-musical sector. What was particularly significant was that the teacher appointed to the chair had dropped out of the conservatory in her youth, precisely because of the teachings she had received there. Laura, however, could only do this job for a short time: she died on October 31, 1950. The chair was assigned to her sister Emma, the only one who was able to continue teaching the Integral Rhythmics method. In 1964 Emma published the small volume La ritmica integrale di Laura Bassi, which condensed the basic principles of the method in a sleek, fluent format, aimed at an easier circulation among teachers (Pampiglione Bassi 1964). The same year saw the publication of an explanatory album of rhythm-based drawings created by Laura Bassi, and edited by Maurizio Gasparotto (Il ritmogramma).

The second acknowledgement came posthumously, in 1975, when the Minister of Public Education awarded the Bassi sisters the gold medal of merit in education, culture and the fine arts.

Emma was forced to quit teaching at the Conservatory in 1956, having reached retirement age, much to the regret of then director Guido Guerrini. The latter, in a certificate issued on July 16, 1957, expressed the wish that Signora Bassi would be given «the possibility to hand down the Method in verbal form to other teachers, so as not to deprive Italian schools of one of the most ingenious and useful didactic and educational systems» (Guerrini 1957, 1).

Emma tirelessly kept on spreading her sister’s method, organizing and directing courses for both pupils and teachers, as well as taking part in exhibitions, lectures and conferences, in Italy and abroad, until her death in 1973.

Main features of the method

In her preface to the first volume of Giuoco e movimento nella prima educazione musicale, Laura Bassi explains that «My work is inspired by a childlike, joyful view of
education. I have always been guided by the belief that children have the right to be happy, and that the task of educators is to give them happiness. This belief led me to the revelation of how important music really is in education» (Bassi 1971, Parte I, 1).

Bassi thus openly talks about her idea that childhood is ‘happy’, and that teaching should be just as happy. The constrained didactic experience she went through during her conservatory years, coupled with her awareness of, and opening to, what was happening outside of Italy, led Bassi to design a method based on free, playful and fun learning:

It seemed to me that modern attempts at putting colour and life in school had not given enough importance to music, so I tried to let it seep into every corner of my kindergarten. My admiration for the thought of Dalcoze led me to the idea of imparting preliminary knowledge of music to children through games that amused them, and tuned into their mental and physical characteristics (Bassi 1971, Parte I, 1).

For Bassi, musicality is innate in children, and can only be developed beneficially through active teaching and learning that involves the whole person, not just one part of the body and mind (as is the case with children forced to sit still and motionless at the piano for hours on end). In order to learn music, it is not necessary to start from abstract theory or instrumental practice: many aspects of music can be acquired through movement. Bassi therefore developed a series of rhythmic games aimed at representing the elements of music in different modes. More specifically, she identified four rhythmic-motor activities:

– musical activity, which involves singing or playing instruments;
– graphic activity, the translation into graphic signs of the music being listened to;
– choreographic activity, consisting in rendering a sound or musical phrase through body gestures;
– oral activity, which involves inventing word games, nursery rhymes, or even just rhythmic-noise effects.

By the term “Integral Rhythmics”, Lombardo Radice meant precisely the use of rhythm in its various aspects: musical, graphic, choreographic and verbal.

Gian Luigi Zucchini, too, as an admirer of Laura Bassi, emphasizes that the most valuable feature of the method is the integrated rhythm-gesture-sign system. These elements are not separable, and the effectiveness of the method depends on their mutual relationship and interdependence.

To carry out an Integral Rhythmics session, besides classical instruments such as the piano, a set of special objects is necessary, including five dolls that represent the first five musical values; (1) the father, called TA, corresponds to the crotchet; (2) the girl, TE, to the quaver; (3) the puppy, TI, to the semiquaver; (4) the grandfather, BUM, to the minim; (5) the crane, GRU, to the semibreve. The purpose of the dolls is to accompany children in a cheerful way as they study musical values. In terms of graphics, Bassi contrived what she called ‘rhythmograms’, or procedures for translating musical values into graphic signs, as a preliminary stage to the ensu-
ing acquisition of actual rhythmic writing:

Under the impulse of music, the hand follows the rhythmic trace, flitting about on the paper: this is how a ‘rhythmogram’ is created. In order to accurately reproduce the musical values, a set of corresponding, easy signs is introduced, which can be written simultaneously to the unfolding of the sounds. This set of signs constitutes our ‘rhythmic writing’. The rhythmographic signs assigned to musical values are designed in such a way that children can compose them easily while listening to music and, at a later stage, go back over them and correct them. The advantage is clear: with traditional notation you cannot possibly do a dictation in time with the music (Bassi 1971, Parte I, 20-21).

To give an example, simple graphic signs such as long or short lines, are paired respectively to the dolls Ta and Te, which correspond to the crotchet and the quaver. Then the children are asked to do a rhythmic dictation using these signs, which are termed ‘rhythmograms’. As a variation, teachers can have children listen to a music piece and ask them to pronounce the names of the rhythmic dolls they have heard, to represent them through different ‘gaits’, to beat out the rhythm with a small instrument, and to “rhythmograph” the dolls. The rhythmic experience is thus explicated in the verbal, gestural and graphic modes.

One- or two-hand rhythmograms come in four different forms: (1) free: children can draw the signs as they prefer, as long as they take into account phrasing, accents and the intensity of the music they are listening to; (2) framed: the signs are drawn within pre-determined frames shown on the blackboard; (3) organized and (4) ornamental. The difference between the latter two types of rhythmogram seems to be limited to their degree of difficulty. Both should actually be carried out using pencils.
of different colours, with the two hands moving simultaneously and in opposing directions, while closely adhering to the rhythm of the piece performed on the piano.

One very interesting aspect is that both hands are drawing, so that the left hand is no longer subordinate, in an attempt at achieving symmetry of movement.

When focusing on verbal skills, children are invited to choose words, or even just combinations of syllables, and use them to beat out the rhythm of the piece being performed on the piano, and to accompany rhythmic gestures and movements.

The perception and translation of rhythm into gestures, drawings, and words, can be beneficial to the child provided that the activities are governed by strict discipline:

In motor exercises it is indispensable that the movement perfectly match the rhythm that underlies it. You cannot move an arm or a leg whenever you feel like it, but only at a certain moment, and in a certain order. Therefore, these exercises require constant control and tension. Integral Rhythmics teaches order, first of all through rhythm, which conveys its intrinsic order to the child (Grazioso 1977, 12).

Bassi was a harsh critic of passive, memory-based learning (such as learning little tunes by heart), but was even harsher towards all forms of spontaneous activity, which she regarded as uncontrolled, self-referential, and therefore useless.

Discipline is also helped by an original teaching device, again conceived by Bassi: the ‘musical commands’, short musical phrases played on the piano, which prompt children to immediately perform what the teacher is asking for.

Rhythmic education also contributes to the development of social skills, teaching children how to behave in relation to others. This is why the rhythmic exercises proposed by Bassi always have a playful side, as in a group game:

Through the exercises in which children act together, and those in which the task to be completed is divided among participants, children realize that they are part of a whole, and ought to do the best they can to contribute to the success of the group. To each child, what their classmate is doing acquires the same importance as what they themselves are doing (Grazioso 1977, 12).
The second part of *Integral Rhythmics* addresses the notion of ‘measure’. In order to let children understand the organization of accents in measured bars, Bassi suggests to use a set of everyday gestures: the hammering of the smith on the anvil provides an example of upbeat attack (the smith first lifts the hammer and then lets it fall on the iron); on the contrary, an abrupt punching movement is similar to a downbeat attack (first you deliver the punch and then let your arm fall down). The titles of these exercises, which are all numbered, often refer to categories of workers: «the mowers», «carpenters shoving», etc. Children are also taught to perform movements with their arms, similar to those of an orchestra conductor.

Some of these rhythmic exercises seem to be aimed at producing small plays (acting had been the first, great passion of Laura Bassi): for example exercise no. 110, entitled «Il suonatore girovago» (the wandering player), is a tune in ¾ tempo, with a waltz-like accompaniment in the left hand and a wave-like melody in the right. On this music, played by the teacher:

A child impersonates a barrel organ player turning the crank handle as he looks around and up to the higher floors of the buildings. When a coin falls he stops playing, picks up the coin, slips it into his pocket then resumes playing. Coins are thrown by his classmates. The accompanist interrupts the music each time the player stops turning the handle (Bassi 1971, Parte II, 23).

As we can see, these are “animation” games aimed at conveying musical rudiments through forms of play, in which social interaction is essential.

All this gets pupils used to music from childhood, which for Laura is important *first of all* for cultural reasons: «We do not need thousands of pianists, violinists, composers, etc. in order to uplift the musical culture of the popular classes, we need thousands of good, passionate music listeners» (Bassi 1971, Parte I, 2). With these words Laura Bassi voices a strong democratic concern, namely that music can and should be a precious, gratifying good for all citizens, regardless of whether they posses technical-performance skills (Scalfaro 2014).
Reviews and positive opinions

Between the 1940s and 1950s, Laura and Emma organized a great number of public displays as part of their educational activity for “Scuola Franchetti”. Enthusiastic accounts of these events appeared in magazines during those years.

Teacher Ersilia Liguori writes that she once witnessed a demonstrative lesson and was astounded by it. What struck her most was the imagination-discipline duality that characterizes the method. In the games, children were able to retain their autonomy and freedom, by creating gestures or words that expressed the values they had identified, and by acting independently one of the other. Moreover, Integral Rhythmics accustoms children to use their hands and feet independently. Liguori hoped that Bassi would be allowed to fulfil her dream of establishing her own method-based school for kindergarten educators, authorized and funded by the State (Liguori 1945a, 1945b, 1954).

Giovanna Dompè and Fausto Coen also gave positive reviews of the Integral Rhythmics displays they attended. Dompè gives an account of the final demonstration of a course, held under the aegis of the Italian Red Cross and of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), describing at length the diversity and complexity of the rhythmic-gestural-graphic activities performed by girls:

At a signal the girls got up one after the other, and chose on their own, with surprising promptness and accuracy, the doll that matched the rhythm, and with the help of the doll they followed the rhythm itself. [...] They also spoke, and spontaneously spelled out, the syllables of words that corresponded to the measure, for example “puppy” or “chocolate”, etc. Then the exercise got more complicated, changing from individual to collective, and started to look more like a curious, fun game. Musical phrases became longer and more complicated, and many more little feet appeared on the floor; the rhythm was beaten out with small instruments, which replaced the dolls; two girls went to the blackboard and with airy, quick grace translated the rhythm into graphic sings, one of them accurately accompanying the music with special graphic signs, the other blissfully drifting as she traced lines, angles, and curves to create a free drawing (Dompè 1946, 4-5).

Fausto Coen recounts the beautiful story of Vincenzina, a ten-year-old girl who, on the notes of a Chopin Polonaise, drew strange, beautiful flowers on the blackboard:

She explained that these were the Awakening flowers. What a smart musical interpretation! And she even added that “they show how Miss Bassi awakened me”. The miracle has really happened, and is condensed in the joy that emanates from these children, a joy that never lapses into nervous coarseness (Coen 1947, 1).

As can be seen, Coen also emphasizes this mixture of freedom and discipline, imagination and self-control.

Emma kept a sheet on which she used to write down the most positive opinions expressed on her sister’s method by prominent figures of the music world, and of culture in general. Many of them insist on the ‘Italian’ quality of Laura Bassi’s pedagogic-didactic proposal, not without a touch of pride: Mario Mazza maintains that
the method does honour to pedagogy in Italy; Riccardo Allorto describes Integral Rhythmics as unique and effective, much more so than many other methods that were popular abroad; Giorgio Colarizi, along much the same lines, praises the method for doing away with the complications that are typical of a part of Northern European pedagogy. Even some foreign educationalists believed that the method of Laura Bassi brought prestige to our Country: for Wilhelm Gebhardt, for example, «it is heartening to see that Italy, which has neglected the teaching of music in schools for such a long time, has now found in Integral Rhythmics a contribution to music education, which may lead to a fruitful exchange of experiences with Germany and other Countries» (Pampiglione Bassi N.D.a). Among the most significant statements, one in particular stands out: that of Carleton W. Washburne who, in a 1945 letter, shares his favourable impression about Bassi’s work with the mayor of Rome, and supports her request to establish a school for the method:

Dear Prince Doria: Miss Laura Bassi asked me to write to You, and share my impressions about her work, in relation to her request to obtain the use of rooms, in which to carry out her program. I talked to Miss Bassi, read some of her publications, and attended one of her displays: I do not hesitate to warmly recommend her to Your attention. She provides children with basic tools to understand and appreciate music, she teaches them rhythmic control of their bodies, which is at the same time an excellent physical exercise, an expression of grace, and an introduction to dance. She also gives them an artistic sensibility by having them do free rhythmic drawings. All this is carried out by Ms. Bassi very naturally, and elicits spontaneous and joyful responses from children. Education in Italy seriously needs the qualities that characterize the program of Miss Bassi. Therefore, it seems to me that it would be very beneficial to establish here, in Rome, a training Course for teachers, and a school for demonstrative purposes. I hope that You will be able to support this project. My very best wishes (Washburne 1945).

The sad twilight of the method

Laura Bassi’s greatest aspiration, to open a school for training teachers in her Integral Rhythmics method, never became real. The State refused to grant her the spaces and means she needed to carry out the project. The reasons for this rejection are not entirely clear, and probably depended on several factors.

As reported by Zucchini (1982), the idea of a joyful growth process, of a happy ‘expansive’ development of children, was not in contrast with the neo-idealistic educational vision of the time, embodied by Lombardo Radice, who effectively valued and highlighted the work of Bassi. The ‘Integral Rhythmics’ method, however, also contained many innovative aspects: it stressed body and motor abilities, rediscovered the importance of physical space for good learning, encouraged graphic expression through the original invention of the rhythmogram; just as innovative was the linguistic education it proposed, based on the analysis of rhythm and word accent. Such a high concentration of innovative and modern elements, coupled with the need for specific, suitable spaces and didactic tools, which were not always easy to find (for instance, a
large number of blackboards was needed to let all children draw at once), may partly account for Laura's failure to raise her method to an official academic status.

Admittedly, Laura Bassi was very ambitious. According to Emma, her insistence and exaggerated requests turned out to be detrimental to the chances of the project being realized. For Laura, a small space was not enough: the school she dreamed of had to be not only big, but it actually had to be located in the park of Villa Borghese.

Laura had an authoritarian, surly temperament, as can be gathered from several accounts, and this did not help her, either. Emma writes that one day her mother had to quell a fight between Laura and the directress of the kindergarten where she was working, in Mistretta. Giorgio Grazioso also recalls Bassi's continuous requests:

Everywhere she went she wanted to revolutionize things, starting from the infrastructure in which she had to work. She asked for wide rooms, a garden, a vegetable garden, bathrooms for washing children and dressing them up, gymnastics mats, small beds for the afternoon nap, a piano, instruments of all sorts, a gramophone, an impossible number of blackboards and even... a private beach (Grazioso 1977, 12).

This side of her temperament made her an unwelcome presence, at least to headmasters: Her constant requests, which she addressed directly to the national Department, entirely disregarding the hierarchical communication channels, were regarded as insubordination, and irritated her immediate superiors, who eventually issued formal complaints, asking that she be moved elsewhere (Bertini 1979, 651).

Her sister also remembers that Laura used to drag her down the halls of the Public Education Department building and, after a long wait outside office doors, Emma had to listen to her imprecations: «burn everything here!»

Laura therefore must not have been easy to get on with, and probably lacked the precious gift of diplomacy. She pleaded her case with anybody, submitting requests and applications, and seeking the support of people in powerful positions. However, despite the interest and mediation of influential personalities such as Luigi Volpicelli, the answers she received were all negative, sometimes even harsh. In a letter dated 27 October 1942, the then General Director of the national Department of Education, Aleardo Sacchetto, urged Volpicelli to restrain Bassi and her requests:

Dear Volpicelli, I received you message of the 17th of this month, to which you attached a copy of the letter sent to me on the 3rd of this month by Ms. Laura Bassi. And, while I confirm that I have given to Bassi the possibility to fully apply her method in the 1942-43 school year, in a kindergarten in Rome, I think you will entirely agree that it would be inappropriate to present this method in an academic form, as suggested by Bassi. This would lead to the method locking itself up in an aristocratic conception, which contrasts with the fundamental guidelines of Fascist education. Moreover, I am convinced that only through long practice in a standard kindergarten will it be possible to determine whether the method proves to be widely applicable or not, if it meets the deepest needs of the multitudes of our children and suits the inner qualities of female educators, and therefore if it warrants the adoption of further measures. Finally, let me add that it will only be possible to authorize a teacher-
training course once the experiment has completed its course of development. In sharing this
information with you, I would also ask you to please inform Miss Bassi that further insistence
along the lines of her previous requests would be ultimately useless as well as inappropriate
(Sacchetto 1942).

After the war, Bassi received higher consideration. In 1947, following the highly
positive judgment of a new research committee, the Minister of Public Education,
Guido Gonella, asked the State Accountancy for a five-million allocation to establish
a school of Integral Rhythms:

This Department has been informed about the importance of the musical educational sy-
stem of Mrs. Laura Bassi, which is aimed at awakening the rhythmic and musical sensibility
of children. A special Committee has recognized the qualities of this new teaching method,
which consist in the richness of its contents and of the means it employs for artistic and mu-
sical education. In order to achieve the above-mentioned goals, it is necessary to set up a
special School, and the estimated sum, which includes only basic necessities, would rise to
five millions. I kindly request this Department to consider the possibility of supporting the
establishment of the above school, and provide the corresponding funds, given the excep-
tional qualities of the method, which is regarded as a major factor in the preliminary music
education of the young (Gonella 1947).

Having received no response, Gonella forwarded a second request the following
year, again unsuccessfully: no funds were earmarked for an Integral Rhythms school.
Meanwhile, the method received further validation of its effectiveness. For example,
there was a proposal by the Conservatory of S. Cecilia to introduce an Integral Rhyth-
mics course in its program. This was not exactly the kind of school that Bassi had
wished for, but was nonetheless a remarkable achievement.

As mentioned above, Laura was only able to teach at the Conservatory for a few
months, for she died prematurely in 1950. Her chair was therefore entrusted to Emma,
who held it until 1956, when she was forced to go, having reached retirement age. As
Guido Guerrini, director of the S. Cecilia Conservatory, regretfully recalls, in 1956
there was no one, except for Emma, who could teach the Integral Rhythms method,
so the course was discontinued.

The problem was indeed to establish a school to train educators in this method.
Without it, Integral Rhythms would fade away, as was actually the case.

Until the last days of her life, Emma Pampiglione Bassi tried in every way to carry
out her sister’s project to set up a school for the method, but did not succeed. A glim-
er of hope seemed to appear in the 1960s, with a proposal by educationalist Burno
Ciari. He had been favourably struck by the method, which he had become acquainted
with thanks to Emma’s compendium, *La ritmica integrale di Laura Bassi*, published in
1964. In 1965 Ciari confided to Emma that he wanted to include the Integral Rhyth-
mics method in the second edition of the book *Le nuove tecniche didattiche*, of which
he was the editor. Ciari, however, made an even more interesting proposal to Emma:
in October 1965 the educationalist was going to be appointed director of the public
City schools of Bologna: «about 200 kindergartens, several hundreds recreation cen-
tres, and up to two officially recognized junior high schools». And he was determined to introduce Integral Rhythms at all school levels, citywide:

The success of such an extensive, comprehensive experience could form an excellent basis for spreading this technique to other parts of Italy. Of course we should train our staff, and your help will be indispensable in this. I will soon see, when I’ll talk to the councillor for Public Education of Bologna, whether it is possible to organize summer courses in musical and rhythmic training. I do not know whether this will be possible, given that there are already so many initiatives, and the summer months are full of conferences, courses, etc. (Ciari 1965; Zucchini 1981)

Ciari kept his promise and included Bassi’s method in his book, but did not succeed in introducing Integral Rhythms in the public City schools of Bologna.

What is left of integral rhytmics in 2016? Basically, the reference publications mentioned in this article. And yet, not without a slightly polemical attitude, we should ask ourselves what it would have been like if, instead of Italy, the method had been developed in another Country. Perhaps today Integral Rhythms would not only be a ‘historical method’ to be remembered, but would still be applied in educational settings, with appropriate updates and adjustments, just like Laura had aimed for. Although the Integral Rhythms method was not specifically aimed at music education, but rather at the integral education of children through rhythm, solid technical-musical competence was required of the educator: and it cannot be denied that acquiring such competence used to be, and still is, quite difficult for a preschool educator.

Bibliography


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