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Integrating Movement and Voice: a seminar for performers

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In June 21 2002, at the Isadora and Raymond Duncan Centre for Dance Research and in collaboration with the Kinitiras Dance Company, a three-day seminar was held with Maxine Heppner on the subject of voice and movement. The basic axis of the seminar was the circulation of the air of the breath. Maxine Heppner, drawing elements from release techniques in combination with various voice techniques, talked about breathing as a dominant energy source for the performer's body.

Dancers and actors, with her guidance, explored the internal spaces of their body, and worked on mental (imaging) routes extending out of the body and directing the journey of the air of breath. They also used the internal focus on breathing as a starting point for the movement of the body and for the energizing of its resonator cavities for the creation of vocalizing and speech.

The biggest part of the seminar concerned the interaction between voice and body, a relation of coexistence and competition that develops through the mutual blocking and freeing of the passages of the energy flow. This powerful bond between air, sound and muscles molds the quality of the voice into visual forms, and in correspondence, gives every movement a sensation that breathes and sounds, even if it is a silent, soundless movement.

Emphasis was put on the technical elements that every exercise demands - and here maybe the word *activity* would be more appropriate - and to the different layers that compose it: the route of the breath, the extension of physical movement from specific energizing points, the focus on the internal space/resonance of the body, the production of sound in an unintelligible form of speech or in actual language/text, the relationship with the environment (what I hear and what I see), the rhythm of all of the above. Individually and in synthesis, all these compiled the different "layers" of the same activity. In every activity we initially focussed our attention on the synthesis of two or three from the above elements in order to build a grid (nexus) of interacting "layers".

The secret, in the end, in this extremely complex enquiry (zitoumeno), was the preservation of a continuous thread of concentration and attention based on the "technical" physical demands. Initially this appeared to split up the activity and fragment the body within it. But quickly Maxine

Ms.Heppner's travel to this seminar was made possible with the support of



drew us into a new condition of alertness, where all aspects of the body functioned as a unity with a sharpened awareness of itself.

Maxine Heppner also gave a poetic colour to technical terms using comparisons and metaphors, enriching the quality of what was happening. She talked about "pockets of air all over the internal body", for vessels/resonators. She also referred to the meaning of the form and the shapes (of the muscles/of matter) as well as how these influence the route of the air and the production of sound (the voice/the intangible) and by deduction the quality of the performer's interpretation.

Finally, with the help of improvisation, which was an important tool for experimentation, we conceived moments and material for the creation of different characters and forms through movement and sound. Indeed it was a seminar-treasure for the actors, the dancers and the performers who combine different techniques, who search for a personal "language" and test new "tools" for their creative course.

Also, we must characteristically say that such efforts to organize such a training seminar are remarkable, bringing Greek performers in touch with important teachers and techniques. Although such a deed is most of the times expensive, it is still desirable that similar future propositions become reasons for concerned organizations to collaborate to find financial support, in the way organizers of this seminar worked together. Another proposition for the promotion of similar activities is that the various ministry of culture dance groups - the subsidy fund assigned especially for this reason - make commitments to include in their annual programs training seminars with invited teachers to run parallel with the scheduled activities of the dance groups. Something like this would be an important step for the dance culture of our country because it keeps alive the ties of the Greek dance community with the international community, not only through the visual stimulation of performances, video, etc, but through empirical (experiential) stimulation, which is the most important.

Maxine Heppner has taught before in Greece invited by Studio Metzis and Teti Nikolopoulos to teach seminars for dancers.

*Written by Martha Kloukina in July 2002; published in July 2003. Ms. Kloukina is a well-known Greek contemporary dance and theatre artist.

***"Choros" is the national Greek movement arts magazine. As the article is all in Greek this English translation is in typed text.

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