

DANCE DEMOCRACY IN DORRIGO

Fran Clayton

Fran, Grad. Dip. DMT (Wesley Institute), registered nurse and midwife is also a trained yoga teacher who specialised in remedial yoga (Yoga for Health Foundation U.K.). She has had a lifelong love of dance and since completing her DMT training has been working in Dorrigo, NSW. She says that here she is experiencing increasing interest from other health professionals from the mid north coast area in the benefits of DMT.

Fran tells us that a colleague encouraged her with the following documentation of this group which differs from the usual - in having no facilitator. Yet it has continued for over three years! The colleague presented her with a beautiful glass ball as a reminder to complete this article that sits on her kitchen bench, one would think unobtrusively, but not so, as it has been a continual reminder. She says that she is so grateful, living in this small isolated community, for the loving support and encouragement her colleague always generously offers.

For completion of my Grad. Dip. (2002) I facilitated six weekly D/M sessions here in my home town, Dorrigo. On finishing there were participants who expressed an interest in the continuation of a weekly session of communing through Dance/Movement. At this time I was not drawn to facilitate anything. However it did come about through the actions of one woman booking the community centre on Thursday mornings to simply dance. Two of us joined her and slowly the group expanded. For the first year there was a core group of four, and now three years later the chore group is eight. During this time we have had up to fifteen people who attend irregularly.

It is an open group, casual participants welcome although at times it has been confronting. While some of the group are obviously comfortable with the form of communication dance/movement offers, there are also those who have approached sessions with caution and timidity. As a d/m therapist it is heartening to see how some have stayed and allowed inhibitions to have their own life and expression.. We have had participants with physical disabilities who have welcomed the time for such interaction. The following quote is from one of these people who gave so much to the group through her music, prose, photography and obvious sheer delight of the movement opportunity.

“ I think of movement on Thursday a.m. and I think of the Latin expression ‘Vehimur in Altum’ meaning - we are carried out into the deep - the great alchemical shifts possible, that take me into the numinous, into God, when moving to rhythms & music in the company of other women and men, and it is an effortless alchemy.”

Two participants chose to come as an alternative to medication... a quote from one, suffering from depression, drug addiction and sexual abuse:

“For me creative movement is a way to come back into contact with myself and my body. It is a way for me to connect & share with others, expressing in the form of movement who and what I am. As I explore the world of movement I push my boundaries, growing, changing, expanding. As I learn to move more freely, with awareness, my inhibitions drop away, my spontaneity and passion surface. To me creative dance is a healing journey a coming home to a body I abandoned long ago”

Another participant wrote the words:

“Thursday Movement Group – loving, caring, supportive, discreet, imaginative, artistic, intelligent, open, encouraging, beautiful”.

The group is focused on the celebration of wellbeing rather than any psycho/physical imbalance. Anna Halprin’s work has been an inspiration to share with the group as a movement community. We have not explored authentic movement yet though there has been interest to do so.



Dorrigo is a small isolated rural community on the tablelands of Northern NSW. It is predominantly a farming community with immense natural beauty of forests, waterways and National Parks. To visitors it can appear quiet and conservative yet there is a strong undercurrent of creativity with a live theatre group which encourages diverse creative expression. We have used the theatre for many of our sessions.



Thursday mornings take on many different forms and while our main focus is dance/movement, sound, readings, dialogue, percussion, both body and instrumental, have also become part of our time together. Spontaneous props creep in too. A favourite, bamboo sticks, black and golden, of all lengths, in all manner, have become a regular focus. They are used for percussion, for jostling, for solo, dyad and collective exploration. They are used for a support in movement meditation, for constructions and for boundary setting.

Plants, fabrics and masks also add to the creative expression. For some reason, drawing and journaling have not been part of these mornings. This at times frustrates me as I know documentation through drawing, prose and poetry can help us make sense of what is happening in our bodies and in our lives.

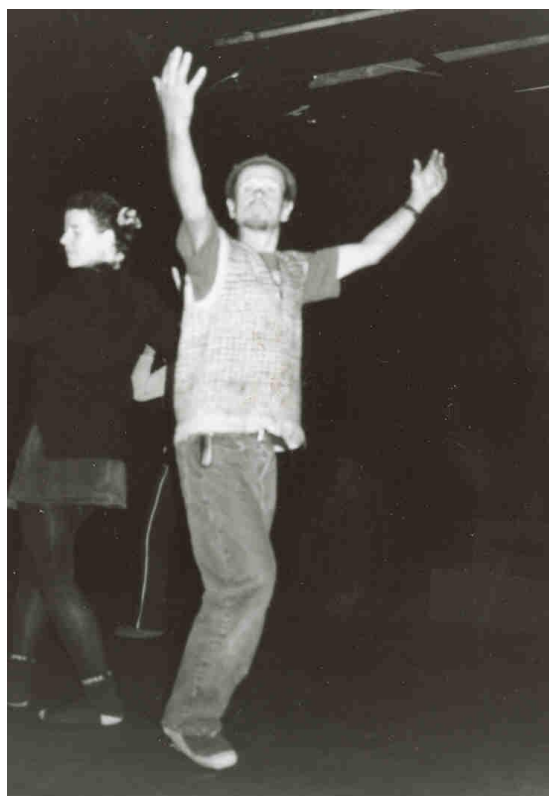
An individual may come with an immediate personal life concern to be offered for collective expression. At times a life situation is danced solo, without any need to verbalise. Others may come with a concept to explore and develop.

At times Thursday mornings have extended into a dawn breakfast at the beach. Often a shared lunch. On one of these occasions lunch was followed with a personal mask making afternoon, tutored by one of our participants in her home studio. It has been envisaged that these masks will have their own life expression in performance sometime in the future.

There has been conflict between the concept of process or product. Some in the group feeling performance a challenging, yet exciting component of our experience together. Some are clear they have no interest or desire to be involved with performance I am aware of my own growth through having to perform during dance/movement training. The potent mixture of fear & excitement. Two in the group experience performance as an integral part of their life. At one stage performance practice seemed to take over our precious movement morning. It quickly became apparent that practice needed to be kept separate.

A special dynamic of the morning is barter. Free range eggs, organic vegetables, goat's milk, fruits in season, herbal products and homemade tofu are part of the exchange.

These sessions do wear the cloak of a dance movement therapy session any one of us, in the role of therapist, would facilitate or have been involved with. The difference is the absence of a facilitator.



No facilitation has its democratic delights and so too its drawbacks.

No one person is responsible for material, music, or session form.

There is no payment, apart from a donation for rent of venue (usually a gold coin).

Non attendance is not an issue.

Numbers are not an issue.

If no one brings music this allows for improvisation or silence.

Our one guideline is to allow any one track of music to finish before changing the track or the CD. There may be a participant fully involved with that particular track.

The unexpected can be thrown up, when the venue is double booked. On one of these mornings there was a decision to go to the playing field. Making our way to the field, non-verbally, we fell into a game of “cops & robbers”, rolling, hiding, chasing, jumping. A large wired mesh fence on the field immediately drew out detainees and guards, aggressive guards, which arose from within. We swapped, guards became detainees. No game now, a sombre experience. Then a “performance” on a skate board ramp amongst collected foliage. There was no direction it seemed to arise from an unspoken void. As I recall this day, I am reminded of the elemental quality. A crisp morning mountain breeze seemed to fill us, like the fallen leaves we were transported.



The theatre has been used for many of our sessions with its womb like quality, all black, no outside light. It seems the theatre brings its own magic. At present our venue is a light airy, hall with a polished wooden floor. It is a little out of town, we feel free to use our voices without restriction. Yet as I write

this we are experiencing a time of “ordinariness”. Speaking with one of the group, her words.....

“Lately we have all felt flat, I’m needy, I roll.....”

We liken this ordinariness to writer’s cramp, a plateau perhaps. Personally, a strange feeling in the last two or three months, I need more to chew on, something richer or deeper, it gnaws at me yet it is undefinable.



We have planned a special morning and lunch to celebrate our time together and to find a collective direction. Amongst the core group, everyone has expressed the desire for Movement mornings to continue. On one occasion last year when differences between two females were being expressed, a male dancer who sat quietly through the conflict, lovingly holding the space said:

“It will be a sad day for Dorrigo if Thursday Movement did not happen”

Thursday mornings allow an “*elegant use of energy through creativity*” Most of all it allows time for that unknowable quality to descend from the ethos, encapsulate the group as a whole. Time for the Mystery, the Unspeakable.

Post Script: Speaking for our group as a whole we would like to extend an invitation to other groups and all readers to visit and move/dance, sound with us here in Dorrigo, or be a guest tutor. **FC**