

Abstract

Vocal Dance as Healing Performance

Driven by a need for self-expression, from 1970 I experimented with using a combination of dance and vocal techniques as a new method of self-expression in performance and in dance education. I wanted to see how it would evolve, and what I could develop; personally and with students.

After several years, noting many students came to me with injuries they'd acquired with other forms of movement, I wanted to ensure my methods caused no harm and improved conditions where possible. Using sound anatomical principles as a basis (Gray's Anatomy), the exercises were – and are – as much cerebral as physical. Awareness of one's body has formed a large component, and that includes the use of voice. Working with students with impaired hearing, vision, breathing, mobility, gave me insights I incorporated into work with others.

Some students brought psychologically troubled pasts and presents, seeking expression for the otherwise inexpressible, as had been my own reasons for beginning this work. They too sought the ability to transcend the need to use intelligible words in vocal expression; experimenting with ways to access internal feelings, to bring emotions to the outside, and to bring them back to the inside with a changed, improved effect.

As experimentation progressed, I realised the use of the mind was an important component in all physical activity, and added mind techniques used in sports and athletics at the elite level. Thus the mind/body/voice connection became steadily more prominent.

Encounters with physicists taught me about the concept of energy exchange: that all matter is energy, changes constantly, and affects everything it encounters. In 1975, I posed the question: how far does our energy go, once it leaves the boundaries of our bodies? This added a new dimension: creating improvised works through energy exchange between performers such as dancers, poets, painters and musicians, and the audience.

Working in countries where I had little knowledge of the language, was not a hindrance. I found Vocal Dance transcended not only psychological barriers with language; it indeed improved communication with people with no common language. An added bonus is the facilitation of the learning of languages.

Life presented me with some physical and emotional challenges; learning new techniques and absorbing them into my work has assisted me to overcome them to a very large extent. These new insights assist others, particularly in the older age groups.

Writing had always been one of my passions, but it was only in the 1990s I began to take my writing seriously. This led to eventually combining writing with Vocal Dance and theatre techniques. The show, *"This is a War Zone, Baby – Improvise!"* (Adelaide Fringe and High Beam Festivals, Adelaide, 2000), was the first product of this new combination.

Through almost four decades, I've developed Vocal Dance, constantly adding, revising, revisiting. The outcome so far is the piece, *Shebada!* performed in the Short, Sweet and Dance Festival, Sydney, 2007; the subject of the DVD I present at the WDA Global Summit.

Summary

Vocal Dance as Healing Performance

Driven by a need for self-expression, from 1970 I experimented with using a combination of dance and vocal techniques as a new method of self-expression in performance, dance education and therapy. I wanted to see how it would evolve, and what I could develop; personally and with students.

The DVD shows a performance in the Short, Sweet and Dance Festival, Sydney, 2007, which demonstrates the combination of dance, vocal, writing and theatre disciplines. After showing the DVD, I will discuss methods and rationale employed in developing Vocal Dance, and its outcomes.

Biography

Aviva Sheb'a studied classical ballet as therapy for severe childhood asthma, then other dance disciplines, singing, acting, bodywork techniques. Her international career includes innovative performance, teaching, therapy, choreography, writing. She's exploring possibilities of a Vocal Dance Theatre group with people of mixed ages, abilities shapes and backgrounds.
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