

Conference Reports and Reflections

"Weaving the Threads"
3rd Australian Dance Movement Therapy Conference
November 2007
At the historic convent in Abbotsford, Melbourne

Presented by the Dance Therapy Association of Australia (DTAA)
in collaboration with Hanny Exiner Memorial Foundation (HEMF)

Conference Report



'Weaving the Threads', the third Australian dance-movement therapy conference, was held over the weekend of November 8-9 2007, in the delightful ambient environment of Abbotsford Convent, Melbourne. This venue had its own significance for many delegates and organizers, as the building and grounds were the venue of much early dance-movement therapy training in Australia. My own very first dance therapy experiences occurred in Rosina Hall at the Convent (when much of it was still a convent!) back in 1982, in workshops led by US visitor, Wynelle Delaney and US visitor-turned Australian resident, Karen Bond.

'Weaving The Threads' was quite some time in the making; with the last Australian conference being held at Melbourne University in 2000 and prior to that, in 1997, at Vision Australia conference centre in Waverley. The conference provided a positive rallying point for the DTAA during the year of program development, and the clear and achievable goals were a very useful focus for the Committee. Certainly the tangible outcomes of hosting a meeting of 90 dance movement therapy practitioners and enthusiasts from all over Australia, NZ, and the US, Germany and Japan, seemed very rewarding - a highlight amongst the ongoing administrative work of our professional association.

The conference was presented jointly by the Dance-Movement Therapy Association of Australia and the Hanny Exiner Memorial Foundation and organized by a small committee; myself, Jane Guthrie and Kim Peel from DTAA and Naomi Aitchison and Di Albiston from HEMF. Support was also provided by

other DTAA and HEMF committee members and friends.

The conference title 'Weaving the Threads' was coined by longtime DTAA member and supporter Linda Murrow, who suggested this as a catalyst for drawing out different threads of the tapestry that is dance-movement therapy practice in Australia. The conference themes were developed by the conference committee, as topics of interest and concern in our profession today;

- How can dance and dance-movement therapy contribute to well-being and personal growth?
- How can dance and dance-movement therapy be employed as tools for health and healing?
- How can dance and dance-movement therapy contribute to the development of communities?
- For dance-movement therapy to be considered more seriously as a profession, what do we need to do?

Conference streams

- Skill development in dance-movement therapy
- Therapeutic applications of dance for specific populations and communities
- Professional issues and supervision
- Research and evaluation

We were delighted with the response we had for presentations, and felt that our intention to draw together the differing methods and approaches to dance and dance-movement therapy was realised in the rich and diverse program. We felt privileged to have had overseas keynote presenters Sharon Chaiklin and Peggy Hackney with us. Sharon is a dance therapy pioneer and founding member of the American Dance Therapy Association, who began her career in dance-movement therapy studying with eminent dance-movement therapist Marian Chace. Peggy is a well known international presenter in Laban/Bartenieff work, and was a colleague of pioneering movement analyst Irmgard Bartenieff for nearly fifteen years. The Movement Choir led by Peggy was a first in Australia, led by an expert renowned for conducting them all over the world, and definitely was a conference highlight. (Other) Participants commented on how pleased they were to have met Sharon and enjoyed her warm wisdom and inspiring leadership skills.

Comments during the weekend indicated how much the dance-movement therapy community valued this opportunity to get together, and how important it was for the development of our profession. Responses to the evaluation survey confirm that delegates were very inspired and motivated by their participation. Comments included:

"All of it was such a high quality, I loved it all."

".....enriching; inspiring....", "....excellent international standard - a gift....", "....helped move DT profession forward....", "....intelligent, expressive passionate speakers.", "....conference had great heart, great spirit."

Almost all survey respondents rated the quality of the event as *"Excellent"* and *"Very Good"*; with new learnings, new skills and the opportunity to get together with like minded people being highly valued aspects of the event. Overall, presenters were very positive of their experiences too, valuing the chance to speak formally about their work to a dedicated audience. Conference administrator Annette Dunphy enjoyed the experience because of all the wonderful people she met; *"a lovely bunch"* she proclaimed, once the stress of receiving and processing payments and registration details had been overcome.

Delegates enjoyed the different activities; the mix of formal presentations, workshops, performances and informal networking opportunities. These offerings by local, national and international guests provided wonderful inspiration for delegates. The final session included a very lively discussion about professional issues, especially those related to the future of our profession. These will be reported in a coming edition of the DTAA Quarterly, and will also inform DTAA's future strategic planning.

We also managed (just) to make ends meet financially, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Ron Exiner for Sharon Chaiklin's airfare from the US. The workshops associated with the conference generated a decent surplus, because of the generosity of presenters and the enthusiasm with which our community took up the opportunity to work intensively with our special guests. These extra funds will be used for good purpose; with current plans including the automating of the DTAA membership system, in an effort to reduce the admin load for the committee.

There were a few comments about areas for possible improvement for the conference. These especially related to the perennial challenges of time-keeping. The 15 minute sessions seemed a

Conference Highlights and People

particularly unpopular format, and although we included those only out of programming necessity, they seemed so unsatisfactory that perhaps we would not consider this possibility in future events. Other feedback and suggestions were appreciated, and comments and ideas have been noted to inform planning of future events.

A small sub-committee is just beginning to develop conference proceedings. Most presenters have obligingly shouldered the wheel again long enough to turn presentations into publishable papers. Even workshop leaders have taken up the opportunity to document their work and it is looking like we will have a good selection of writings to edit into a high quality publication. The format of this is as yet undecided but one suggested option is the development of another *Dance Therapy Collections* - similar to the one published with writings from the '97 conference. This has functioned as a valued and well used reference about the diversity of dance-movement therapy practice in Australia and is still being sold across the world ten years on.

There are no immediate plans for another conference. Without a host, supporting institution or any funded staff, the workload for volunteer organizers was very substantial. From my own perspective, however, the experience was very enjoyable, especially when the event was being created for such passionate and appreciative participants.

Our strong sense is that the dance-movement therapy community in Australia and New Zealand has been newly invigorated as a result of the conference, with new connections made and skills shared, inspired by the excellent leadership of our presenters. The call from participants was certainly strong; more conferences would be welcomed. Perhaps you might like to lead the next charge?

Kim Dunphy
Conference Coordinator

Kim, BA, GMD, M.Ed. Ass. Member/Vice-President DTAA, lecturer RMIT (2003-2006) DMT program, has extensive experience in DMT with people with intellectual disabilities/ children with special needs. She co-authored *Freedom to Move: movement and dance for people with intellectual disabilities* (pub. 2003) with Jenny Scott, and has published numerous articles on dance in community, educational and therapeutic contexts.

In this section we are pleased to present reflections on integral and exciting events within the conference. They include the *Welcome Drinks* evening with African Dance, that sumptuous *Conference Dinner*, followed by acknowledging our *Overseas Visitors*, who we were delighted to receive. This is followed by a section on *Conference Special Events* and *Being There*.

Welcome Drinks Evening



Phillip starting the dance

Held in The Convent Bakery, in the old convent grounds in Abbotsford, this was a pleasant start to the conference night for all involved. Meeting with other members of the community from national and international destinations; a time of connecting or reconnecting with friends and acquaintances; coming face to face with someone whose name was well known from correspondence but who had never been met. Sipping on cool drinks and taking savories as they

were passed around. It was a balmy night and lovely warm social gathering.



Naomi Aitchison, Virginia Woods and behind, Peggy Hackney's husband Rob, Judith Adcock and rear Tiana Li-Donni

The minute Phillip Light appeared and the African music started to throb throughout the bakery and surrounds, the whole gathering became easily and enthusiastically caught up in the rhythm and in true DMT fashion, fully involved in the dance. **Thank you Phillip for your expertise in leading the dance in this special event.**

Conference Dinner

A feast for the senses!

Well what a night – you get a group of dancers together in one space and you are absolutely destined to have a good time!



The Conference dinner was well attended and enjoyed by all. We dined on sumptuous Italian food and felt warmly welcomed and treated by our hosts at Mama Vittoria in Smith Street, Collingwood. Nothing was too much trouble! Following a delightful first course of antipasto followed by pasta that tasted home made in a 'real Italian' kitchen, we feasted our eyes on Natalie Poole's Egyptian Dance Troupe. Dancing Suraya Hilal style we were mesmerised by the rhythmic hips and energy of these three young women. Personally, I felt quite exhausted watching them and extremely impressed with their ability to express and interpret this contemporary eastern style.



Continuing with the exotic East we were further treated to some Egyptian Raqs al Baladi with Maria Sangiorgi. Maria with her warm and earthy style and her glossy dark hair was an absolute treat to watch. Dancing below a huge candelabra, we started to feel drawn into this exotic, Eastern mood and just when hips were starting to twitch and shoulders starting to roll.....

There was a change of pace, and we moved from the earthy and folkloric East to Spain. The beautiful barefoot flamenco artiste Marina Bistrin, complete with red dress and exotic flower in her hair, took us with her on her journey into this dance and invited us to participate with some foot stomping, hand clapping and paper plate waving (simulating fans). Well it was very hard to stop at this point and we just danced and danced the night away.....!

Sally Denning

Sally is a Prof. Member DTAA, B. Ed, Grad Dip Movement and Dance, Grad Cert (Dance Therapy), M.Ed (Dance Therapy), is currently undertaking a PhD at Melbourne University on the Pedagogy of Dance Movement Therapy in Australia

Photographs - Clockwise from top left: Natalie Poole, Maria Sangiorgi, Marina Bistrin and the enthusiastic audience.

Overseas visitors

Overseas visitors

As well as our two esteemed keynote presenters



from the USA, Sharon Chaiklin and Peggy Hackney (see p. 9 and p.14), we were also really pleased to welcome a number of other overseas delegates. These included E. Connor Kelly and Steve Harvey from New Zealand. Steve and Connor, as well as presenting during the conference, ran a very popular post conference workshop which expanded on their speciality of Physical Story Telling and its therapeutic applications. Connor, MA, ADTR, amongst many other things, studied with, Marcia Leventhal, Mimi Berger, Andre Bernard, Penny

Lewis and interned with Dr Judith Kestenberg. She is experienced in counseling, family therapy, focusing, contact improvisation and authentic movement (worked with Janet Adler). Steve, PhD, ADTR, RDT, RPT/S, is a well known international presenter, DMT and psychologist. See p.50 for reflections of Connor and Steve's workshop.



Connor and Steve at the dinner

From Japan, we were delighted to meet Mariko Shiba, a professor of Dance and Dance Education, Performing Arts, and Faculty of Letters and Education from Ochanomizu University, in Tokyo –

the only University in Japan that has a faculty of dance and dance education. Professor Shiba's major research interests are dance education and dance therapy, and she is interested to extend her understanding of developments in the Oceania area. Her visit to Melbourne was largely to interview people about Dance Education, Performing Arts, and dance funding systems in Australia

From the USA, we were also honoured to have as a delegate and presenter Dana Swain, MA, associate teacher, Tamalpa Institute, with a background that includes more than ten years in training and facilitation in a corporate context. Amongst many other things, Dana played an organizational role for Angola's English Language Teachers Association's (ANELTA) peer conference in Angola and there facilitated the Dance for Peace in partnership with



Special Events

The Movement Choir

"Simplicity is power...."

Peggy facilitated the first Movement Choir in Australia as a closure for the first day of the conference. During this she told us that Laban said "Dance is the birthright of all human beings." and he believed in scores for groups so they could intermingle. Unfortunately his ideas were taken on by the Third Reich and distorted for Hitler's use and Laban fled to the UK. She stated that simplicity is power and that simple movement for the expression of group purpose is what works well in Movement Choirs.

We explored both words and movements, first



Dana involved in the dance

Development Workshops. Dana's excellent presentation at our conference, *'Dancing for Peace in Angola, Africa: Using Movement-Based Expressive Arts as a Tool for Social Activism'*, was her first public presentation of Tamalpa Institute's Life/Art process, and it was the first time Dance for Peace was conducted in Luanda, Angola. .

Also from New Zealand, we welcomed Lesley Hawkins, Brigitte Puls and Jennifer de Leon. Lesley is well known to the Melbourne DMT community, as she lived here for many years and has been a loyal and contributing DTAA member for some time. Presently living in Christchurch, she is working as a counsellor and incorporating DMT into her work. Brigitte Puls, is a Clinical Psychologist, Movement Therapist, Psychotherapist, and senior lecturer/coordinator in the P.G. Dip. in Expressive Therapies at Auckland University of Technology. Jennifer de Leon, is a Dancer, choreographer and Director of *Poyema* Dance Company in NZ and also a psychotherapist and dance therapist.

As well, we were pleased to welcome Lisa Krasel from Germany, as a delegate, and get to know her well through workshop attendance's and talk to her about her life in Europe and her love of dance.

individually and then in a small group. Within the group we created a group repeatable movement phrase based on the individual word and movement. Each group then shared these and we voted on about 5 different ones to be the framework of the dance. Fortunately for us the wedding taking place in the Abbotsford Convent's gardens was ending and we could claim the use of the lawn and dance these words and phrases in unison outside in the sunshine.





The power of the communal body moving amongst Nature's elements was pure joy and I imagine most of us were as refreshed and energized by the experience as I was. I adored the toddler coming close to the group knowing that this indeed, the joy of dancing together, is what life is all about.

E. Connor Kelly

"...everyday work actions"

My memories of Peggy Hackney stretch back to 1987 when I spent one semester studying Movement Analysis and the Bartenieff Fundamentals with her in Seattle.

In that time, her profound mastery of body movement and dance was something I relished. Twenty years later in 2007 when I joined her movement choir at the Dance Therapy Conference, I fully expected a Laban style movement choir. Rudolph Laban created the concept of the Movement Choir in Germany in the 1930's using simple movement sequences on large groups of people based on everyday work actions. From photos of these choirs, it appears as if the form of these choirs was 'directed from the outside' by Laban using a variety of group formations to help to design the material.



Peggy took a different approach to the Dance Therapy Conference Movement Choir. She seemed more interested in opening up the dynamic range of movement based on the feeling responses of the participants. Each person was asked to contribute a movement quality and participate in a small group (5-6 people), which then added vocal, spatial and timing considerations to the material.

The larger group (around 80 people) then viewed all the pieces and through democratic vote, an order was selected creating a beginning, middle and ending. This piece was then taken outdoors and performed twice so that people could feel a sense of completion.

The piece seemed satisfying both to do and watch - creating an authentic, living, flowing, evolving movement choir ... fun to create, available to all participants working at their own level, and satisfying to perform.

It led me to reflect on the flexibility of Movement Choirs and to appreciate once again the heritage Laban has left us and the ingenuity of Peggy Hackney's appropriate adaptation for such a worthy occasion.

Linda Leah



"...."repetition builds meaning"

Imagine planning your perfect wedding dress, perfect wedding day, perfect wedding party and then having a bunch of dance therapists on mass running around and expressing themselves in the background of your wedding photos. Personally, I would have thought that was perfect too.

So this is the picture I have of us all: a beautiful sunny afternoon, a grassy hill surrounded by a grand but crumbling building and rejuvenated gardens... and a wedding party and photographer somewhere nearby, just perfect for our movement choir. And in my own memory of photographs I see many familiar faces and familiar bodies. We are running and reaching, forward and back. We are swaying and

stretching inwards and outwards. We are folding down, flying high and flinging around on mass. Once, twice three times we worked through our movement piece *because repetition builds meaning* says Peggy. *And it takes time to build to a climax.*



I am aware that somehow something of my movement, something of what I feel I do as a dance therapist, something that I expressed in movement,

Performance on the Lawn

“Three Songs, Three Dances” - BAH Improvised Movement Collective



Sitting on the lawns and getting out into the beautiful grounds of the Abbotsford Convent was really another unsung highlight of the conference, particularly as the weather was mild, sunny and conducive to sitting outside on the grass or somewhere in the lovely convent grounds. Add a dance performance on the grass to this and what a luxurious, pleasant and lovely way to spend a lunchtimejust watching and enjoying the dancewhat more could you ask?

The written description in the program of “*Three Songs, Three Dances*” BAH Improvised Movement Collective told us that “This creative and dynamic team of contemporary dance students have a passion for spontaneous movement and quirky characters”, and we weren’t disappointed with this

was being drawn out of me, out of my group that I formed and collaborated with and was being offered to the group. Something of the essence of what I think, what I believe, what I embody was claimed by the bigger group and used to express what we all feel *we do as dance therapists.*

And the group movement felt personal, so personal that some of the gestures touched my heart and I blinked away a tear as I dug down into the past and yet I felt connected to all the bodies and safe and held and happy as I surged and reached forward to the future.

Through a beautiful and democratic process, Peggy elicited my inner attitudes, she facilitated connections through dynamic interplay with others and directed an outward expression. It was a beautiful way to fully embody just what the conference was about.

Natalie Poole

description. They delighted us with their improvisations and creativity that fitted so perfectly into that wonderful performance space.

