

Reflections of jewels extracted from “Dancing in Space, Dancing in Community”

Tricia Mary Lee



Tricia comes from a professional background of teaching and healing but considers dance her lifelong passion. Author of “The Sacred Mystery Manuscripts” which have been the inspiration for her dancing journey since 2000, she has been immersed in the Global Sacred Dance movement for almost 20 years. In 2008, she received a scholarship to attend the Sacred Dance Guild festival in Connecticut, USA. She is currently Vice president of The Guild [www.sacreddanceguild.org]

In 2015, 2016 and 2017, she organised and facilitated Sacred Dance Retreats in Bali for women and it was here she met Marylee Hardenbergh and first heard of Global Water Dances.

In 1999 she trained in BCMT and has just completed a Diploma in DMT in New Zealand. Her work continues to focus on women and the healing power of dance and she is currently preparing to offer training workshops and retreats for others who wish to include Sacred Dance in their practice. She hosts the ‘Sacred Dance Community’ Facebook page.

Abstract

The author reflects on, what was to her, a memorable experience. This was attending a two-day workshop led by Marylee Hardenbergh, who is renowned for her development of the Global Water Dances and other site-specific dances. The ‘jewels’ of this workshop and site-specific performance it led to, at Melbourne’s Abbotsford Convent, are re-experienced by her, when recently participating in, organizing and leading a Global Water Dance event, close to her home in West Australia. These dances now take place worldwide on the same date in June each year, involving very many countries. Through the authors words, her reflections and quotes used from Marylee Hardenbergh, the occasion in Melbourne comes alive again for her and we are able to appreciate the value and benefits of ‘dancing in the community’ and of course, the framework of Space Harmony from which this is developed.

Key words: Space Harmony; dance; community; site-specific; movement choirs

This year I have been preparing for Global Water Dances, where I live in Busselton, WA, which took place in June, 2019. Throughout this my thoughts have constantly been flowing back to the event in Melbourne in January 2018, led by Marylee Hardenbergh, and feeling my gratitude overflowing. What an absolute delight and privilege it was to attend this weekend experiential workshop led by Marylee in partnership with the DTAA at The Abbotsford Convent in Melbourne.

Marylee is one of the original founders and an Artistic Director of “Global Water Dances” and renowned for her outdoor ‘site specific’ choreographies. She has led many movement choirs and loves to use Laban’s Space Harmony

in her work. She trained with Irmgard Bartenieff and Penny Lewis.

“One of the reasons that dancers and non-dancers alike go into the field of Dance/Movement Therapy (DMT) is to be in the arena of healing. Certainly, this type of site-specific performance work is art, yet, like a DMT group, it has at its core the potential for healing. Much like a group therapy process, the performance project is about building relationships, but on a much more expansive level, including relationships to the site, the townspeople, the dancers, the environment, etc. And, too, helping to bring awareness to the environmental aspects is another level of healing.



Using dance therapy principles to create a community-based site-specific performance that brings beauty and a sense of place to its participants and audience members, is an

*avenue for bringing the benefits of DMT to a large community.” (says **MLH**)*

From our first gathering and greeting circle on Saturday morning to our final public performance on the Sunday afternoon, Marylee shared not only her vast expertise as a DMT who is skilled in the use of Space Harmony, but also her rich creative ability to respond flexibly and imaginatively to a new and diverse community of dancers and members of the public, as well as to the “site specific” environments offered by The Convent.

In the words of Marylee:

“To embody the space surrounding our bodies creates a more vibrant sense of aliveness. Laban’s Space Harmony material will be taught with clarity and simplicity, making the information accessible to all levels of experience, from beginners to advanced practitioners of dance.

In this workshop, you will

- 1. create a more personal relationship with the space around you*
- 2. define and become better acquainted with your individual kinaesphere.*

Studying Space Harmony has applications for psychotherapy and choreography. It is a tool that can be used with both individuals and group experiences. I will present structured exercises that offer tools for personal reflection, for therapists, for group leaders. There is something deep and archetypal in these spatial explorations. As we explore the connections to the space around us, we can learn to trust... and actually lean on... the space around us.”

Arriving from the USA midwinter into a roasting hot Melbourne summer is no mean feat but Marylee wasted no time in visiting the site for a couple of days before the workshop. This enabled her to identify five sites which she felt would be the most effective for our dance explorations and the creative performances she inspired us to co-create in response to them.

She was especially drawn to the power of the arches at The Convent and these featured strongly throughout the two days alongside four other very different settings. Our final performance, which invited participation from the audience was staged beneath, through, and in front of, these dominant arches.

The other sites were a worn industrial looking area complete with rusty door and staircase, the second was the Rotunda and grass quadrangle with large central tree. The third was a cluster of large rocks on gravel within a corner setting and the last was a grassed area with trees which included an old metal fire hydrant. Each of us chose one site with which we felt a connection to, or resonance for our final performance and then we all danced with the arches for our ‘Finale’. The movement between the spaces was also danced as a procession with assorted music and sounds organised by Marylee.

This in itself attracted a gathering of onlookers, families with children and fascinated others who joined in the procession wondering, absorbing, sharing from a perspective of curiosity, quest and desire to be a part of the dance..... what rich harmony here?

*“Honouring the site and all the different people, saying thank you, is a way of “valorising” [adding value] to the overall experience” **MLH***

Marylee also shared:

“Tending to the external environment while at the same time attending to internal emergent reactions to the environment.”

Irmgard Bartenieff’s belief that we need to take out into space those emotions and responses that occur inside of our bodies. She felt that if our emotions stayed inside and never came out into space, that this was not as healthy as moving them from the inside externalized out of the body. Using Space Harmony to encourage this is an excellent tool in dance therapy.

Learning the dimensional scale enables us to connect and ground into our own sense of being, and then take that out into space, into the

environment, and of the community. The simple dimensions gave us an important tool which we can use in our dance therapy groups.”

Watching Marylee weave her DMT and Space Harmony skills from initial concept to our final performance at these sites in a mere two days was uplifting if nothing short of magical!

Our experiential practice with the Laban principles of planes, space and dimensions on the Saturday as well as our Laban movement choir session on the Sunday were for me both seminal and profound in my personal dance consciousness whilst also creating intense group harmony before our site-specific performance.

“Unison coheres the space and creates cohesion within the group” MLH



Through her art of constant questioning she encouraged us to dance and delve more deeply into the spaces, to discover personal as well as group imaginal connections, to draw on our inner perceptions and feelings, not only in response to the spaces, but to each other and to ourselves and to refine our intentions. Why are we dancing? Who are we dancing for? What is our connection with the earth, with urban space, with the audience? What moves us? How do we sense our emotions? When do we recognise our relationships with the earth and the elements, the spatial planes?

What is the power of unison? of divergence? of sequence? How can we utilise rhythms? patterns? design elements? In what way did we

connect with the energy? What experience do we wish for our audience? Awe? beauty? Connection? Respect? Transformative memories? What is our intention for the site on which we will dance?

“The group is the “pebble” which creates ripples in the audience.” MLH

Using the strategy of Authentic Movement and witnessing we explored our relationships with the Arches our perceptions and connections with thresholds/ gateways/ solid boundaries, our sense of comfort and discomfort in the built spaces and between them. Time for reflection, sharing and feedback was precious and added richly to our sense of value not only in the dancing personal journey but also to the quality of honour and integrity relating to the sites which was so evident in the final dance.

Marylee’s tips for future site-specific performances included:

“Become acquainted with the basic methods of how to create a site-specific performance.

Site-specific dance is a dance created especially for a site, where the music, the costumes, the movement repertoire, are all inspired by the site itself. The majority of my dances have been performed at vast outdoor sites. The first step in creating site-specific dance is to choose the site. An important second step is to ensure that you can get permission to hold a dance at that site, and if so, what insurance is needed. Once you have permission to hold a performance, get to know the site as well as possible. Learning about the site can be similar to an in-depth analysis of the unique movement personality of a client. There are many ways to “read” a site. I recommend visiting it at different times of the day, and in different weather. How each DM therapist reads a site will vary from individual to individual; there is no one “right” way to analyze the site. Emphasis can be placed on the visual geographical aspects of the site, or on gathering history, or talking to townspeople. One’s approach in getting to know a site is unique, like any other relationship. As you become familiar with the site you can determine whether you will commission a composer from that site, or use found music, perhaps even written about the region in which your site is located. It is important to me that all of the performers are from that local area. The costumes and the music are designed before starting to work with the dancers as they help to weave together the overall container.



It is very important to set your intentions for the dance. This is similar to setting specific goals for a group; the goals will become clearer as each DMT visits the site and talks to the people there and knows more of the

history--just as checking in with other staff persons about patients or reading their charts. And just as each agency or hospital has a mission and each patient has treatment goals, so does the overall project have a mission that creates a foundational context for the work. There might be goals for the overall dance in addition to goals for individual sections or dancers.

This is a list of aspects to consider as you create your own performances:

- 1. Know your site.*
- 2. Deciding audience placement and "audience-as-client"*
- 3. Setting the container and necessary permissions*
- 4. Music or chosen sound*
- 5. Selecting performers*
- 6. Targeting the public*
- 7. Physical elements and the out of doors*
- 8. Time of performance*
- 9. Publicity*
- 10. Funding.*
- 11. Gathering and weaving together the performers*
- 12. Showtime!*
- 13. Processing the experience afterwards.*

Thank you Marylee for coming to share your gifts with us we dance more richly on this earth, together in harmony.

And how fortunate I was to stay in a lovely home with such generous hospitality. Here I was able to listen to Marylee's thoughts as she planned, prepared and delivered her Art.

Discussing possible processes and sharing reflections was a rich added bonus for me. I feel I was maybe a sounding board for her active dancing path of 'delivery' as she birthed us into a new Space Harmony creation at the Convent. Our conversations, both before and after, covered possibilities for the diverse sites, reflections on group dynamics and structures, potential choices for the best next steps.

I watched her as an artist at work rising to the challenges, stretching to the diversity, responding to the energies and creating, weaving, directing from the tips of her toes to the imaginal zone beyond I sensed the inspirational current which fuels her work and this felt truly Sacred and Blessed ... for this I am eternally grateful, more skilled and richer in my own dancing journey.

Postscript from Marylee:

These are some of the identifiable goals of our dance performances which correlate with therapeutic elements of dance therapy (as presented by Jenny Moore, ADTR, when she and Hardenbergh presented their work on site dance to a Master's Degree program class in DMT at David Yellom University in Jerusalem, Israel in spring, 2009):

1. Inclusivity. There is a sense of belonging to community and anyone who wants to be part of the project can be. This includes non-dancers who want to perform; we find roles for them that are on par with their skill and do not ask them to do arabesques where they will not be presented in their best light. We fit the choreography to the level of the dancers. The homeless men in the city of Atlanta invited to be part of the ADTA dance in 2001 had radiant faces after the performance. Other unlikely people to be included are the lock and dam staff at the US Army Corps of Engineers, the Park Service workers, the drawbridge operators. The whole performance is very much like the container we make for our dance therapy sessions and people can come into the circle of activity if they want. We intend to make people feel invited.

2. Shared purpose. Having a common goal that everyone is working toward creates the sense of: 'Here we are' as a group, facing the same direction, moving together towards a deadline, creating something larger than any one individual could do alone. Because the container has been intentionally set, something bigger than the sum of its parts can come through because of this opening. To make an impact, to be part of

something that will make the world a better place are shared goals, whether stated out loud or not.

3. *Expanded sense of self.* Individuals are asked to take on another role. Step out of the familiar, try on new movements, moving away from habitual patterns of movement, come out of one's routine and place in day-to-day life. Audience members also are asked to do this when invited to join in experiential movement in the Finale of the performance, and to expand their role from being passive spectators.

4. *Being seen and affirmed, in the performance, the audience can be seen as the witness.* Performers are being seen as valuable members of this dance community and being encouraged in this new valued role. This community-based affirmation supports not only who the performers are, but who they can become.

5. *Having a specified role.* In the DMT group, each person is asked to see themselves as an important member of the circle, that without them, there would be a gap in the group. Having a role in the dance, i.e., being needed to fulfill an important task relative to the overall success of the project supports a sense of individual importance. Even the smallest tasks take on new meaning and importance, especially when done to music and within the container of the dance, since they serve a bigger purpose to the overall success of the performance.

6. *Creating beauty.* Highlighting elements of the site allows all to see that familiar scene in a new, beautiful way. Beauty can be created externally or internally, such as the performers dressing up in a costume, feeling beautiful, being told by the audience that they moved beautifully. Using fabric to bring out the already existing colours at the site, i.e. navigational colours, or adding colours to (re)present an historic element, such as the four sacred colours of the Dakota Indian Nation along the Mississippi River. Making the beauty of the site, of the individual, more visible.

7. *Reconnection to something larger.* Through the dance, individuals find themselves connecting in a deeper way to the site, to other dancers, the audience, the Divine. These dances serve as a reminder that we are all connected, not isolated beings. This allows support to be given and received. This container gives people a certain amount of time to just be part of their environment, their community. A sense of belonging is fostered through this structure of time and place of event. Our dances are also "time-specific" meaning that we can connect to

larger-than-ourselves events, events that are reoccurring, such as the rising of the full moon, Solstice, the setting sun, bringing a feeling of being connected to natural rhythms.

8. *Seeing self in a new way.* "I never thought I could do this." Self-doubt, resistance, gives way to risk-taking, raised self-esteem with success of the project. Challenges are offered through new tasks, such as offering movement to whole groups to try, dancing on high rooftops gives people opportunity to conquer fear of heights, fear of water, men on machines.

9. *Giving something back.* Here is what can bring - a feeling of having something of value to offer. I have a role to fulfill, it's expected of me. I can feel needed. The overall success of the dance depends on me (good kind of pressure). I will be missed if I don't show up. I have a thread to weave into the overall fabric.



Gain experience of being a performer in a site-based piece, and understand some of the important aspects of "valorizing" your dance partner

This was all accomplished through our collective efforts in creating the site-specific piece for The Convent and developing the Finale into a Movement Choir

Topics covered during the experiential weekend included:

The audience joining in the Finale and creating different aspects of a Movement Choir, gathering Authentic Movement phrases from each of the dancers and editing these into a dance sequence to be performed in unison, the use of synchrony in the performance, treating the site as a client, and treating the group of performers as group therapy participants.

*Marylee Hardenbergh
Director, Global Site Performance*