

Adding Grace to a Deeper Seed: a singdancing manifesto

From the beginning, the purpose of art has been for us as human beings to reflect upon our experiences and gain greater understanding of ourselves. Art is the recorder and the mirror, without which we would not know what we have done, nor what we could do. The myriad forms that art takes illustrate the several processes within human thought and activity. Our sense of order, time and symbol creates the verbal arts of story, theater and poetry; and there is an art form for each of the main physical senses: music for hearing; painting, film photography and all the visual arts for sight; sculpture for touch; and dance for both sight and for our sense of movement, the lesser-known kinesthetic sense. There are lots of combinations of these art forms, such as poetry and music for choral music, music and theater for opera or musical theater, story and film for movies, movies and music and dance to make music videos. We love to integrate as many of our senses as possible. Through these senses we experience life, and through their corresponding processes we express our responses to life: our emotions.

Expressing our emotions has a healing effect. It has been said that one of the four primary causes of disease is repressed negative emotions.¹ We repress our “negative” emotions when we feel we don’t have a right to have them, or when we believe that if we acted on them we would be sorry. Often we need not even imagine dire consequences to sense our wisdom about a situation. Yet if we suppress an unwanted reaction, but our negative thought about the situation has already triggered an emotion that is particularly strong and attractive, the resulting vibration can just bounce around in our cells with no place to go, eventually causing mutations that can lead to disease, or block our ability to feel anything at all.

To deliberately act out an emotion in a theatrical situation creates a safe channel for the emotion. Writing demented poetry, dancing wildly on a Saturday night, singing raucously in an empty house, playing the villain in a drama, or just watching from the audience and experiencing Aristotle’s vicarious catharsis—any of these outlets can serve the need to release strong emotions through a safe channel. To restate ourselves backwards, we may have just healed one-quarter of the causes of our diseases.

Singdancing happens to be a uniquely advantageous way of channeling emotions—whether negative or positive—in that 1) it doesn’t use words and 2) it uses the body and voice simultaneously. As a result, the act of singdancing is rooted in a highly satisfying, primal or infant-like, *direct vibratory expression* using the entire body and voice, without falling back on any predetermined common symbology of word or gesture. Not just so that we can avoid clichés, but so we can more directly express our emotions through vibration rather than through symbolic representation.

In the classic art book “Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain”, renowned artist and author Betty Edwards explains that the left side of the brain names

¹ Dr. Anderson, Cleanse Thyself.

objects but the right side only sees them. Therefore the left side of the brain, when asked to draw “a pair of glasses”, can only draw two circles connected by a frown and having two canes sticking out the sides, for this is the brain’s symbol for “a pair of glasses.” The ability to symbolize serves us well, enabling us to recognize items in one category, and to use words, which symbolize meaning. But the right side is where drawing ability resides. If you turn a picture upside down and copy it by hand, the left side of your brain will ignore it as unrecognizable and the right side will take over. Turning the finished picture right side up again, you find that your copy is actually quite good. Instead of symbols, it contains lines and shapes that directly match the original.

Singdancing is like doing the art of musical theater with the right side of the brain. Traditionally, the creators of musical theater begin with a story. Perhaps it is a story we all know, such as Beauty and the Beast. But in order to communicate the story, someone had to use words, and someone wrote them down. From this written story, the scriptwriter finds dialogue. From this written script, the lyricist finds poetry. From this written poetry, the composer finds music. The written word is necessary so that all these minds can communicate. Once the music is recorded or played by the composer, the choreographer can hear it and find movement that fits. In this way, people with differentiated artistic abilities can collaborate to come up with a final product that one hopes will convey the original intent through all the senses.

But singdancing is not so complexly processed. It does not get taken apart in order to be put back together again, because its seed is not in words, but in the emotions of the creator, who is a holistic combination of choreographer, composer and storyteller. The creator completely bypasses the step of using words, so mandatory to musical theater. Instead, the creator feels and directly expresses feelings through movement and sound. If we were to use this technique to heal ourselves, we would start by focusing inward to sense the vibratory residue of our own experiences. We would feel the motion and hear the sound of this emotion, and send it exactly as it appears, through the receptive twin channels of our bodies and voices. This is an excellent way to thoroughly cleanse one’s emotional/physical channel, that is, flush out stuck vibrations from the voice and the body, both for one’s own emotional and physical health and for one’s ability as a performing emotional/physical body to be able to sing, dance and act on stage. In a studio or private room, one can indeed safely express one’s emotions this way. Paul Newham’s² name for this direct vibratory expression is voice movement therapy. I refer to it as singdancing, although it is really the roots of singdancing, as I will explain.

Wordless expression can be extremely cathartic, for it is capable of entering a section of the brain that lacks time and symbol recognition and therefore has no way of determining whether the acted event actually happened. Whatever you express through both sound and movement, your psyche is bound to accept as a huge release. In fact, because the event was acted and danced in the body and sung by the voice, this part of the brain believes the event *did* happen, like how a very young child may start crying during The Wizard of Oz,

² Author of The Singing Cure, etc.

believing that the actress *playing* the witch is not a symbol for a witch, but really is a witch.³ Without words, no clinging to subject matter is necessary. When I singdance anger, it flows through me so easily I do not need to hold on to it. As a result, I hardly ever need to singdance anger anymore.

Another amazingly useful *missing* aspect of wordless voice movement therapy is that it cannot communicate anything about the past or future, only the present moment. This is advantageous because when we are praying for healing, it is necessary to bring a desired event into the present, rather than the future. As the Red Queen said, frustrating Alice greatly, “Jam tomorrow and jam yesterday, but never jam today.”⁴ We can see how the words “I will earn more money” or “I will figure out how to let go of my failed marriage” might never bring the desired event into the present moment. Yet just saying words like “I am now earning five thousand a month” or “I now forgive my ex-husband” simply doesn’t wash for many people, because they cannot believe it. Here the lack of words in voice movement therapy is quite fortunate. The expression dwells in a part of the brain that has no words, let alone verb conjugation, therefore no past and no future: only now.

Many people’s experience of nowness is saturated with the vibratory residue of traumas from the past. The way singdancing heals the past is by expressing its vibrations in the present moment, in a safe place. The stage or studio is safe, because what we do there alone does not physically affect another person. Also, this venue allows the audience to experience the emotional catharsis right along with the performer. However, expressing nowness that has residue from the past is not like pantomiming or acting out what happened yesterday. Rather, it is like the mental space of an infant or an animal. Animals cannot tell you what happened yesterday. With their cries and body language, they can only express the vibrations of what they are feeling right now. Yet we are not animals; we have highly developed intellects. What to do with them?

The way to integrate the higher, knowledgeable intellect while staying in this innocent mindset of eternal nowness is to apply conscious grace to the primal spontaneity of voice-movement therapy—in other words, to singdance. For the arts of music and dance involve great intellect, without involving time-specific words.⁵

For when one performs voice movement therapy, even as the rational symbolic mind lets go of its customary control, a scintillatingly beautiful and fascinating opportunity appears to the intellect: that of gracefully heightening the primal, spontaneous expression into the realm of music and dance. This is analogous to the way authors like Shakespeare heighten regular speech into poetry, but instead of words and the verbal sense, we use principles of dance and music, which are the heightened versions of movement and vocalization.

3 It has been said that we are to become like children in order to enter heaven.

4 Through the Looking Glass, Lewis Carroll

5 I want to acknowledge here that certainly there can be, and have been, very powerful songs whose words and music combine to create an emotional effect that affirms a valuable message and changes the minds and lives of the listeners. Many such songs have uniquely and positively affected me, and one could certainly dance to them, using the traditional methods of finding movement that fits with the rhythm and imagery of the song.

For example, I can find a rhythm in the repetition of a particular walk that grew out of my breath. I can exaggerate an emotionally initiated physical shape into its most extreme, athletic incarnation. With a partner or accompanying instruments, I can tune the pitches that my rough vocalization suggests, even by sharpening only microtonally, to intervals whose relationships with the other sounds resonate with our emotional state.

Most importantly, I utilize the physical principles of singdancing. These principles help a singdance become far more physically and visually stunning than voice movement therapy ever is. When applying the principles, I break them down into these steps in this order: move from the deep seed of emotion, breathe during moves that allow for abdominal expansion (in any direction), vocalize the exhalation and allow the movement to affect the vocalization. Using this order we can see how different singdancing is from traditional vocal technique in which the singer considers the vocal line first and moves his or her body only to support the singing. Singdancing could be called backwards singing, because the trick is to consider movement first. Once the movement affects the voice, the resulting vocalization contains a rough shape out of which the composer whittles the details of melody.

So now we see that all the inner composer/ choreographer needs to do with the newly mined jewel of expression is polish it up a bit, perhaps cut it so its many facets may shine, and utilize the physical principles of singdancing. This strategy amounts to a conscious addition of grace. These conscious applications of grace do not hide, but rather enhance the original primitive and spontaneous nature of the voice movement therapy. Now we're singdancing!

The reason the opportunity of heightening a spontaneous expression into a singdance is so valuable is because the conscious addition of grace can bring your own state of mind to a higher perspective from which it is easier to unconditionally accept your emotion by seeing, hearing and highlighting its inherent beauty. For all of life is vibration, and dissonance and harmony are relative concepts, measured from one pitch relative to another.

No emotion has a negative effect once it is viewed from a higher perspective. Instead, the vibrations of the emotion seem like music and dance. The expression is deeply satisfying and the emotion changes automatically to a lighter energy. That is why the act of singdancing a "negative" emotion does not embed negativity in the mind, only positivity.

Thus, singdancing clarifies and uplifts negative emotion. Often then we know what action to take in the real world, and clear words come to us to communicate, when previously we had felt stuck and speechless in a lack of understanding of our feelings. Then we may feel so well that our singdancing becomes an affirmation for healing.

Now the act of releasing becomes the act of creation. For from the higher perspective we can create affirmative visions of the future. By dancing, we learn how to embody the joy of these visions in a palpable and powerful way—acting out the joy as if we are actually experiencing it. In addition, creating music with our voices affirms and even demonstrates that we ourselves create our reality. For the vibrations we create by singing, we also hear and respond to—they

become our very environment. Whether harmonious or disharmonious, this environment comes from our own mouth. There can be few experiences more powerful. Dancing and singing, we are then using so much of ourselves that the mind begins to believe the experience of joy is not just a performance, but is actually happening from the inside out.

Singdancing individually may lead one to realize that it is very hard to keep a melody going all by oneself, when one needs to breathe much more often due to simultaneously dancing and of course as a solo instrument it is difficult to establish a sense of harmony. The answer to that is, of course, that the only thing better than a singdancer is two singdancers, or three, or four-- preferably five, to create full harmonies and continuous sound. And this leads us to another powerful metaphor of life: we need each other to create the experience of harmony, even though we are wholly expressing ourselves. Since harmony is a relative concept, when more than one person is singdancing, we can create harmony. Without anyone else to relate to, you cannot be inherently harmonious or dissonant. Luckily, no man is an island. We live in the context of the cultures and subcultures of our nations.

This fact brings us to the culturally evolutionary benefits of singdancing. Many of our current cultural beliefs condition us to ignore the body. Yet any kind of dance is a direct affirmation in favor of the bodily experience. Many religions of the east consider the body the sacred temple for the spirit, challenging the western religious practice throughout the centuries of prosecuting dance as a potential form of devil worship, or at the very least, an inappropriate focus on the body. I believe many ills have come to society by denying or repressing the body, but I feel great compassion for our forefathers, because it is a natural error to try to forget the body when one's physical existence is so exhausting. For centuries, humans have survived hard manual labor, sickness, and natural disasters. We taught ourselves to store up our treasures in heaven. To me, the classical music of Bach and Mozart seem to express that paradise which existed only for the rich or in the supremely imaginative minds of the composers. Everyone believed the afterlife was where we would be freed from the limitations and the suffering of the body. Yet the human mind went on searching for knowledge, and now, the tools of our scientific progress have given many of us longer lives, greater health, and so many modern conveniences that we have time to do what we love most. Many of us no longer have to use our bodies so long, so hard, so much. But the pendulum has swung to the other side of denial, for these same conveniences take us out of our bodies. If one is conditioned thus to ignore one's bodily experience, one can hardly be expected to exercise or notice when one is overeating. So much time is spent at computers, at desks, in cars, in front of a television set, that many people still do not have an experience of life that integrates their emotional life with their physical life.

Contrarily, music has been a favorite art form of Christian religion, probably influenced by the scripture, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord." Music is highly intellectual, therefore acceptable to our predominantly mental culture. But the reason Bach, Mozart and Beethoven continue to hover for centuries in the general psyche of our culture is because our very molecules still need the

messages contained in their music.⁶ Perhaps if the music had a physical life, expressed through singdance, humans could actually manifest paradise. The act of singdancing thus becomes an even deeper challenge to tradition and an even greater declaration of the validity of experiencing spirit through the body, as it combines singing, the most accepted music and a highly valued expression of most western religions, with dancing, the most rejected art form of those same religions. In singdancing, the angelic intelligence listens closely to primitive outbursts, and naked expression aspires to conscious beauty. Heaven descends to earth, and earth ascends to heaven.

“At the height of intelligence,
holding the animal’s mouth open
encourages love”

--Strength, “The Rimur of the Major Arcana”

Wonderfully, because singdancing uses only our voice, mind and body, all of which we were born with and would have on a desert island, the act of singdancing contains radical implications. They are: we are self-sufficient and whole and we are inherently good. This is not to say that anyone who uses an instrument such as a violin or a paintbrush, or god forbid a computer like what I’m typing on now, does not believe themselves to be inherently good! I am simply pointing out that *when* one is using only one’s body and voice, naked as the cave days, one cannot help but affirm the idea, and send the message into one’s consciousness, that one is inherently good, and contains within oneself all the tools necessary to create art that reflects one’s experiences, reverberates one’s vibrations and affirms one’s visions. Therefore singdancing, a performance art without tools, is a celebration of the toolmaker. For at last our tools have freed us long enough to enjoy ourselves-- embodying, feeling and expressing well-being. The result, by simply celebrating ourselves as we are, is adding grace to ourselves.

“Let yourself shine out
on the garden you’ve grown up
to play without handles in harmony!”

-- The Sun, “Rimur of the Major Arcana”

But don’t take my word for it—or any other words, for that matter. The only way to appreciate singdancing is to experience it yourself, as audience or performer.

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Vanessa M.M.A.Nowitzky

singdancer@gmail.com

6 Fabien Maman, Music in the 21st Century