

German Dance Medicine in Basel

German Dance Medicine Association

Report: Annual Symposium

The city of Basel, Switzerland, lies cuddled on the Rhine river, with many houses from the middle ages gracing its streets. France is just three and Germany only seven kilometres away. There is a hospitable atmosphere: aside from German, you can often hear French, Italian, and English being spoken, and strangers with quizzical facial expressions may easily be approached by citizens who offer help in finding the way. In this manner, numerous dance enthusiasts did find their way to the Scala Theater on the week-end of the 18th to the 20th of May for the yearly Symposium of Dance Medicine, presented by TaMeD e.V., the German Dance Medicine Association. Here they learned more about different medicinal aspects, including the neurological, as indicated in the title, "The Nerve to Dance." Because of the generous financial assistance offered to TaMeD e.V. by the Swiss Interpreters Guild, S.I.S., the conference was able to be presented with simultaneous translation, enabling the participants to listen through headphones to the lectures in either German or French.

A high level of specialized knowledge was offered in this conference, fulfilling the expectations indicated by the doctor titles preceding the names of numerous lecturers. These came not only from Munich and Berlin, but also from Zurich, Lausanne, Den Haag, and London, among others. Professor Dr. Werner Mueller, himself a native of Basel, is one of the most highly recognized Swiss specialists for the treatment of joints. His lecture, together with that of his fellow citizen of this second largest Swiss city, Dr. Victor Valderrabano, presented a basis for understanding the most frequent injuries among dancers, with an in-depth examination of the anatomical-pathological situation in the feet. In that segment of the conference Dr. Boni Rietveld, den Haag, also discussed neural entrapments in the legs while Peter Lewton-Brain, Monaco, showed the results of a study on the optimal nerve firing patterns in the calf. Later, Peter also elucidated this work with the calf in a workshop. The interaction of these four speakers painted a complex picture of functional units of this most important area of the dancer's body.

But these four speakers were not alone in offering useful information. Since neurology is also involved with the psychological, the dancers' emotional realm was also discussed in the introductory block of lectures. Emotional intelligence, a theme which made a big sensation in the past decade with the book by Daniel Goleman, was discussed in this conference by Thom

Hecht, who worked on this program with authorities on the subject at Yale University. This presenter accommodated that knowledge to the specific needs in ballet. Gert-Jan de Haas from Delft, raised the mirror question for us, in analysing the sensory feedback being used in dancing. The absence of the mirror during performances, along with the fact that “you can not dance and watch at the same time,” make the use of this traditional element of the ballet studio a debatable topic. The question of absolutism, which was left open to apply to healing arts, dance class, or life in general, was presented by the renowned psychoanalyst, dance critic, and theatre scientist from Zurich, Dr. Richard Merz.

These first themes found their complement in presentations of the final day, when methods for facilitating more effective work in the traditional training were presented and validated. The French contingent, represented by the Parisians Nathalie Schulmann and Patricia Zaretti introduced perception of the body from the inside, with their “Analyse fonctionnelle du Corps dans le Mouvement Dansé” while Prof. Annemarie Autere from Nice described the neurological connections to the core muscles and their great importance for the dancer. One of the fascinating alternatives for improving the work of dance students was presented by Dr. Anita Ginter, from Freiburg, Germany. In her practice, she uses osteopathy and Applied Kinesiology to deal with persistent reflexes left over from early childhood. If such reflexes are not overcome during the early phases of life, then the movement qualities of the adult dancers can not approach the actual human potential. Resolving such developmental difficulties seems a challenging, necessary work for those treating young dance students.

Additional important perceptions of dance medicine were presented by other well-known members of the dance-medical community. Dr. Carlo Bagutti, who attends to the contestants of the Prix de Lausanne, discussed the topic of healthy bones in adolescent female dancers. On a related point, Dr. Pia-Maria Wippert discussed the negative effects of dieting on the stress reactions and the associated risk of developing eating disorders. TaMeD’s board member, Dr. Elisabeth Exner-Grave mentioned the alarming increase of new HIV infections during her elaboration upon the possibilities to try keeping this viral disease in check.

Between all the lecture blocks, the participants could choose from 26 different workshops and four discussion groups to intensify their understanding and have a chance to physically incorporate the knowledge presented in the symposium. Aside from the Franklin method, Pilates, Gyrokinesis®, and mental training, additional subjects were Rolfing, Alexander

technique, dance therapy, hypnosis, and contemporary improvisation, just to mention a few. Dancer career transition was also the subject of two such sessions. Often the theme of the earlier lectures could also be more intensively discussed in associated workshops.

The conference participants had the opportunity to enjoy a new work in the local alternative dance scene, in a hall which formerly was used to train horses. The Kaserne Theater was arranged to have the audience on two sides, as opponent players of the oldest known board game, the royal game of Ur. Based upon actual Mesopotamian archeological finds, the stage setting was divided into squares, where pentagonal block figures were first seen haphazardly distributed, as if just uncovered from their earthy grave. The game began slowly, built up in various configurations of its five dancers, went on to a charming pas de deux walk on the lined-up blocks, then increased in speed and variety to a lively finish. The fact that the choreographer Cathy Sharp herself took part in the conference, and that some of her dancers acted as impromptu interpreters for various workshops on the same day as their evening performance added a welcome connection to the local dance world.

But of course, the Get Together Party was the highlight of the whole three day affair, so much to say to so many participants, we just felt the need for many more hours devoted to this interaction. Perhaps we just have to return to the discussion when we see each other again in Dresden, the second to fourth of May, 2008, for the next TaMeD symposium. Then we will be speaking about “Growing together – dance and medicine” and our loyal helpers from the Palucca School in that city will be able to stay in their own town.

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