**Social Movement Theatre Case Study**

**Dance in community as an art form.**

**Sonia Mets**

My Case study today is community dance workshops as an art form.

And specifically I would like to present our idea of Social Movement Theatre.

I would like to start with the idea of the dance in community or community dance. Which is probably not so new. And most of you are already professionals if this field.

We already know that community dance is any form of dance that is suitable for children, adults and seniors ( all non professionals). The forms vary from traditional dancing to dance theatre and therapeutic dance.

Probably dance in community at this point is getting more and more popularity in each country. As a means of first of all therapy and well being.

As for Greece, Athens specifically, lately many programs took off and therefore make us very very happy for that.

There are different dance programs from Onassis Cultural Center, Niarchos Center, National Ballet and Opera house for people with movement disabilities, poor vision, for people over 65years old, for children, for schools. Different programs for prisoners, for children of Roma and refugees. Special program “Open Schools” is open for all dance forms for community in public schools now. The tremendous work of Dora Stratou center approaches large part of community in Athens and from CID UNESCO center Athens.

Therapeutic dance – primitive dancing, dance therapy groups and etc are very very popular right now in Greece.

So, What can we say, dance in community flourishes and becomes more and more popular every day, helping to resolve social problems, health problems, mental issues , racial issues and just improve our lives. ( Although I don’t say that there are NO problems for organizers and curators and creators of these programs but this is the whole different subject and presentation).

**The question that arises while watching and participating in these programs is -**

**Is there anything MORE that CAN be done or SHOULD be done?**

Of course you would say “there is always more to be done in dance, it’s dance!” You can jump more, practice more, try different form of dance, different communities and etc.

So, this question – “Is there anything more that can be done” was our main question 4 years ago – what more can be done? Should it be done?

Going slightly back, after a brief 10 years of professional dancing ( totally unsuccessfully), I started to create movement and dance programs for people over 70 years old, for children of immigrants and just for people in community.

Of course I was full of joy, seeing all the benefits from the programs – children were happier, fights in school among different racial groups would decrease, health problems would be a little bit more bearable. So, actually, it was very productive.

**But for once again, something bothered me and I wondered – What Am I missing? Are we missing something in our work?**

**What was it?**

I started to look closer to the participants of my movement and dance groups

Usual pattern of movement class asks us to copy certain movement and to maintain it. “Copying” gives student a safe environment to work in, a feeling of being safe to experiment.

Although they were all trying to copy my dance style and technique and exercises, I noticed ( as probably all of you with your students- that during the small breaks, during the class, after the class **they would move in a different** way, in a way that was more interesting for me to preserve and to watch then to teach my own style, certain technique and to direct them).

Their original movement, the original movement of a person with his or her background, with his or her history, with his or her roots and ancestors, experience of life, fears and hopes, was very very interesting, devastating and fascinating and actually DIVINE.

I asked myself, how can Giselle of Svetlana Zaharova make most of people cry and feel during her performance, while watching and admiring her line, harmony and beauty and how can I show the same harmony, the same balance, the same beauty that I see in the original movement of an everyday person dancing and moving with his or her soul.

Well, you would say - big news, big discovery, ..people are talking about this for the past 100 years…..there is so many forms for that – improvisation, body contact improvisation, free movement, and etc. Express yourself, what’s the problem?

You are right. And yet, this idea, this thought that one of our main purposes on earth is CREATION, to CREATE, this idea made me to search more.

Each person is first of all is interesting and devastating as an authentic creator, as a mover as a dancer….. of his or her life if you want…..

**The idea that in each of us there is a divinity – which expresses though gesture - this DIVINE ABILITY to create and create through body expression, though movement and dance. – That was the central thought that urged me to try more.**

**After understanding this clearly, the next question was -**

**What’s the next step? What do I do?**

The idea is not so new, it is more of a remembering something that you have already known.

**To sum up: - what do I have**

* I have a group of people, who are interested in movement and dance.
* I recognize A CREATOR in each person, I recognize A DIVINE ORIGINALITY of movement that is beyond traditional dance, beyond improvisation – it has to do with roots and our cosmic presence.
* and I want to preserve the movement originality of performers in a form that is suitable for the audience.

So, what do I do?

**First of all I create a safe environment.**

We wanted to create a safe environment, in order for movers to feel safe to continue to search for the final form of what we were doing.

Also, we needed a structure, we needed a social prototype.

The environment in our case was found in a concept of “ A GAME”, “ A PLAY”

To create a safe environment for a game, for a play is to call something “THEATER” – theater is safe, theater is something where play is allowed, theatre is a common concept, theatre is something familiar.

And that is how we started to combine .

We combine:

* DANCE and MOVEMENT CLASS
* RESEARCH movement LABORATORY
* A STORY ( either from classical literature, for example ‘Romeo and Julliet” or a concept that worries us, for example the idea of freedom, the idea of a good lie or a bad lie and etc, or personal story)
* COSTUMES
* PROPS
* PERFORMANCE – CONTACT with the public
* DISCIPLINE AND PROFESSIONALISM in turn of seeing our work, being responsible, being very organized as in professional theatre.

So that is what we did.

Using the model of theater, we create works though movement and dance research.

We try to PLAY, we try to be at the same PROFESSIONAL – meaning – being truthful and sincere to our goal

We create a STORY in which----we find and preserve our original movement that respond to the needs of this specific story

Usual steps is our work include also

* Props
* Lightning
* Music
* Creation of movement vocabulary
* Working with literature texts
* Learning new dance or movement techniques

I am passionate about creating and improving a dance- movement company where usual people, after work, most of the time tired, with whole bunch of problems, come to our movement laboratory and through dance and theatre can travel and create and experience a small fairy tale with true ending of their own.

Our goal is to continue our research, to create programs where teenagers and adults can experience the magic of movement, music, storytelling, creation and performance, connection with audience. To create the environment where they can stretch their limits and become gods and rulers of their own lives.

We have a lot to do – our next goal is to make our performances interesting and useful for the audience.

And our constant goal is to try to purify the form and to work on our movement expression as on an art form.

**Is this form suitable for everybody?**

I honestly cannot answer this question but I will give it a shout and look forward to working absolutely with any group of people. And try and find out.

**SO what’s new, you would say? What did you discover? What are you telling us?**

Well, maybe there is not much new, maybe it is only a beginning, maybe we are not so right about some things…maybe ..and I am sure that we will find out but for now – we have achieved

* a creation of our SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEATRE
* Social Movement dance programs
* and Creative projects in community focusing on preserving the authentic movement of any person in a form of performance and storytelling.
* and of course being sure that……we have constantly to ask ourselves the question

**– WHAT MORE CAN TO BE DONE** in our work, in any kind of dance, in any kind of art form, in any kind of program? We are dancers and creators – HOW further can we go at this very specific point?

…because probably – we should do that, because probably somebody out there needs that……and first of all we ourselves really need that.

**Thank you very much for listening and reading.**

**Thank you for your time.**