

Annette Walker - Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund Report

Associate Artist at Atlantic Center for the Arts Residency #169

New Smyrna Beach, Florida, USA

Sunday 12th May - Saturday 2nd June 2018

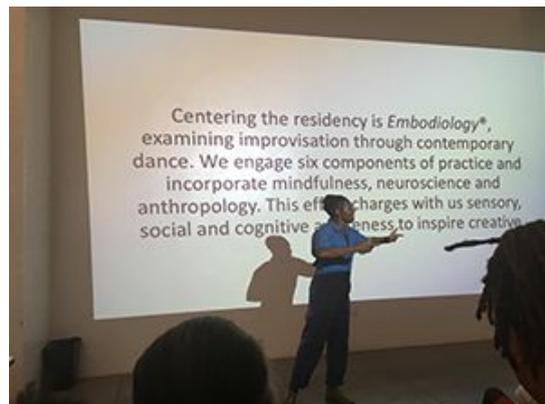
Project summary

The purpose of my trip was to explore the improvisational movement of tap dance, incorporating both the upper and lower body. The aim was to explore different approaches to creative techniques for style and expression in performance that can also be incorporated into teaching dance and music workshops.

Improvisation has been the foundation of my tap dance career but there are few opportunities to work on the practice as a profession. Dr Wray's Embodiology® workshops at the Atlantic Center for the Arts (ACA) Residency #169 provided an opportunity to explore and interact with music and rhythm outside of the usually structured tap dance class, workshop or jam.

Residency Statement¹

During the residency the associate artists are introduced to Embodiology®, a neo-African mode of performance-as-improvisation, and through daily workshops, which involves [sic] active physical participation and generous reflective discussions, a wealth of self-knowledge is revealed.



*Dr S. Ama Wray's Master Artist Outreach presentation,
22 May 2018*

Atlantic Center for the Arts Mission²

Atlantic Center for the Arts is a nonprofit interdisciplinary artists' community and arts education facility dedicated to promoting artistic excellence by providing talented midcareer [sic] artists an opportunity to work and collaborate with some of the world's most distinguished contemporary artists in the fields of music composition, and the visual, literary, and performing arts. Community interaction is coordinated through on-site and outreach presentations, workshops and exhibitions.

Summary of my three week journal

ACA residency #169 included a Master Artist for dance/movement, poetry and visual arts. I was one of eight associate artists for Master Artist Dr. S. Ama Wray's Embodiology® programme. We were also joined by visiting dance artists throughout the residency.

¹ <http://atlanticcenterforthearts.org/master-artist/sheron-wray/> May 2018

² <http://atlanticcenterforthearts.org/> May 2018

The residency began with a welcome dinner on Sunday 12th May. The artist introductions during the first week were the only compulsory activity throughout the residency and provided the opportunity for associate and visiting artists, across all disciplines, to share information about our work and ourselves. For my five minute introduction I included a piano medley, an improvised tap dance and a short talk.



ACA grounds, May 2018

During the residency the Embodiology® sessions were timetabled for weekday afternoons so I was able to decide what to do with my mornings and evenings. I began with a flexible schedule, only setting a time for my daily breakfast (to work around jetlag). After breakfast I found myself gravitating towards the music room to make use of the Steinway piano and the drum kit although I didn't plan any particular exercises in the first few days. Since I hadn't brought any music books with me I shifted between working from memory and improvising. I only began using my tap shoes towards the end of the week when I felt inspired to experiment with the rhythms of Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 3, K.281 in B-flat major. This led me to develop a new set of technical exercises for both piano and tap dance.

In the mornings, the drum kit in another part of the music studio (the sound-proofed room) became the place I immersed myself in polyrhythmic exercises, working on patterns and coordination which I would then modify for the piano and for tap dancing. I made use of the theatre space in order to switch easily between piano and tap dance and would use the music studio just before lunch for my drum workout.



ACA Theatre (Photo by LaTosha Pointer)

On Thursday I woke up "hearing" a new music composition in my head which I captured (over several attempts) by singing the melody into my phone before falling back asleep. It had been a few years since I'd come up with a new music composition. Later that morning I focused solely on playing and writing down the music. I was reminded of the importance of *making* time to just be creative. The residency was beginning to feel like a blissful artistic retreat!

In Dr Wray's Embodiology® workshops, we began with meditation before shifting to movement-based warm up. Our group was made up of a mix of dance artists from dance styles with a strong basis in rhythm and a lineage to dance of the African diaspora. So despite having a varied vocabulary of movement, there was a deeper connectedness through rhythm which was inspiring to both watch as well as interact with. It encouraged a sense of exploration.

¹ <http://atlanticcenterforthearts.org/master-artist/sheron-wray/> May 2018

² <http://atlanticcenterforthearts.org/> May 2018

I found I was quite comfortable dancing without my tap dance shoes for most of the first week, when exploring Embodiology® techniques (some of which crossed over with tap dance and jazz music practices). When I did eventually put **on** my tap shoes, it not only added sound but required an awareness of the need to adjust my physical movement. I became hyperconscious of the surface of the floor (with less friction or grip in tap dance shoes), the subtleness of control through weight transference and the relationship between the range and speed of a movement. For me, the differences in the micro-physical movement brought a deeper understanding of the technique for the tap dance vocabulary.



ACA Dance Studio, May 2018

By week two I was in the swing of a daily routine. Having lunches, dinners (and desserts) catered for, access to a dance, music, theatre space and other facilities within a five minute walk of my room, made a noticeable impact on the extra time available to pace myself in activities throughout the day. I was able to embrace and enjoy all the opportunities available to explore, create and play as well as interact and socialise.

The Embodiology® workshops were intended for dancers and musicians and during the second week we were joined by a percussionist, pianist and trumpeter. The workshops in the second week further highlighted some of the improvisation practices I had become accustomed to through jazz music but also introduced new approaches, as well as the opportunity to engage in the practice with musicians and the other dancers. I even unexpectedly found myself playing the piano for the dancers in part of one of the sessions.

Whilst the first week passed by at a slow, steady pace and week two settled into a routine, the final week seem to fly by. In-depth discussions were integrated into our workshops which would cover supplied materials read in our own time as well as collectively watching relevant videos. Often the workshops required mental focus alongside physical movement and I was grateful for my aerial circus and fitness practices that kept me in good shape since it's very difficult to concentrate if you get physically tired.

As the end of week three was coming closer I still hadn't decided whether or not I'd be performing at the informal sharing. Many of the other dancers had begun working on pieces from the weekend and some were collaborating with associate artists from other disciplines. I remained open-minded about what I might do but found that in needing more space and time for myself I was unusually reserved in getting involved with other projects.

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² <http://atlanticcenterforthearts.org/> May 2018



In the ACA Whatmore Commons, May 2018

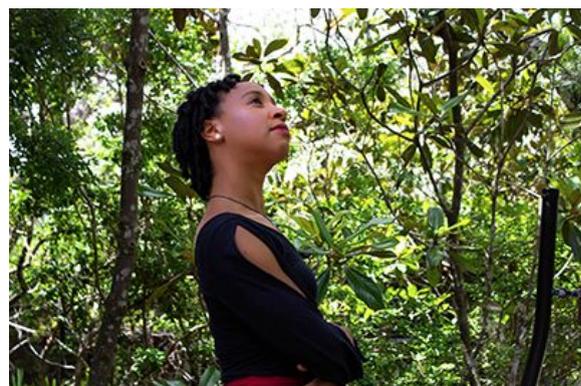
The residency and Embodiology® helped reaffirm my own journey through music and dance. It was helpful to have the time to refresh some of those exercises. It was valuable to be able to spend time listening, observing, playing and reflecting. What became apparent towards the end of the residency, through both the Embodiology® workshops and the residency itself, was the importance of developing a regular active practice, much like a routine or ritual, that helps towards both the expected and unexpected. It was a good reminder about how much preparedness is required for performing improvisational pieces.

Baby Squirrel

The residency provided an opportunity for associate artists to share work without it being compulsory. In keeping with my own “no pressure, no stress” approach I had not planned to take part in the performance as a soloist unless I had a specific piece (I was doing the group dance improvisation piece). However the night before the informal INSIDEOUT sharing of work a bright idea popped into my head. This wasn’t a new idea, it’s something I’d started on a few years ago, but I realised this was the perfect opportunity to try it out. It was storytelling with tap dance. I had previously flirted with the idea and had been journaling ideas and scripting short stories but what I needed to do was experiment through practice. I had begun my practice when co-hosting circus cabarets but now I needed to take the risk in improvising and storytelling on my own. And so I picked one of my unscripted tales (a true one) to play with and my *Baby Squirrel* tap dance number was born.

Each time I practiced the number, it came out differently. I worked on developing specific elements such as steps and movements. Experience had taught me that this was part of the process and that what I might use would only be decided in the moment. The performance itself brought the unexpected, as expected. I was both relieved and glad I went through with it and hope to develop it further through future performances.

My experience on the residency highlighted the importance of having time and space to practice one’s craft. From an early age I’ve been “playing” and creating exercises to challenge myself. It was good to be reminded of the value in having this time. It’s where the magic begins and although it doesn’t necessarily blossom into a performance it always contributes to the journey in discovering new possibilities.



Annette Walker (Photo by LaTosha Pointer 2018)

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Acknowledgements

The Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund helped significantly towards the the trip since the return flight to Orlando, Florida formed the largest cost. Initially, I was unsure if I would be able to afford to attend the residency until I received the LUTSF award. I set up a GoFundMe campaign to further help towards all costs and raised £365.

I intend to share my associate artist experience of the ACA Residency as article for dance magazine/newsletter as well as sharing it with ACA, Dr S. Ama Wray and other fellow *Embodiologists*® from the residency. Journal highlights, photos and videos from the trip will also be available on my website <http://www.annetwalker.co.uk/tag/lutsf/>

	<i>Lisa Ullmann Travelling Scholarship Fund</i>
	<i>Atlantic Center for the Arts, Residency #169</i>
	<i>Dance of the African Diaspora and One Dance UK</i>
Embodiology®	Dr S. Ama Wray
Many thanks to friends and family who supported my GoFundMe campaign	

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