

Lisa Ullman Travelling Scholarship Fund
'Discoveries in and around the Bay area'
Report for Katie Keeble
San Francisco, USA
June 2015



During my month-long trip to San Francisco, USA I have had the opportunity to meet wonderful artists and people working within dance and dance therapy practices. My report encompasses all my experiences while living in the Bay area, which includes performances and community events, as well as participating in classes and workshops and observing current practices with local charities. I am very appreciative to LUTSF for their support helping me to fulfill my professional development project in America, which has inspired me to continue my career along this path. Thank you.

The first weekend after my arrival in San Francisco, I was invited by my friend Nancy to the opening of Alice Street Mural, a community event in honour of significant artistic leaders within the Oakland community, in connection with the Malonga Casquelourd Centre for the Arts, next door. Nancy was performing with her Samba group Fogo Na Roupa (Clothes on Fire), as the leader of their group is painted in the mural.

Nancy is performing as a Bayana, traditional African Samba dancer, and as their theme this year is water, many of the movements reflect the Brazilian Orixá (goddesses) for sweet water and the ocean, including paddling in the river with your hands, washing the water over your face and combing your hair while looking in the mirror.

I learned about the history, culture and different styles of Samba from talking with Nancy, and it inspired me to go to an Afro-Brazilian Dance class at ODC Rhythm and Motion dance school in the Mission area. The class was taught by Tania Santiago, from Bahia, the heart of African influenced Brazil, and performer and choreographer of her own company, Aquas Dance Company. The class was a mixture of technical exercises from the style and learning a short sequence of movements that we practiced with the live drums. Two musicians were playing large and smaller drums very loudly so that the sound vibrations flow easily through the body and are expressed out in the dance movements. We learned movements from Oxossi, the Orixá (god) of the Forest; the movements were representational of shooting a bow and arrow and bringing the hunt home over the shoulder. At the end of class we created a small ceremony to thank the musicians for their playing and we finished in a large circle once again.



The next day I went to Mount Tamalpais across the Golden Gate Bridge to take part in the Planetary Dance with Anna Halprin and the dancing community from the Bay area. The Planetary Dance is a ritual ceremony with the theme of Freedom, Solidarity, Equality



and Peace in the world. The sunrise ceremony was at the very top of the mountain where we gathered to offer poems, dances, songs and music towards peace in the world. The view was



stunning overlooking the clouds above the city and valleys below.

The Planetary Dance started as an annual ceremony after six women were murdered on the mountain 35 years ago, the local residents became afraid and Anna wanted to

create an event to reclaim the peace and sense of safety on the mountain. In honour of the women who were killed we walked in silence around the top of the mountain and paused at each direction reflecting on our past to the South, our present to the East, our future to the North and what is beyond space and time to the West.



The second part of the ceremony was at Santos Meadow where we created the dance, including running and walking in circles around the live musicians in the centre. Before we run we say to the circle the reasons why we are running and what we would like to heal in the world, for example 'I am running for all people to be healthy



and happy'. We also drew our reasons on the chalkboard in the picnic area.

The following week I went to see a performance by Axis Dance Company, an integrated contemporary dance company for disabled and non-disabled dancers.



The company performed three pieces by three different choreographers. The most moving piece was by Joe Goode, called *'to go again'* 2015, about real-life experiences of veterans returning from Iraq or Afghanistan with serious brain injuries, amputations or PTSD. The mixture of expressive arts, speaking, dancing, singing and images of characters and personalities was really evocative and compelling.



During my stay I took various contact improvisation classes and jams across the Bay area, and for the Summer Solstice I participated in the Global Underscore by Nancy Stark Smith in Berkeley.

It was wonderful to experience different contact improvisation teachers, each imparting their nuggets of wisdom and joy in

moving together. Dancing in duets, trios, quartets, and as a whole group we practiced spirals into the floor, up out of the floor, sharing weight, folding and finding flow and momentum with each other as we dance.

The Underscore is a score (see left), which maps out the process of dancing together as a group, coming in and out of contact improvisation. The score is a way of marking down the stages in a contact dance, which we flow through together.

The 20 different stages include moving in connection with the earth, moving within your own kinesphere, moving within another mover's kinesphere as well as your own, dancing in contact with any number of movers, grazing: where you can move on your own and observe as well choosing where to enter into a dance, finding a resolution together and coming to stillness.

I really enjoyed dancing the Underscore because for me it brought a new awareness of the space with other movers in the group, adding another level to the dance encompassing compositional elements, such as space, timing, dynamics, trios, and quartets, in a very inclusive way. I look forward to dancing in the Underscore again soon.

As part of my project I was volunteering and observing children's dance classes within therapeutic settings. *Dancin Power* are a charity based in Oakland, offering free dance classes to hospitalized children, including patients facing chronic and life-threatening illnesses. Vania Deonizio is the founding director of *Dancin Power* and was sharing with me the work they are doing in Oakland and the Bay area. We visited dance classes in the playroom at the Children's Hospital Oakland open for all children including patients and their siblings, the Camp Creating Confident People at a nearby school for children who have suffered physical or sexual abuse, and the George Mark Children's House, a freestanding pediatric palliative care center, where we worked with two individuals with severe learning disabilities.

The sessions offered vary between free expression, learning simple sequence material, and gentle contact or touch with one to one sessions. The music is a powerful stimulus and way to bring ease,

sense of safety and flow of movements within the environment, placing a frame and structure for expression to take place. Seeing the positive and life changing work *Dancin Power* are delivering across the Bay area was hugely inspirational for me on my journey into dance as a tool for healing within a therapeutic context. I am keeping in contact with Vania and looking forward to developing my practice with her charity in the future.

The second volunteering opportunity I participated in was with the Children's School of Dance in San Francisco, where I assisted with integrated creative dance and yoga classes for children age between 3 and 11. I supported two children, one 5 year old girl with Down's syndrome, and an 11 year old girl with Cerebral palsy. My role with both children was a mixture between playing together in an inclusive way with other children, and being a support for them during the classes. The classes were really lively and fun for all the children, using storytelling and imagery to capture the imaginations and spirit of wonder as the children moved in the space together. The children loved being outside in the garden area too where we held games and dancing activities for them to enjoy the sunshine.

During the final week of my stay in California I participated in the Summer Workshop with Anna Halprin at her Mountain Home Studio, in Kentfield (Marin County). We were a group of 28 dancers, illustrators, artists, actors, bodyworkers, among many more. We looked at different scores for improvisational dances, exercises, talking, drawing, and learned more about the Life Art Process that Anna and her daughter Daria have created for the Tamalpa Institute (dance therapy training programme). The Life Art Process is a way to bring the creative process into our lives and our lives into the creative process, using the tools and resources we have as creative artists to develop and shape our life path. Part of the process is called RSVP, which stands for Recycle or Resource, which is when we create a score, see what comes up or happens, use this as a resource for generating new material, create a new score and continue; Score which is something we create with people, in space and time; Valuation, which is a word created to combine value and action and encompasses a way of thinking with non-judgemental eyes, seeing value within our actions; and Performance, which is more about thinking of how to move from A to B than I've got to get from A to B.

Within the scores we created we played with elements of touch, being in contact, drawing our dances, dancing our drawings, spatial relationships, imagery, responding to sounds and our environment, spending time in nature in the woods, releasing tension, opening our eyes and ways of seeing, finding our centers, feeling grounded through the feet, lifting up to the sky through the hands, singing with our voices and creating art with our bodies.



This year Anna Halprin is celebrating her 95th birthday and we had a small party and birthday cake to mark the occasion. There are many special events taking place worldwide in her honour, and she is performing in her own piece during one celebratory performance event at her Mountain Home Studio in July. It's been a pleasure and joy to meet her and dance at her Mountain Home Studio during this week. I look forward to many more dances to come in the future! Thank you so much!

Katie Keeble
Cambridgeshire, UK
June 2015