

## LISA ULLMANN SCHOLARSHIP FUND

New York - Daily Klein class

May 26<sup>th</sup> - June 7<sup>th</sup> 2009

My own personal reasons for travelling to New York were to discover some new thoughts on the functions of the body, and their mechanics. So I went to take daily class in Klein technique. My purpose of the trip was achieved by physically going to daily class. In terms of learning, the trip opened my mind and has triggered a trail of thought I feel far from the end. Is there an end? I feel I still want more brain food from Klein. It was most definitely only the beginning, although I am reflecting and finding ways for it to feed into my current work and current Postgraduate studies.

I did research Klein intensive and weekend courses, but I did not find any (at least not for my time of travelling). There are two classes in Klein technique. I chose to take class with Susan Klein. I wanted to follow my trip through with one practitioner, as it was only a short time for learning. The other class took place on the west side of Manhattan and was taken by Barbara Mahler. At one time Susan and Barbara worked together, but they do not lead classes or workshops together anymore. I found it useful to get one philosophy on Klein. My report has quotes from daily class and quotes from Susan Klein during the classes I took with her. As I have not got all the answers from my trip I reflect and also ask questions.

Stuart Waters

### REPORT

In the time that I had in New York, my exploration of Klein technique was extremely brief, considering some people have dedicated their whole practice to it. So, although I am truly thankful to have gone to New York (Klein's birthplace), to have met, and taken class with Susan Klein, I left realising I had not even begun to scratch the surface in terms of learning about the technique, and the potential it has.

My time in New York really enabled me to have an introduction to the technique, its relationship with the anatomy, and also Klein's personal relationship to my own self-discovery, practice and delivery. The first reaction to a Klein class was frustration. As dancers we are very used to a whole class packed with a range of physical experiences and information. That happens fast to keep us on our toes and test our physical boundaries. In this class, my first twenty minutes was spent being still with my eyes closed as I internally "stack my bones", followed by very slow roll down and up of the spine, finding places to stop, places to learn about "your spine". Now I have looked back over my classes I realise I was frustrated, as I wanted answers, I wanted to understand the technique and find out what it could do for me? As I have become aware, the "answers", don't happen fast.

Repetition is a characteristic of Klein. Each class, each day started in the same way, as did slow mobilization of the shoulders leading into figure of eight exercise with the arms which, in turn, built into small turns. Occasionally the ballet barre came out and we went through tendu, port de bras and degage. During the first class, a discussion occurred between Susan and the participants. Discussion and reflection is all part of the Klein class experience. Sometimes a question would come to the attention of Susan, which would then get broken down and opened to the class. This particular discussion was based on the question "is tucking our tail bad?" Does this opinion about tucking the tail lead one to injury; is it such a bad thing if it achieves good alignment of the spine?

Susan Klein often verbalised wide questions. On reflection on these statements, I often thought and questioned what one tells a participant during class. Do you have a strong personal belief that you want your classes to believe? Or, do you present options to create thought and strength of mind? I think is a mixture and dependant on who you have in front of you. After my first experience I reflected on this introduction to Klein technique. I pondered on: why such a slow pace? Why was it necessary for the whole class to be the same dynamic? It appears the slow pace is aimed at getting to know and be familiar with your own anatomies /personal habits, to focus on the mechanics of the joints and bones in motion. And through time and repetition one's body will slowly change "little by little" Susan Klein. I started to think how can I apply this to my own practice and my teaching practice when leading young people into dance training, slow focused movement could really benefit people into a different understanding of their own bodies and movement studies. But how do you make such slow movement for a duration of time interesting to young people? My thought is that one has to be in a certain place within their training and career to appreciate the technique.

Another class that sticks out in my mind, was a class based on the exploration of joints.

"what joint through action, leads one into the next?"

e.g. - a back bend at the bar, arm in fifth position in order

- hand
- shoulder
- head
- neck
- chest

(Susan Klein)

I took two classes also with Athena, (she works in place of Susan on some classes) who was at one time a student of Susan Klein and now teaches the technique herself. Athena had a different approach, bringing a skeleton, mats and cushions for floor exercises. The framework of the class covered the same topics, but her teaching style created a seminar feel as we were moving through the exercises. Athena constantly fed the class with questions based on her own self discovered experiences and information. Athena did appear to share the same thought on the technique though. Like Susan Klein, Athena frequently made statements, some made one reflect more than others, but usually they were all rather thoughtful and aimed to trigger thought. Here are some I wrote down.

"slowness is for the consciousness, so one can feel the skeleton"

"tailbone through the centre of the legs towards the heels"

"rolling, up through the spine" the, skull lifts from the heels, feel the connection with the floor always"

"when you get to a difficult place, pause, breath as that's where you will start to lead from a different place"

"where is the initiation"

"everything is interconnected"

"there isn't just one route for the tail"

Here I have described an exercise set by Susan Klein: "in pairs swing your arms forwards and back and watch each other. Watch what happens."

Discussion:

"As, a dancer we get in the way of what is natural with our joints. The, training and information from past leaders moves us away from the natural movement of the joint. Naturally there is rotation in the joint as the arms swing forwards and back, nearly everybody controlled this rotation in some way."

Mat work with Susan Klein -

The whole session was set on the sacrum, and feeling the weight drop through our bones into the sitting bones and into the floor.

"Right now a particular pattern within our body may not be a problem, but this information is useful to know, to know where the blocks are, or the discomforts, this information could be useful later in life, to have this understanding of your own body."

From my experience I believe I have found the beginnings of a new approach to my own practice and my delivery within dance education and training. Klein has opened my mind and encouraged me to search for subtlety within my work. Quality not quantity whilst planning a class was something I have decided on and was strengthened by the structure of Susan's classes. To always be inside my body and mind, and to always be connected. I know this sounds obvious, but it is always good to be reminded from a different approach and school of thought. Klein also encourages safe practice and knowledge of anatomy, to understand the functions of the skeleton and where we could potentially go within our own limits and understand those choices.

On the surface we all look the same. When we watch a ballet bar it appears everybody is moving in the same way. If we slow everything down, and analyse everything, we will see things are very different. For me this is Klein, I could share some personal discoveries about my spine, but I think it is only fascinating if it is your body. Klein is subjective study for your own body and its path to change and development.

Stuart Waters