

Back to School: Synaesthetic Spreads the Viewpoints Virus



In the past year, Synaesthetic's instructors worked with high school actors and dancers on a number of occasions, including workshops conducted in NYC and invitations to teach in Florida. We found the teens to be eager and adept at learning physical theatre techniques, including the Viewpoints and Grotowski-based exercises.

Synaesthetic Theatre has always been dedicated to furthering the artist's craft through trainings and workshops. Last November, we were given the chance to share some of our favorite techniques with high school students. About 60 actors and dancers from the Cobb County Center for Excellence in the Performing Arts in Mableton, GA visited New York City to participate in workshops in acting, monologues and clowning. Most of the students had been given a taste of the Viewpoints at home in Georgia and Synaesthetic was asked to expand their knowledge with three 2-hour long sessions during their stay in New York.

Led by company member Tina West and assisted by members Clinton Powell and Margaret O'Sullivan and Synaesthetic performer Joy Lynn Alegarbes, the stu-

dents (up to 22 at a time) were given a ride through space, time, shape and movement. The students took to Synaesthetic's playful style of the Viewpoints quite readily and enjoyed the opportunity to have fun. For the company members, it was inspiring to watch the young adults let go and fully inhabit their bodies in the moment.

This first foray (as a company) into teaching teens was quickly followed by an invitation from Douglas Anderson School of the Arts in Jacksonville, Florida. Executive Producers and frequent co-directors Chris Nichols and Joy Leonard flew down for some intensive work with acting students and a series of sessions with the 10 cast members of *Metamorphoses*, who had just begun rehearsals the previous week. Over 4 days,

Chris and Joy led 3-hour Viewpoints workshops with the junior and senior acting classes and 4-hour rehearsals with the cast incorporating Viewpoints, Grotowski techniques, and other physical approaches to character and scene work. All of the students and especially the cast members stepped up to experience and claimed ownership of this method of working. It was truly a pleasure and challenge to work so intensely in a short time with young people who were physically fit and ready to take risks in their exploration of the actor's craft.

While working in Jacksonville, Chris and Joy were invited to bring other company members down to teach more workshops as part of the 2006 Florida State Thespian Festival. Michael J. Higgins, the

(Continued on page 3)

2006 Production Update from Board Chair Jessica Baker

The beginning of 2006 found Synaesthetic Theatre wrestling with continuing growth, conceptual quandaries and tantalizing opportunities.



In late fall of 2005, our board was approached by a San Francisco-based arts incubator to develop some ideas for a multimedia performance and street theatre installations based on a novel they published. For the past two years, this SF company has commissioned artistic work based around the novel including music and visual artwork, and they were now interested in finding a multimedia theatre company to create a performance which would incorporate much of



the previously commissioned work. After some initial negotiations, we agreed to a six-week development program for company members to develop production and street theatre concepts. Synaesthetic members as well as guest artists from our last production worked physically for the six-week period while a group of directors, designers, and production staff developed artistic framing concepts, storytelling and framing devices, and production timelines and budgets. At

the end of the development period, representatives of the SF company traveled to NY to observe a physical session with the performers interspersed by discussion with the production/concept team. They were very impressed with our work in this development period, and offered Synaesthetic an extremely ambitious opportunity to develop the show and street theatre concepts in New York, and then tour the street theatre to 20 US cities and the full multimedia production to 5 US cities.

For several weeks our board struggled with the enormous scale of the offer, the speedy growth that would be required, as well as the dilemma of creating a work of

(Continued on page 4)

Courage to Create

For the second year in a row, Synaesthetic Theatre joined forces with the incomparable Jonathan Hart Makwaia to produce and participate in *Music of the Voice: Song and Improvisation*, a 2-day vocal workshop. The weekend of February 25th and 26th found 14 performers -- company members and performing artists from far-reaching parts of the country and Canada -- united to experience Jonathan's unique and organic style of teaching voice. Tina West recaptures the exploration.



Participants brought with them a wide range of experience, from those who had studied with Jonathan at NYU's Experimental Theatre Wing to those who had never met him, from song-writers to those just finding their voices. All had different goals for the workshop from the very specific ("I want to sound like Sarah Vaughan") to the very broad ("I want to surprise myself") and



Jonathan skillfully guided us individually toward achieving those goals.

Beginning with vocal release techniques and partnered massages, the singers began by exploring the state of their individual voices. Using musical improvisations, participants shared their voices with others, creating landscapes of sound that ranged from pieces that could have been musical

theatre songs to spoken word to explorations of sound reminiscent of John Cage.

Jonathan gently and firmly led the performers to a love and acceptance of their own voices while nudging them out of their pre-conceived limitations and notions of what singing is. One of the participants noted that it was some of the most courageous work she had ever seen.

For additional information on future Synaesthetic workshops, please visit www.syn-workshops.com. 

Back to CAC

At the heart of Synaesthetic's activities is a community of creators who are constantly seeking ways to improve their technique and explore the self-scripting process utilized in creating original pieces of theatre. To that end, Synaesthetic holds regular invitation-only workshops for its collaborating artists with the goal of refining and expanding "how we do what we do." James Ford comments on the most recent laboratory.



Creating Art Collaboratively (CAC) is an annual physical performance lab for the artists who are familiar with Synaesthetic's methods and who are interested in exploring its boundaries and developing the creative vocabulary of the company's process. Over multiple sessions, a constantly shifting ensemble made up of current and past company members, actors from previous shows, and a roster of designers come together to engage in a mini-rehearsal process. The process is similar to that of a full production, but without the looming inevitability of opening night that can discourage bolder and riskier choices. The techniques that Synaesthetic uses to create work are put to the test and new methods are explored in the hopes they can be incorporated into future shows.

This year's CAC focused on a question that often crops up during the company's creative process: Where is the line



between theatre and dance? The work of Synaesthetic is highly physical, but often has elaborate intellectual and emotional content. This forces the ensemble to draw on the vocabularies of multiple disciplines that can at times seem in conflict with one another - utilizing dance techniques to refine a monologue or creating a movement sequence to write a two-person scene.


"Even as a physical actor, the process of translating concepts and impulses into move-

ment has always remained a bit elusive to me," said workshop attendee Alexandra Gray. "The exercises we worked on really helped illuminate how to create cohesive dance pieces that are abstract but also clearly 'about' something."

"[CAC] is absolutely essential to keeping my skills

and psyche sharpened," said company member Suchan Vodoor. "It also provides collaborative opportunities that would not always be appropriate in a rehearsal process. When free from the constraints of developing product, I transform and explore my artistic process."

"CAC also lets us play with artists who may not be available for our looong, intensive rehearsal processes, but who love the collaborative process of making art," said Joy Leonard. "I had a great time working with this year's group, both planning and participating in piece-making experiments."

CAC has become an integral part of Synaesthetic's long-term artistic development, allowing the company to stay creatively engaged in its process between productions. It is also one of the many unseen puzzle-pieces that often have the biggest influence on the shows the company eventually brings to its audience. 



(R)Evolution Through Movement

In January, Synaesthetic Theatre produced a two-day workshop with Wendell Beavers, exploring the relationship between the compositional awareness of the Viewpoints and the experiential anatomy work of Body Mind Centering and Developmental movement. Several company members took this opportunity to return to and deepen their understanding of Wendell's approach to kinesthetic movement and the Viewpoints, and Suchan Vodoor describes the weekend.



Each day began with an extensive warm up based on Developmental Movement, a technique which organizes movement using locomotive forms nature has developed through evolution. This evolution of locomotive forms roughly parallels the phases in the development of a human child, from fetus to toddler. During this warm up participants are able to expand their movement vocabulary through an exploration of slithering, crawling, and walking.



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After the warm-up Wendell lead the group through a structured series of Viewpoints improvisations. The work was firmly grounded in an experiential approach to the Viewpoints, and the Developmental work helped to focus the performer's awareness on the sensation of movement. But from this groundwork Wendell also led workshop participants to explore the presentational quality of Viewpoints- how, in many ways, the form allows a performer to work with a choreographer's cognizance of how his/her work is viewed by an audience.



This duality between physical experience and conscious choice helped to keep everyone challenged and present. At times it was a difficult balancing act, but it allowed the participants to explore one of the many paradoxes in performance- how does an artist keep it interesting for an audience yet still have an honest and uncompromised experience as a performer? There was no definitive answer, but throughout the workshop there was a sense of fulfillment in diving headlong into the question.

For additional information on future Synaesthetic workshops, please visit www.syn-workshops.com. 

Support Synaesthetic



Want to help us continue to offer affordable workshops and original productions that are challenging and spectacular? You can!

Synaesthetic Theatre is a non-profit organization dedicated to creating new multimedia theatre with a social conscience, and supporting artists in their

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efforts to collaborate across the perceived boundaries of media and methodology. Any contribution that you choose to make, whether financial or "in-kind," will be tax-deductible. In-kind donations include goods and services such as theatrical, film or sound equipment; raffle prizes for our benefits; printing; fabric; legal assistance ... you name it, and we can probably use it.

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Back to School *continued from page 1*

director of *Metamorphoses* at Douglas Anderson, is also the State Director for the Thespian Festival, which is now the largest state thespian festival in the US. Chris, Joy, Tina and Aubrey Hardwick flew down in April for 4 days of workshop insanity and fun in Tampa, and discovered that the Festival had brought together 7,000 students and teachers from all over the State -- taking over a convention center, a huge performing arts complex and the entire

hotel where we were housed! Students who came to perform and compete also had the option to choose from hundreds of acting, movement and voice workshops over 3 days, including Synaesthetic's Viewpoints Levels 1 & 2, Advanced Viewpoints and a jam-packed Grotowski class. Several members of the *Metamorphoses* cast were assisting Mr. Higgins with running the festival and had spread the word about Synaesthetic's

workshops. Teachers and students coming out in droves and had to close some of the classes and turn people away. It was a great time overall, and we've been invited to return for the 2007 Festival. With this many teenaged performers getting hooked on physical theatre -- "feeling" the space and discovering their bodies and senses in new ways -- well, we're expecting the revolution to begin any day now. *Bye Bye Birdie*, and hello *Hamletmachine!* 

art from a story that many of us were ambivalent about. Through this period of negotiations, our company explored many important questions about our rate of growth and future goals, our openness to commissioned work, and the tensions surrounding commercial opportunity and artistic integrity. After much consideration, the board decided to offer a compromise which better fit Synaesthetic's creative process and current capabilities. We reentered negotiations with those parameters in mind, and were unable to reach an agreement with the SF company on the ultimate shape and structure of the project. So, having learned a lot about the art of negotiation and our own values as a company, the board has now moved on towards planning our

upcoming season with a renewed sense of energy and direction.

Prior to this detour, we were poised to begin work on a Dystopian Cabaret - a collection of performance pieces and vignettes which would allow us to incorporate current events and reflect the turbulence of the social and political climate. We've chosen to return to this concept, as



well as the workshop performance phase which was originally scheduled for spring '06 and will now take place in the fall. Having explored the allure of a commissioned commercial venture, we now look forward to sinking our collective teeth into the type of original work that our audiences have come to expect from Synaesthetic Theatre -- challenging, multi-layered, and emerging from the combined perspectives and energies of our wonderfully talented company of performers, designers, and production staff. So keep checking the website for updates on our fall workshop performances and spring '07 premiere. We're ready to tackle Big Brother!

For more information about the new show as it develops, please visit: www.synaesthetic-theatre.com/cabaret 

the viewpoints: a weekend workshop with Synaesthetic

Over the last several years, Synaesthetic has served hundreds of artists in the NYC area and beyond with our one-day Viewpoints workshops. This summer, for the first time, we are offering a 2-day intensive weekend workshop led by company members Aubrey Hardwick, Joy Leonard, Chris Nichols and Tina West. The 12 hours of instruction and exploration over 2 days (with 1 hour lunch breaks) provide a highly concentrated environment of experimentation, enabling the workshop ensemble to experience an exponential learning curve. We'll pay particular attention to skills such

as pattern recognition, giving and claiming focus and developing physical, emotional and conceptual themes.


This new format accommodates both first time Viewpointers and experienced improvisers, delving deeply into the unique properties and possibilities of Space, Time, Shape, Movement, Logic and Emotion. With the time afforded by the 2nd day, we will also work with found text, music, and improvised words and sound -- working towards coherent, articulate and fully-embodied improvised compositions.



For additional information please visit www.theviewpoints.com. 

WHAT:	A weekend intensive in viewpoints and composition.
WHERE:	Chelsea Studios 151 West 26th Street
WHEN:	Saturday, July 29th and Sunday, July 30th (10:30am - 5:30pm)
TUITION:	\$200. <i>(save \$25 if you apply early)</i>
APPLY:	www.theviewpoints.com or call 212.696.6721 to request an application.

www.theviewpoints.com

Synaesthetic Theatre 

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syn·aes·thet·ic, *adj.* characterizes a work of art which produces harmony out of different or opposing impulses.