

The Artist Chronicles

The Performing and Teaching Artists of the Music Center - Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County

Quarterly Publication

Issue 4 Winter 2010

Cultural Events

Workshops

Performances

Research

Training

Partnerships

The Identity of Culture



Winter is upon us, well, if Southern California really does get a winter that is. Kwanza, Christmas, Winter Solstice and Channuka are all looming, if I have left anyone out my apologies, space limitation. The point I really want to make here is, we celebrate this time of year in a multitude of ways that embrace our different heritages and diverse spiritual beliefs. But, these holiday celebrations all have one thing in common...

...they are celebratory! They are united by the common universal themes of the family, the power of nature and the desire for peace - at least one hopes for that!

It seems only fitting that this issue of the AC delves into the landscape of culture, diversity and heritage. And examines how we as artists bring an authentic and rich cultural tapestry to our students.

So whether you light candles at this time of year, gather round a cradle or dance around a tree, I hope these reflections by Music Center artists will give you that warm fuzzy feeling, and a sense of hope for the coming year.

Happy Holidays and a wonderful 2010 to you all!

Madeleine Dahm
Designing Editor/MC Artist



**Mark Slavkin -
Vice President for Education
The Music Center**

The Music Center - Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County provides the finest in arts education to more than 250,000 students and teachers annually.

As a premier performing arts center, the Music Center has built its educational programs around the unique role and expertise of the professional artist. The power and impact of our work comes from the interaction of outstanding artists with students, teachers, and family audiences. Accordingly, the Music Center invests substantial resources in the identification, training and ongoing support of these performers and teaching artists. The artists selected for the Music Center roster are widely recognized as leaders in the field and are sought out by other arts presenters and arts education organizations around the United States.

The Music Center is proud to present more than 100 world-class performing and teaching artists from around the globe to share their knowledge, skill and artistry.



The Artist Chronicles - Winter 2010

In this issue you will find:

- Reflections on Cultural Diversity and Authenticity • Humanitarian Arts Projects • Artists in Focus • Making Connections Through Art • Plus our regular commentary page by featured writer Peter Kors



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- MOSCOW NIGHTS
- BALLET FOLCLORICO DO BRASIL
- ANDREW GRUESCHOW
- PAUL TRACEY
- THE TINKERS

INSIDE COVER:

- INCA, THE PERUVIAN ENSEMBLE
- JOHN ZERETZKE
- NOAH ANDZONGO
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“Change is inevitable, except from a vending machine.”
- Robert C Gallagher

The final three months of each year seem to be all about dramatic transformation. We see it in nature, leaves turning colors, and in people. It's as though we have the need try on - wittingly or not - as many outfits, personalities and temperaments as possible before the current year shifts into the next.

It all begins, of course, with Halloween, that endlessly popular holiday that gives us permission to be anyone or anything we want to be. This year I decided to participate. With the help of a black suit and black shirt, white tie, mustache, sunglasses, and fedora, I managed to look like something between Chef Boyardee and a “Sopranos” cast member wannabe. That evening, I found myself surrounded by vampires, Playboy bunnies, characters from “Wicked,” and cross-dressers, each inhabiting their chosen role with a commitment that would rival any regional theatre stage actor. But then again, a professional actor nowadays doesn't usually need to fuel himself or herself with alcohol to stay in character, I think.

Then comes Thanksgiving, when we endeavor to set aside our petty resentments and hostilities and become the generous hosts, grateful guests, loving friends and forgiving family members we imagine ourselves to be. Some travel great distances to be with those normally appreciated only from afar. Some, too busy to eat a daily breakfast, find time to plan, shop for, cook and present an elaborate meal. I have a picture of my family, immigrants from Holland, at a long-ago Thanksgiving, our first “real American” holiday. At the center of the photo is my Dad carving an oversized turkey, the rest of us wide-eyed with the spectacle of a table overflowing with food featuring that turkey, a miniature plastic American flag prominently stuck in its breast. We were thankful for being in America. We were transforming ourselves into Americans!

And that brings us to the various winter festivities, when we celebrate the rebirth of the sun, the triumph of good over evil, the transformation of scrooges into benefactors.

But this is also the time when we are most likely to transform into the very monsters we didn't think we were. I've seen drivers who normally wait patiently for a red light become so engulfed in road rage they deliberately caused an accident. We've all seen reports of persons being trampled by crowds of frenzied bargain shoppers. Sadly, the list goes on.

But being people, we manage to mutate some of the less horrible of the horror stories into funny anecdotes, quirky memories and learning moments. And then it's the New Year. And what do we do? We make resolutions. We set out to transform ourselves yet again, promising to become a different kind of person next year. Happy New Year, everybody!

PETER KORS

INSPIRATION, CULTURE AND OUR ART
Experiences With a World Music Artist Educator
By John Zeretzke

Csabi spoke with a thick Hungarian accent, his black gypsy eyes dark and mysterious as he grasped his violin, slowly shook his head sideways as he said to me, "Nem, nem." No, no! I was not playing the melody right. Csabi was a primas, or lead violinist and most respected in the Tanchaz or dance hall tradition of Transylvanian and Hungarian music. He was also Rom, or of Gypsy origin, and one of my teachers of traditional music from various regions of Hungary. I would often record him playing a melody when we were learning a tune. Then, when the next lesson would take place, I would play him back the melody I was earnestly working on. It was never quite right, no matter how many recordings and transcriptions I wrote down; it never matched up with the version of the tune he would play the next time. Elements within the melody were always changing and shifting. I suddenly had a revelation! Part of the tradition of playing this style of music was to never play it the same way twice! My teacher was showing me this through the process of banging my head against a brick wall. Thankfully, I finally saw the light. Some concepts we learn about cultures are not laid at our feet. We have to be open to new ways of thinking and approaching art. Our job is to sometimes leave behind attachments to certain ways of learning or thinking so we may be open enough to learn without judgment or bias.

Exploring Cultures

Cultural background and perspectives in music have not only been a major focus of the music I have been interested in throughout my life, they have been one of the defining factors in why I teach music to children. The thrust of culture in traditional music is one of the most important concepts in being able to appreciate music from other countries. It's been a long journey from the classrooms and school auditoriums in the 1980s, around southern California, to where I find myself today - an artist educator, teacher, performer and mentor to youth. When I was Music Director with the AMAN Folk Ensemble, we helped to pioneer curriculum in the schools for the Music Center of Los Angeles Education Division we focused on music and dance of other cultures, even before the term World Music or World Dance hit the scene. Cultural awareness was embedded within our work as artist educators and we were constantly refining our focus as we expanded our content. AMAN gained national recognition for its multicultural work in American schools. Being able to place students within a cultural context and have them learn dance movements to a Bulgarian dance or play an unusual rhythm from the Middle East was a way to get them to understand how people move, play and celebrate within a culture.

Flutes Across The World

Recently I took an old lesson and activity I have taught with students and teachers to a new level. What if I had students during a residency program build not one whistle-style flute, but two? Then they could give one away to a child in need in another part of the world. In July of 2009, I had the opportunity to take 120 flutes made by students in Ojai, California on a humanitarian mission with Operation Smile and Knightsbridge International to Jolo, Basilan and Zamboanga, remote regions in the southern Philippines.

During the pilot program, 4th and 5th grade students in Ojai, California made their two flutes from PVC plastic pipe. Each was corked and painted, and decorated with ancient symbols of friendship, good will and peace. They learned a popular folk tune on their flutes, "Bahai Kubo," that is known and sung throughout the Philippines. They played instruments from the Philippines and heard demonstrations of mouth harps or kubing, Kulintang (pitched gongs) and slit drums. Each flute that was given away to a child in the Philippines had a laminated photo of the student who made the flute, signed with their first name.

The mission was a smashing success and has morphed into an international program for children and music. For me personally, it pulled me out of a dreary stretch in my arts education career during trying times. I needed

growth and expansion within my own work. I needed to go further into my work, into new regions and ideas. I reconnected to what I felt was most important in all my music and art work - to inspire, to motivate, to guide and to bring joy to others. I wanted to help them discover and share their joy of music and the arts. I was attempting something new and bold - bringing students closer to the source of human compassion and cultural understanding, in a way I never could have imagined years before.

Cultural understanding, in this case, went from the classrooms here in America to another culture far away, distant and remote. The immediate understanding was touching and compassionate for students in Ojai, knowing that their flute were going to some unknown 'flute friend' across the world. Some kids teared up in the first introductory lesson. They were immediately on board and open to learning. They learned about traditional Filipino music and culture with their hearts and eyes wide open. It was 'real' that their flutes were going over-seas. In the Philippines, the students and teachers could not believe that, as Americans, we would care so much as to send flutes as gifts. Teachers and principals were in tears. The social impact was tremendous. Many in the social, political and military arenas stated that this was the real way to achieve peace in the world. When I returned to the U.S., I shared in assemblies at each school where the program started. The students in Ojai saw the children who received their flutes. We had gone full circle. The responses from students proved to me that this was one of the most effective cultural programs I have ever had the opportunity to design - children reaching out to children in other parts of the world.

Staying Fresh And Thinking Differently

I mostly like to think of my path in life as a guide, one who open doors to new experiences for others and as a human vessel that creates experiences in sound and sight. Our unique vision as artist educators shape the world in which we work and live. We open doors to new ways of learning through the arts, but our own batteries must be charged from time to time. We need to stay fresh, alert and true to our own art and creative process. Art is connecting, emotional and expressive. Art is what we live. And to this day, I still try to never play a melody the same way twice.

John Zeretzke has written numerous World Music ballet, dance and theater scores for such companies as The Royal Danish Ballet, The Ohio Ballet, The Ice Theater of New York; also, Shakespeare's The Tempest, As You Like It and King Lear for Shakespeare Santa Cruz. Zeretzke's score for The Joffrey Ballet of Chicago was featured in Robert Altman's docu-drama "The Company". Zeretzke has composed numerous scores for films including over eight motion pictures for Paramount Pictures, Disney, Discovery Channel and Kushner-Locke Productions. He has recorded with artists Michele Polnareff, Liana Foly, Angelique Kidjo and Kenny Loggins.

In 1999 he won the P.A.S.A. Award, (Professional Artist Service Award), a lifetime achievement award for his work in arts education in the state of California. He is associated with numerous leadership and educational organizations in the state including the Music Center Performing Arts Center of Los Angeles County, Orange County Performing Arts Center, The California Arts Project and Literature Projects and The California Leadership Academy. Zeretzke is a guest composer and musical artist at numerous Ronald McDonald and American Cancer Society Summer Camps for children with cancer in California and nationwide.

John is Director and creator of the Goin' South Band and the Salaam Ensemble, masters of Middle Eastern music. He received the highest Medal of Honor from the White Helmets of the United Nations for peace keeping in the world today for his joint efforts with Knightsbridge International and Operation Smile in their recent July 2009 Mission to the southern Philippines with his newest program, Flutes Across The World.

'FLUTES ACROSS THE WORLD'

Flutes made by students in Ojai, California - for children in Basilin, in the Philippines.
(photo: Commander Ramon Mareno)



Artists in Focus - Eleanor Academia and Dr. Bobby Rodriguez



The ancient, haunting melodies and compelling rhythms of Kulintang gong and drum music are presented in this critically acclaimed performance by World Kulintang Institute Ensemble. Led by founder and artistic director Eleanor Academia, the group is dedicated to the preservation and presentation of the centuries-old indigenous music of the southern Philippines. Taught and shared through the oral tradition, Kulintang musicians must memorize hundreds of melodies and rhythms if they wish to master the art form. Today, the music is performed in only a few villages, rendering it in danger of facing cultural extinction. This enchanting, colorful performance, which is presented in traditional costume and supplemented by narration and audience participation, enables students to discover and enjoy a culture and a style of music that are as rich as they are unique. Founded in 1988 by Executive Director and resident master artist, Eleanor Academia, the World Kulintang Institute and Research Studies Center, Inc. is dedicated to the preservation, education and presentation of this centuries old music from the Southern Philippines. The World Kulintang Institute has performed at festivals, universities, schools, communities and private special events, including openings for the LA Philharmonic, Vice-President Al Gore, Pan American 2002 World Drum Festival and many others.

Under the direction and leadership of Grammy-nominated musician Dr. Bobby Rodriguez, a native of east Los Angeles, Jazz Adventure introduces audiences of all ages to America's indigenous music - jazz. Under the leadership and direction of Grammy-nominated musician and native Los Angeleno, Dr. Bobby Rodriguez, Jazz Adventure features a roster of seasoned professional musicians who have performed together throughout the southern California area. Their combined professional credits read like a listing from "Who's Who in Music" and include performance and recording work with such legends as Quincy Jones, Ray Charles, Herbie Hancock, Poncho Sanchez, Bo Diddley, Ike and Tina Turner, Louie Bellson and others. These dedicated and talented performers are deeply committed to the task of expanding the musical experience of children. They abide by the words spoken to Dr. Rodriguez by his mentors, who told him to "be professional and keep learning!" Dr. Rodriguez is himself a mentor and teaches at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, and performs with the Clayton Hamilton Jazz Orchestra.



CUTURAL DIVERSITY
by Paul Tracey.



Our editor, Madeleine Dahm (she sounds very English, but isn't that a German name?), asked me to write an article on Cultural Diversity. Aha! She must know me well enough to know that I am Mister Cultural Diversity! But doesn't she also know what a highly charged topic it is, how sensitive people are about anything that is at all connected to 'race'? You have to be so au courant these days to know how to thread that needle Politically Correctly. Can I do it? Me, a white South African?

Perhaps I have gained some discretion at my age, but in my youth I thrived on being non-PC. In fact, that's the only reason I am a Californian.

"Wait a Minim!" was the name of the stage show that my brother and I, and a small team of other performers, created in South Africa. It was a musical revue that poked fun at several different ethnic groups. We were equal opportunity satirists! Designed to have a six week run at an intimate theatre in Johannesburg, it ran for seven years worldwide. I was smart enough to save my money and in 1976 bought a small house in the Palisades where, ever since, I have been enjoying the air that comes directly from Japan, picking up a hint of pineapple as it blows past Hawaii.

My brother had been the president of the folk song society at Oxford University and had amassed a wonderfully diverse collection of international songs. This became the foundation of our show. Then we added the other elements of theatre; our cast, the dancing, the mime, the appropriate musical instruments which we hurriedly learned, the costumes, the stage set and the lighting.

Sorting them into national groups, we picked the songs we liked best. Then we decided which of them should be presented straight for their musical appeal, and which of them could be used in satirizing the foibles of various nationalities.

We had, for example, a couple of French songs we wanted to include. OK, so what's funny about the French? Ask us in America and we'll tell you how the French love their food and how rude they are to us. We in South Africa didn't have that problem with the French, but we knew that they loved 'love' - l'amour - and that they specially loved bicycling - the Tour de France.

So we created our French sketch!

My brother and I played our guitars while our French speaking tenor, Michel, handled the lyrics to an ancient ballad, "L'Amour de Moi." Just beautiful! Then gliding onto the stage came our lithe ballet dancer, Zelide. She wore a diaphanous gown and 'glissaded' liquidly while gracefully plucking petals off a rose, en pointe. Gorgeous! That would be have been enough in itself.

But then onto the stage, on his racing bicycle, came the leader of the Tour de France, Kendrew, wearing his yellow jersey. He saw the ravishing woman who was beckoning seductively to him, and being a typical Frenchman, leapt off his bike and went over and danced with her. (They were both superb dancers.) During their pas de deux, he suddenly spotted his bicycle lying on the ground, left the woman, walked over, tested the pressure in the back tire and started to pump it up. But she tempted him back and he came over to partner her. Once more, he caught sight of his bike and returned to it, but again she silently reined him in. You could tell that the poor Frenchman was completely torn between his two passions - l'amour and la bicyclette. Finally he hoisted her high in the air and carried her offstage where there was an enormous crash. He re-entered, brushing his hands off, jumped on the bike, circled the stage and exited. Funny stuff if you know the French and how they behave!

That was gentle satire. We were much tougher on the Germans and the Japanese, but bear in mind that we created this show in 1962 and WWII was still fresh in our minds.

One group we never joked about was Africans. At that time, the world thought that if given the opportunity and freedom from colonial rule, plus a free education, every African would be a successful, perfect gentleman. The arrival of the monstrous Idi Amin in Uganda started to erode that daydream and today's Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe (don't get me started on Zimbabwe!) has finally shown us that African leaders are equally capable of being tyrants as any other world leader.

We played our African music straight. No funny stuff. Not surprising, really, because our father was Dr. Hugh Tracey, the leading authority on the music of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. He founded the International Library of African Music and stocked it with his vast collection of recorded music that he'd made in the '40s and '50s.

Paa - as we called him - knew the African character pretty well and was neither illusioned nor disillusioned by political events. What he did have was a tremendous respect for the culture of all the different tribal groups he had encountered on his extensive travels, and this is what we demonstrated in our show, "Wait a Minim!"

Of course, being in South Africa during the apartheid years, we could only have either a totally black or a totally white cast. What was hilarious about this policy was that backstage we could have anyone we wanted, so long as they were hidden from the audience! We often had one Black man - Richard - and one Indian - Manny. By the time our show got to Broadway, we had a crew of about 15 forced on us by union rules.... dressers, props people, scenery movers and even four musicians who were paid not to be there because we played all our own music on stage.

Audiences who came to see the show experienced a brilliant display of cultural diversity, able as they were to believe for the moment that we were the people we were portraying. We changed nationality simply by changing hats. A Sotho hat made us Africans, a beret made us French, and so on. Because we were determined to be as authentic as possible, we learned to play the correct instruments for every group we satirized: bagpipes when we were being Scottish; Chopi xylophones and drums when we were African; steel drums to back a Caribbean calypso; accordion, clarinet and tuba to accompany an Austrian schuhplattl slapping dance, which, once fully under way, of course got out of hand! Our firm belief was that before we made a mockery of anything, we first had to know how to do it really well ourselves. If you're looking for any wisdom in this article, that was it!

Since leaving the magic of the theatre and starting out as a one-man-showman, it hasn't been quite as easy for me. When I began to perform with Music Center on Tour, I submitted my performance "ABOUT AFRICA" to a panel of judges. The show is filled with my personal knowledge of Africa, being born there and having lived there and worked alongside Africans on our farm; with my father's recordings; with the exotic instruments I play; with a delightful folk story that my father originally collected in Zimbabwe; a little about language, costume and dance... plus a compulsory element - my own sense of humor!

The panel of judges saw only a racist white man. They rejected my show.

Luckily, Joan Boyett, founder and former director of the Music Center's education division, saw the value in what I had to offer and came to my rescue, and I have been happily presenting Africa to Americans ever since. My audiences can clearly see that I have a great respect for the culture that I am promoting.

It's funny that the panel never objected when I sang a Welsh song in my program on Great Britain. They never checked my credentials when I appeared in a kilt and a tam playing my pipes, nor asked for my passport when I put on my deer stalker and sang about London bridge falling down. Maybe I look British enough.

So, now that I've got over that hurdle and can be anyone I want to be, I don't have to! Music Center on Tour makes it easy because now we have a selection of authentic performers who actually are what they are representing!

Or are they?

The Korean Classical Music and Dance Company comes from Korea. Well, some of them do. At least they look Korean! And so beautifully costumed and coiffed; have you seen them?

A Gaelic Gathering: Irish Music and Dance. Well, Maire is not exactly from Ireland, but London's close enough and there are plenty of Irish there!

Kahurangi Maori Dance Theatre of New Zealand. They are a visiting group - they don't live here. Perhaps they are in fact all Maoris.

Now that Malik is gone, am I the only On Tour African left? What?

We definitely need more Cultural Diversity around here! To me, it's what makes life interesting. I revel in our differences.

Long live Cultural Diversity! OK, Madeleine, meine Frau?



EDITORS NOTE:

Editors actual cultural heritage:

"Actually it's English, Scottish, and Irish. We are a pretty multi-cultural bunch. Sister is part Burmese, Aunt is Jamaican. And well okay, I admit it, there is a little German there too, but we don't talk about that side of the family!"

Sharing Cultures and Creating Connections Through the Arts

By Beth Peterson -
in conversation with Leslie Kitashima Gray

Historian Howard Zinn wrote, "What we choose to emphasize in our complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember the times and places where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the power to act." Artist John August Swanson wrote, "Each one of us is part of an infinite succession of caring and compassion." These quotes bring to mind the story of a woman called Moonza, and of my experiences collaborating with her daughter, author, director and puppeteer Leslie Gray. We created a puppet show based on her Mother's personal story *The Pink Dress*. While visiting Minneapolis to see a puppet show, Leslie shared a short story that she had written about her mother's experiences as a prisoner in a U.S. Internment camp for Japanese Americans during WW2. What I appreciated about the story was how well it was written and, also, how amidst its sharing of history, it told the timeless story of a girl daring to be different in the face of immense opposition. The girl in the story had a lot of personality. For me, working on the puppet show provided an opportunity to learn about an episode of history that I knew little about, and through my art-form be able to share this journey with others.

I first met Leslie's husband, Mike, and her Mother Moonza on the morning that we drove to visit the site of the Amache Internment camp in Colorado. Leslie's Mother had been held prisoner there with her family for three years, and it was the first time that she had returned to the site.

We stopped on the way to visit John Hopper, a local high school teacher and baseball coach in the small town near the site of the camp. John has made it a life mission to have the site declared a National Historic Site and to establish a museum and cultural center. John grew up in the town and was greatly inspired by his mother's supervisor at a nursing home who had also been held as a prisoner at Amache Internment Camp. John now volunteers a large part of his time to involve his students in the upkeep of the site and to do one major improvement or reclamation project at the site each year. His students are primarily latino children of local farm workers. The students learn the history of the camp and then travel throughout the state and region to share the stories, hoping to prevent the kinds of policies targeting race and ethnicity prevailing in the future.

The Amache site itself was huge - a barren wind swept wasteland of ghostly barracks foundations. Cold on a windy September morning; almost unimaginable what it would be like on a winter's day. Rattlesnakes rested in the sun amidst the stones. Sky, wind and dust were the most notable features.

Leslie recalls, "*This visit had a huge impact on Mike, who wrote the music for the show. These kinds of places still hold the whisperings of the people who were there and the emotions that they felt. My mother shared a few more stories that I had never heard before as we walked around the site. We looked for the foundations of the barracks room where her family had lived, and visited the cemetery for those who had died while in the camp and the names of those Japanese Americans who had died serving in the US Army when their families were interned in the camp. As we were leaving the camp my Mom said, 'This is the second time that I have been here and the last time I am leaving.'*"

I asked Leslie more about the creation of *The Pink Dress*:

"What was the vision for the work?"

"The vision was to create a work for elementary school and family audiences that could introduce an understanding of how the injustice of history affected the family at the time, and equally as powerfully to share an example of how one child finds the courage to rebel and in so doing can give hope to others."

"What inspired the work?"

"My inspiration was hearing the story from my mother and also the idea of forgetting lessons from the past such as blatant and discriminatory acts committed in the name of justice and defense. When we look back, we see that such acts were not defensive and did not do much good. If we go down that road and round up people just as an ethnic group then we have learned nothing from the past. In current times, when we are being asked to target groups solely by ethnicity, it is important to remember the stories of the past so that we do not perpetuate that way of thinking and repeat the mistakes. When my mother told me this story, it spoke to the issues, not on a grandiose scale, but in the small experience of one family member that can speak to many."

"What are some of the highlights of bringing your family's story into schools?"

"At every school we toured, there were many different cultures in the audience. It is nice knowing that a story specifically from my family's history could have significance to a wide variety of cultures who feel empathy with the story and are inspired by Tzuki's courage. Many audience members of other cultures later share stories of their own difficult experiences that resonate with my own. This speaks to the interconnectedness of peoples' experiences and that helps you to not feel alone."

Leslie shared her thoughts on rehearsing *The Pink Dress* at Centenary United Methodist Church in Little Tokyo:

"The church was established in the early 1900's in the middle of Los Angeles. When most of the Congregation was taken away to the camps, the members of the clergy from other cultures who remained, stored a lot of household things for people in the church. This was one of the few positive stories, as most families lost everything in the years away from Los Angeles. When people came back from the camps or from fighting in the war for the U.S, like my dad and uncle, they had no houses or places to stay and the church let people stay in the choir lofts until they found a place to live. One day, we were rehearsing at Centenary and a family came in who were having a funeral for their mother later in the day. The family watched part of the rehearsal and recognized a character in the show as one of their uncles who had run a hamburger stand in Los Angeles before being interned in the camp. As the family now lived in Atlanta, the show opened an avenue to talk with their children about the history."



The Pink Dress was premiered at the Japanese American National Museum. The show was performed in front of a wooden barracks that had been hand carried in pieces by the Japanese American community and reassembled at JANM from former Internment camp in Heart Mountain, Wyoming. Being in that space on the verge of the first show, we felt a lot of pressure and responsibility to share the story well in respect to the suffering of the people. Suddenly Leslie's petite, senior citizen Mother, who inspired the story, bounded up the staircase at JANM with a giant bouquet of flowers and a huge smile on her face. We then knew that Tzuki, the main character, had arrived and that her spirit inspired us to do the best that we could in sharing her story.

After performing the show at JANM, we had the opportunity to bring the show back to my home in Minnesota for a run at *In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre*. This opened up new avenues of understanding. A teacher I had worked with for many years in Minneapolis, turned out to be herself a former internee. She organized speakers from the Japanese American Community in Minnesota to speak after every performance.

We also recently had the great honor to perform *The Pink Dress* in tandem with the renowned *On Ensemble* at the Walt Disney Concert Hall outdoor amphitheater for the World City series. The Artistic Director of the Music Center, Barbara Leonard, brings groups from all over the world to share cultural understanding through storytelling, music and dance. Each performance is accompanied by hands-on art workshops that allow families to create art and to further explore the featured cultures. Eiko Amano and Peggy Hasagawa developed art projects for the children to enjoy and experience the art and beauty of Japanese and Japanese - American culture.

The Pink Dress is available through the *Music Center On Tour* program. Leslie has also recently written and illustrated a beautiful book by the same title that is available through Amazon.

The Making of A Great Artist

by Aimee Young Hopkins

An old theatre story tells of Fred Astaire auditioning for a musical in his early days. In the director's notes next to Astaire's name reads, "OK singer. Can dance a little." Of course, today we know Fred Astaire to be a dancing legend. This story illustrates just how much the arts are subjective and that opportunity has everything to do with timing, sensibility, and taste, as well as training. Perhaps Fred Astaire became a better dancer as he studied and performed, having been given an initial chance.

A recent article in the NY Times discusses the sale of Frida Kahlo's personal archives - receipts, little notes to herself, recipes, letters, journals, sketches - bought for a small fortune from a lawyer who had purchased them from a wood-carver friend in the Riviera. Frida had bartered these trinkets for a wood-carver's picture frames in 1954, and handed over papers marked, "personal archive of my private life." I was struck by the monetary value of these items which to most would be worthless, simply junk to be sorted through or discarded, yet because of Frida Kahlo's value as a *Great Artist*, they are now treasures.

These stories remind me that art has no cultural value in our society until someone decides that it is significant - someone other than the artist. To make value judgements we must first have the support to create the art and the education to think critically about it. The Visual and Performing Artists (VAPA) Standards were created by the California Department of Education so that we, as educators, could teach our students to observe, create, discuss and critique the arts. The five strands of the VAPA Standards are:

- Artistic Perception
- Creative Expression
- Historical / Cultural Context
- Aesthetic Valuing
- Connections, Relationships and Applications.

Each of these strands are essential to our youth's growth in the arts. Children need to understand and use the vocabulary of their art form. Whether it is Theatre, Music, Dance or Visual Art, it is necessary for them to practice their craft, be able to critique their own work and another's, learn about the art form's place in history, and make connections with other art forms and subject matter. These steps are important to master the skills of any art form.

The artists of the Music Center of Los Angeles County are committed to using these strands in our teaching practices to enrich our students lives and provide meaningful growth at home and school. Whether it is a percussion lesson, a musical theatre production, a watercolor project, or a folk dance workshop, the students are given the best quality in arts education. Many will make the arts an important part of their lives, a sanctuary to express and create. Some will pursue it as a lifelong passion or career. But most will incorporate their artistic experiences into their development as human beings - increasing confidence, improving reading skills, synthesizing rhythm and tempo with mathematics, applying art history to their knowledge of the world's story and so on.

Today's student may only have a few sketches, fragments of a poem or journal entry but they may someday paint like Frida Kahlo. The worst crime would be to judge our students before they have had a chance to blossom and explore the arts. Who knows? Maybe you might grow too, whether you are a Teaching Artist, a teacher, a parent or an administrator. I've seen many a parent sign a child up for piano lessons and then decide to also take lessons, to help their child; then they find a whole new world opening up in the process. Thank you supporters of arts education, for being such a valued part of this exciting process with the artists at the Music Center! We appreciate your support and your commitment to the arts and to the children of Los Angeles.

Aimee Young Hopkins is a Teaching Artist in Vocal and General Music.

Finding the Essence is Essential

Andrew Grueschow



A constant challenge in the life of a teaching artist is maintaining authenticity and artistic integrity in our work. Our time with students is limited, and often they may have limited experience with the art form and culture in which they are engaging. Due to time constraints we must make difficult choices about content, often omitting important, but not essential information. As we adapt our art form to function in a workshop setting, content is made more accessible by simplifying and editing things that would require many hours of individual or group practice. Does the limited amount of technical development that can be accomplished in a series of workshops mean that the workshops can't be authentic, or lack artistic integrity? The answer to this question depends on critical choices made by the teaching artist while planning and delivering the lesson.

One series of workshops I teach focuses on the music and dance of Ghana, West Africa. Students use traditional instruments to play rhythmic patterns as others dance. As I was first planning these workshops, I was immediately faced with the challenge of how much to simplify patterns, and what patterns had to be left out all together. Layering rhythms to create a complex poly-rhythm is an essential element in Ghanaian music, but also requires many hours of practice. Some traditional dance moves were accessible, but others required more complex coordination skills. After all of the simplifying and editing was done, I found myself wondering if what I had created was too far removed from the original piece. Were students truly getting an authentic experience in Ghanaian music and dance? Had things been simplified to the point that the magic that is Ghanaian music and dancing was lost? Arriving at these questions set me on a new path of investigation...

What truly was the magic of Ghanaian music and dance? Surprisingly, I did not have an immediate and concise answer to this question. I could talk for hours about all of the things that were amazing to me about this art form, but I was not sure what it was, at the core, that fueled my passion for it. Why was this art form created? How has it sustained itself for so many years? Why do people in Ghana continue to participate in making music and dancing? These questions had me thinking about my relationship to this music and dance in a new, "big picture" way. Sure, I loved the complex rhythmic material, but it was clear that I had to pull back further than that. I spent many hours thinking about this (still do), and had several discussions with my mentor in this field, Kobla Ladzekpo.

What I found at the core of my art form was the social interaction it allowed and even demanded. This social interaction included exchange of energy between the drummers and dancers, traditionally performing for hours at a time. Social interaction was also evident in the joy on dancers faces as they “lose themselves” in movement and music, and the unity felt by drummers as they focus in order to play together. Suddenly simplifying and editing rhythmic patterns and dance movements no longer felt like I was losing authenticity, but rather I was enabling students to tap into this same core of social interaction with limited time and expertise.

I became much more explicit in my instruction as I tried to tap into this core of social interaction. Students practiced drumming with their eyes looking up from the drums, so they could see the dancers. Dancers explored ways of putting more energy and personal style into traditional dance movements. Closing reflections often centered on various aspects of social interaction. Despite the realization that rhythmic complexity is not required to tap into the core of my art form, I do strive to keep all of my students working in their zone of proximal development. I continue experimenting with how and when I simplify and edit traditional material. I push as far as I can in terms of complexity, but not so far that it gets in the way of my core goal. When the rhythm is so difficult that it can't be played with accuracy for dancers, or when dance moves are so complex that students can't render them, then I know the content is getting in the way of us arriving at our final goal, rather than being the vehicle to bring us to our final goal. My students at Cal Arts do play and dance all of the complex material, but I can't say this makes it easier for them to arrive at this core goal than it is for elementary school students with simplified or edited material.

I continue to strive for authenticity and artistic integrity in all of my work. I believe as teaching artists we must find what lies at the core of our art form. This is what we should be trying to share with our students. We must examine how this discovery will affect content and delivery, and make the artistic core accessible and relevant to students. In short, finding the essence is essential.



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The next 'Artists Chronicles' will be published in the spring Of 2010, if you would like to submit an article please contact the Editor Madeleine Dahm at rodaigon@aol.com

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