

ACCESSIBLE ARTS PRACTICE: AN INTERVIEW WITH MORGAN JAI-MORINCOME PART ONE: BY TIM MCCANN

Morgan Jai-Morincome is an independent community arts worker and educator who draws upon her background in theatre, dance and movement to inform her approach to 'adventurous, explorative, person-centred dance making.' Tim McCann stepped into one of the Radiance project workshops conducted by Morgan at the Ralph Wilson Theatre at Gorman House, and was impressed with Morgan's capacity to integrate dance and performance in an inclusive and fun workshop with a large group of women with a range of abilities and their carers. After that experience, Tim contacted Morgan to arrange the following email interview.

Tim McCann: Are there a set of ideas that underpin your work as a whole?

Morgan Jai-Morincome: My community arts practice is underpinned by the two following values. This is my approach to all my community arts making regardless of the age, background or ability of participants.

Valuing Difference – appreciating difference as a rich source of creative material that increases the depth and diversity of creative experiences.

No Right and Wrong – arts making that embraces and celebrates a broad definition of the medium(s) being worked with.

My interest is in the everyday artist – the person who doesn't identify as creative or artistic yet who given the opportunity discovers their unique way of expressing themselves is a powerful and engaging experience for themselves and others.

TM: You have a history of personal engagement with bellydance as well as other dance training and theatre experience; which aspects of this experience do you bring to the work you currently do?

MJ-M: I have always been involved in community arts and have studied theatre, voice and creative dance since high school. I was fortunate to attend a community school that valued the creative process and encouraged students to develop their own arts practice from a young age. I then attended Narrabundah College where I devoted myself to theatre studies.



I completed a B.A in Educational Theatre and a Graduate Diploma in Education (Drama) at University of Adelaide and more recently a M.A in Cultural Performance from Charles Sturt University.

My experience in performing arts is diverse and at different times in my life I have been more or less involved with specific art forms. I am finally at the stage where I am able to use an integrated approach in my arts practice and incorporate theatre, movement, and sound.

Radiance Dance began as a belly dance performance project as that is where my attention was at the time. I had two young children (and still do) and was teaching belly dance while completing my Masters. I wanted to offer this experience to women who for many reasons were unable to access mainstream classes.

Belly Dance was a wonderful dance form in the first year of Radiance and we had fun coming together to learn the movements, make the costumes and perform at The Chinese Embassy and National Museum. In the second year I identified a need for a broader scope of movement possibilities for dance making as the prescriptive movement vocabulary of belly dance was limiting the group's creative potential and development.

This year I have been able to go back to my roots and use my theatre and dance/ movement training as the foundation for adventurous, explorative, person-centred dance making based on the individual's and group's responses to a variety of themes, ideas and stimuli (internal and external).

TM: How significant is community development as a component of your work?

MJ-M: Essential. There is a strong social justice aspect to accessible arts in terms of addressing issues of social exclusion and increasing access to the arts by all people. Radiance Dance is founded on community cultural development and adult learning principles. It is a place for developing individual skills as well as community

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building using dance as the medium. The community development aspect of Radiance is equal to the provision of a high quality arts process and where applicable, artistic outcomes such as performance. This is reflective of the wider community dance sector where community development and artistic process and product are both valued.

TM: Has the Radiance Dance Project required you to undertake additional training? If so, what specifically? How does this inform your capacity to engage new staff?

MJ-M: Yes and No. In this case the practical experience has provided the learning and my arts practice in this field has developed as a consequence of hands on experience. Having said that, I have a deep love of learning and when I have a passion I fully immerse myself in understanding and researching my passion. I have read everything I can get my hands on as well as attended training with Accessible Arts NSW and Access Arts Qld in a sound and movement framework called SoundCircles™ which I am now accredited to facilitate. I also teach regularly in a school for young people with disabilities, which has been an invaluable learning experience. I make a point of developing my skills through self-learning and whatever opportunities are available to me but nothing beats hands on practical experience.

Being self-reflective in my arts practice and always thinking about how I can improve the way I facilitate, communicate my ideas and enable others to express themselves creatively means that often I find the answers to my own questions. I am also blessed to have a co-facilitator at Radiance, Min Mae, to plan, discuss and evaluate the practical sessions with and to bounce ideas off. I read about what other facilitators and groups are doing around the world and keep myself informed. So much of what we do is hands on – we need people to work with to find out what works and what doesn't.

A perceived problem or obstacle at Radiance has always been an opportunity to do something differently and the participants drive the direction of the sessions depending on how they react to the material or structure being offered. Facilitating Radiance requires constant flexibility and adaptation. I go in with a basic plan but within that plan there is vast amount of space with which to explore based on what direction participants go in.

TM: How is the Radiance Project Funded?

MJ-M: In its first and second year (2005-06) the project was funded by an Innovations grant through Disability ACT. In 2007 it is funded by an ACE grant through the Department of Education and Training. Each year I need to secure funding from somewhere. I feel a great sense of responsibility to ensure that this project is offered each year despite the challenges of funding. It would be extremely disappointing for a project with a proven record of success to cease to exist because of lack of financial support. Radiance is difficult to categorise because it is a project that re-occurs each year with a new combination of participants and is weighted equally in artistic and social outcomes. It defies labelling (as it should).



TM: How is client base development approached for the Radiance Project?

MJ-M: The project is promoted through a range of organisations (community and government departments) as well as in the broader community media. Participants come independently as well as through organisations and agencies working with people who experience a disability. There are around thirty participants ranging in age from twenties to sixties from Canberra, Queanbeyan and Goulburn.

END OF PART ONE
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