

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by - ANNA YEN - 2002/1 Churchill Fellow

The Gilbert Spottiswood Churchill Fellowship to study all aspects of physical theatre particularly directing, creating new works and clowning.

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Signed

Dated

Anna Yen

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Introduction and Acknowledgments

This report details the outcomes of a Churchill Fellowship study tour to England, Andorra and USA to study aspects of physical theatre, including directing, creating new work and clown, which I undertook in 2003 (I was granted the Fellowship for 2002, but postponed the trip for a year due to other commitments). Specific areas of study included:

- Open workshop with Theatre de Complicite in London;
- Clown at the Festivale Internacional de Pallases (International Festival of Women Clowns) in Andorra;
- Clown at Dell'Arte International School of Physical theatre in California, USA;
- Generating New Material at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre USA;
- Movement at Dell'Arte.
- Method Acting at Hull Actors Studio in California, USA (although not physical theatre, it was a good as a comparative study).

Acknowledgments

My study tour to investigate aspects of physical theatre and the invaluable experience I have gained, would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust and of Gilbert Spottiswood who sponsored the Gilbert Spottiswood Churchill Fellowship for the study of theatre of which I was recipient.

I would like to thank:

- Meg Martin, of the Churchill Trust and Nadine Phillips of Qantas, Brisbane for their kind assistance during my preparations for the trip. It was much appreciated;
- all the talented, generous, inspirational and knowledgeable teachers of theatre whom I have had the honour and pleasure to study with on this trip, including Ronlin Foreman, Joan Schirle, Daniel Stein, Marya Erin Jones, Lorraine Hull, Dianne Hull, Angela de Castro, Annabelle Arden and Clive Mendus;
- all students who were in the workshops with me, as our collaborative investigations which enriched the learning;
- Sue Greene, administrator at Dell'Arte, everyone at Dell'Arte, Maggi in London, Festivale de Pallases in Andorra, for kind hospitality and welcome;

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Project Description: to study all aspects of physical theatre particularly directing, creating new works and clowning.

Fellowship Highlights

- participating in the Complicite workshop in London, UK, led by Annabel Arden and Clive Mendus;
- attending and performing at the Festivale Internacional de Pallasses in Andorra;
- attending Master classes at Dell'Arte International School of Physical Theatre in Blue Lake, California with Master Teachers Ronlin Foreman (Advanced Clown), Joan Schirle (Movement) and Daniel Stein assisted by writing teacher Marya Erin Jones (Generating New Material). I was also fortunate to be at Dell'Arte when they were hosting the Dell'Arte Mad River Festival.

Lessons learnt and conclusions

- creativity requires a leap of faith into the unknown. Many people have explored the realms of creativity, and some are able to guide others to be intrepid explorers. I am lucky to have met several of such teachers on this Fellowship.
- intensive training suggestions such as the ones I attended are very useful for developing the performer / creator / director as it allows focused investigation. I highly recommend performers/directors take advantage of such opportunities when they arise, with master teachers.
- powerful, effective, evocative physical theatre requires good training in a variety of disciplines. The Fellowship reinforced for me that core training must include some form of training in the kinaesthetic awareness of the performer, and the importance of performers becoming aware of what their current movement habits are and of learning how to develop a range of options. Methods such as the Feldenkrais Method and Alexander Technique are very useful for this training.
- the influence of the training methods from the Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris were evident in most (but not all) of the physical theatre master classes I attended both in the US and in Europe,
- Clown requires a ferocious amount of enthusiasm!

I was greatly inspired by the workshops I attended, my teachers, classmates, and by theatre works I observed. The new skills and experience will be shared with other performers whom I will collaborate with in future projects, including with Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre Company's 'Wicked Bodies' team in 2004 at La Boite Theatre, the new clown circus show 'The Adventures of Fi Fi and Fu Fu' 2004/5 which I am developing with Chelsea McGuffin, other arts workers on the Australian Performance Laboratory's 'Cultural Diversity Cluster' Project in 2003-2005. On my return to Australia, I have led classes for trainers at Vulcana Women's Circus in Brisbane as part of their Professional Development project. I have also been looking for opportunities to incorporate my training as a Certified Practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method into actor training programmes, as my Fellowship Study tour has sharpened my appreciation for the Method's benefits to actors. I highly recommend other Australian performers apply for Fellowships, to have the opportunity to investigate their particular fields of interest intensively, and then share with others.

PROGRAMME 2003

- May 12 -16 COMPLICITE Open Workshop with Annabel Arden and Clive Mendus, London, UK. Participated in workshop.
- May 19-25 2nd Festival Internacional de Pallasses, Andorra la Vella, Andorra
Participated in Angela de Castro's Workshop and performed in the 'Combinat' directed by de Castro.
- May 31-June 19 HULL ACTORS STUDIO, Los Angeles, California, USA.
Studied Method Acting.
- June 24-July 18 HEART OF A POET/ MIND OF AN ACTOR/ BODY OF A GYMNAST- GENERATING NEW MATERIAL Summer Workshop with Master Teacher, Daniel Stein, at Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, California, USA.
- July 22-July 26 MOVEMENT with Master Teacher Joan Schirle at Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, California, USA

Observed Mad River Festival performances at Dell'Arte.
- Aug 12- Sept 6 THROUGH THE NOSE : ADVANCED CLOWN with Master Teacher Ronlin Foreman, at Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, California.

MAIN BODY

May 12 -16 COMPLICITE Open Workshop with Annabel Arden and Clive Mendus, London, UK. Participated in workshop.

Workshop description as written in their e-flyer inviting applications to submit applications:

“Living in a democracy with war being waged on foreign soil, we have a responsibility to articulate our voice and seek to make theatre that is relevant and addresses issues that concern us all. Working with familiar Complicite themes, physical preparation and narrative of the body, the use of masks, the manipulation of objects, the ensemble, improvisation and games, we will attempt to find forms of theatre that express our common humanity, mixing personal narratives with global issues.”

The morning sessions of the workshop was led by Annabel Arden, whose work is inspired by the teaching of Monika Pagneux, whom I have also worked extensively with and been deeply inspired by. The afternoon sessions were led by Clive Mendus and focused on making ensemble political theatre. Participants were theatre practitioners from the UK, Europe, USA and Australia. I wish the workshop had been longer!

Complicite’s web address: www.complicite.org

May 19-25 2nd Festival Internacional de Pallasses, Andorra la Vella, Andorra. Participated in Angela de Castro’s Workshop rehearsed and performed in the ‘Combinat’ directed by de Castro.

This international festival of women clowns is organized by Artistic Director Pepa Plana and attracts participants from across the globe. Web Contact: www.festivalpallasses.com

I found it a very inspirational festival as I had not seen so many women clowns together in one spot before, all strutting their stuff. Due to my lack of Spanish, I had thought before I arrived that I was going to the Festival just to participate in the workshop with Angela de Castro, but it turned out that the workshop’s focus was to make a clown show for the Festival, directed by de Castro, so I wholeheartedly went along with that once I realised. Some of the funniest moments for me during the whole festival, were watching each of the participants in the workshop present their clown pieces to each other, so that de Castro could incorporate parts of all our work into a new show. What funny women! The Festival was well supported by the Comu d’Andorra la Vella and the organization of the Festival was fantastic.

May 31-June 19 HULL ACTORS STUDIO, Los Angeles, California, USA.
Studied Method Acting.

I studied aspects of Method acting with Dianne Hull and Lorrie Hull Ph.D. in Santa Monica, California. Dianne and Lorrie Hull’s classes offer intensive training in a broad spectrum of Method acting tools. The teaching includes techniques of: relaxation; concentration; sense memory; affective memory; improvisation; and cold reading. Actors

learn aspects of how to create a life for a character. The Hulls were very competent and insightful teachers. Hull Actors Studio can be contacted through : www.actors-studio.com/hull

Why study Method Acting during the middle of a study tour of Physical Theatre? As most of my previous training has been what is considered to be a physical theatre and contemporary circus background (Nanjing Acrobatic Troupe, Shanghai Circus school, Philippe Gaulier and Monika Pagneux, as well as performing with companies like Rock'n'Roll Circus, Vulcana Women's Circus, Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre Company, plus a few projects more mainstream companies such as La Boite Theatre, Qld Theatre Company), I felt the need to broaden my training, and also understand the basis of many other people's training /pedagogy. It was very useful for me, both as a comparative study, but also, its important to have many tools in one's acting kitbag, and draw on them when necessary.

June 24-July 18 HEART OF A POET/ MIND OF AN ACTOR/ BODY OF A GYMNAST- GENERATING NEW MATERIAL Summer Workshop with Master Teacher, Daniel Stein, at Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, California, USA.

The content of this master class is aptly described in the course description:

“A comprehensive four week course in generating new performance material dealing with the emotions of shape, rhythm, and dramatic tension. Otherwise put a training in juggling the juxtaposition of the physical world on stage and the metaphysical world that the audience takes home with them. Give your imagination a whack on the side of the head! Discover concrete ways to get beyond ‘STUCK’ when making new work. Find or re-find the freedom in creativity with clear paths that silence the inner critique. This workshop will empower actors to work in the theatre because our focus is on just that: the empowerment to create and perform work that is human, social, and thus essential to all who see it”.

During the course of the 4 weeks each of the participants developed a 3 minute solo piece of work, the starting point of which was working with an object that we thought had innate theatricality, finding ‘magic moments’ with the object and building the piece from there. Daniel Stein steered us all successfully towards making work that was meaningful and artful. Each day, writing teacher, Marya Erin Jones led us in writing techniques which drew from our intuition and creativity as well as our analytical selves, which influenced our final pieces.

Web: www.dellarte.com

July 22-July 26 MOVEMENT with Master Teacher Joan Schirle at Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, California, USA

Course description from Dell'Arte Brochure: "From Shakespeare to Shepard, from the stage to the street, the body of the actor is what's right there in front of the audience. Today's actor needs a responsive body / mind / spirit able to move flexibly between non-realistic and heightened styles as well as traditional forms. The techniques of the Dell'Arte school activate the physical imagination, increase the actor's size and presence, relate character to physical skills, and develop ensemble focus. Technique and improvisation daily. With assignments. Performers, teachers, directors welcome. For all levels."

A great course (I only wish it had been longer), with a great teacher, Joan Schirle! Joan was assisted by Berni Sabath, who led us in warm ups and conditioning each day.

For info on Dell'Arte or their Summer Workshops: www.dellarte.com

Aug 12- Sept 6 THROUGH THE NOSE: ADVANCED CLOWN with Master Teacher Ronlin Foreman, at Dell'Arte International, Blue Lake, California.

Course description: " High stakes research for the performer in the realm of theatrical clown. Areas of investigation include: * the play of the clown and relationship to audience; * sense of humour - point of view; *Origins of the personal clown; * Solitude and signature; *Status: play in groups; * performance space; * dynamic origins of the gag. The workshop will be developed through thematic assignments and improvisation rather than classroom exercises. Preference is given to the play of the ensemble. Ferocious enthusiasm required. Be funny or die."

Ferocious enthusiasm was certainly required. However, I found Ronlin to be one of the most insightful theatre teachers I've had for a while, due to his ability to see deeply where I was at as a performer at each specific moment, and his ability to offer useful proposals to improve my work at a core level.

I would sincerely like to thank Ronlin Foreman, and my other master teachers during the Summer of 2003, Joan Schirle and Daniel Stein, and their wonderful assistant teachers Bernie Sabath and Marya Erin Jones at Dell'Arte International for great teaching and inspiration.

Readers of this report may wonder why I don't write with more details on the contents of the courses, or on my insights, but I think that the nature of physical theatre is such that to develop skills in it effectively, one must do it in person.

CONCLUSIONS

- creativity requires a leap of faith into the unknown. Many people have explored the realms of creativity, and some are able to inspire and guide others to be intrepid explorers. I am lucky to have met several of such teachers on this Fellowship.
- intensive training suggestions such as the ones I attended are very useful for developing the performer / creator / director as it allows focused investigation. I highly recommend performers/ directors take advantage of such opportunities when they arise, with master teachers. It was like a freelance performer /director/ teacher's sabbatical.
- powerful, effective, evocative physical theatre requires good training in a variety of disciplines. The Fellowship reinforced for me that core training must include some form of training in the kinaesthetic awareness of the performer, and the importance of performers becoming aware of what their current movement habits are, and of learning how to develop a range of options. Methods such as the Feldenkrais Method and Alexander Technique are very useful for this training. I was greatly encouraged during my study tour of the value of my training as a Certified Feldenkrais Method Practitioner, and my background in training with Monika Pagneux, including her pedagogy of movement for actors which is very influenced by the work of Moshe Feldenkrais. Many actor training institutions in Australia recognize and incorporate the benefits of this training into their core actor programmes.
- the influence of the training methods from the Ecole Jacques Lecoq in Paris were evident in most (but not all) of the physical theatre master classes I attended both in the US and in Europe,
- Clown requires a ferocious amount of enthusiasm!

I was greatly inspired by the workshops I attended, my teachers, classmates, and by theatre works I observed. The new skills and experience will be shared with other performers whom I will collaborate with in future projects, including with Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre Company's 'Wicked Bodies' team in 2004 at La Boite Theatre, the new clown circus show 'The Adventures of Fi Fi and Fu Fu' 2004/5 which I am developing with Chelsea McGuffin, other arts workers on the Australian Performance Laboratory's 'Cultural Diversity Cluster' Project in 2003-2005. On my return to Australia, I have led classes for trainers at Vulcana Women's Circus in Brisbane as part of their Professional Development project. I have also been looking for opportunities to incorporate my training as a Certified Practitioner of the Feldenkrais Method into actor training programmes, as my Fellowship Study tour has sharpened my appreciation for the Method's benefits to actors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I support the inclusion of the Feldenkrais Method into performance training in Australia. As a Certified Feldenkrais Practitioner myself, I am looking for opportunities to utilise my skills and experience in this field, combined with my experience as a performer, director and physical theatre tutor.

I highly recommend to other performing artists/ freelance director / teachers in Australia who are seeking excellence in their fields, and who are keen to continue to share their skills with other performers, to apply to for a Winston Churchill Fellowship, as it can give a great opportunity for focused and intensive study / investigation/ reflection.