

From Walking and Talking to Cartwheels and High Cs: An examination of practice-based laboratory work into physio-vocal integration.

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6 From Walking and Talking to Cartwheels and High Cs: An examination of
7 practice-based laboratory work into physio-vocal integration.
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9
10 Abstract
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12 Following a series of investigative workshops inquiring into the possibilities
13 of the vocal body, artists of Experience Vocal Dance Company trained
14 intensively in an experimental method called the Integrative Performance
15 Practice (IPP), developing an exacting technique that allows the
16 performer the freedom to completely integrate unlimited movement and
17 uncompromised voicing including bel canto singing.
18
19

20
21 This article shares the work of the company through case study, exercises
22 and application to performance propositions examined through the
23 methodology of Transdisciplinarity. The article reflects on how many
24 approaches to voice and movement within the disciplines of acting,
25 singing and dancing can promote disintegration of the physio-vocal
26 instrument. It touches on the implications of integrating the performance
27 instrument through the notion of the psycho-physical and addresses
28 certain inter and cross-cultural perspectives present in recent discussions
29 about voice and movement.
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31

32
33 Finally, it lays out exactly how with the IPP it was discovered that
34 everything needs to originate from the breath/body; how language and
35 skill sets are best rooted in process-based terms; and that action, be it
36 vocal, physical or emotive, needs to initiate from awareness, reconfiguring
37 the artist as self, working within an active aesthetic. As a key finding, a
38 most precise articulation of centre is described in detail and related to
39 physio-vocal praxis.
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44 Introduction
45

46 This article contains the results of a five-year "moment" within a larger,
47 ongoing project concerning the integration of acting, singing and
48 dancing. The entire project has spanned three countries and has taken
49 place over 17 years to date. (To be published in an upcoming book for
50 Routledge, 2013, titled *Integrative Performance: Practice and Theory for*
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3 *the Interdisciplinary Performer*). It included studies in acting for opera,
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6 movement for actors and acting for dance within collaborative, devised
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8 and more traditional models of theatre making. However, before it was
9
10 possible to reconcile the different skill sets and vocabularies of the
11
12 disciplines of acting, singing and dance, it became clear that some
13
14 aspects of the exacting physicalities and underlying cultures within the
15
16 disciplines of singing and dance were complex and often contradictory.
17
18 They needed to be worked through in a "moment" of their own. Of
19
20 course, sounding and moving structures are a valuable part of many
21
22 preparatory exercises and creative explorations for the actor, singer and
23
24 dancer. However, we saw a gap in knowledge surrounding the
25
26 possibilities of an integrated practice of dancing and singing that does
27
28 not compromise either discipline on their own aesthetic terms. In resolving
29
30 some of the differences in the techniques taught to vocalists and movers,
31
32 we re-configured where the practitioner begins in terms of 'awareness'.
33
34 We worked to demystify conflicting notions of 'centre', clarified a
35
36 breathing practice for the vocal body, and documented a most exacting
37
38 use of the iliopsoas muscle system. Through a coordinated 'dynamic
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40 alignment', handstands, cartwheels and movement from the floor to
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42 leaping became possible without compromising voice or movement. This
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44 article outlines these key elements of the practice. The work took place in
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3 the studio and was ultimately shared in peer reviewed environments and
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6 public performances as *Experience Vocal Dance Company* (EVDC).¹
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8
9 Many of the practical outcomes of this work challenged the ways we
10
11 approached language, skill sets and even the artist as self. It is hoped that
12
13 what is shared might contribute to existing knowledge, and in some cases
14
15 offer a new approach to interdisciplinary explorations within performance
16
17 practice(s).
18
19

20 21 22 23 The enquiry and its players 24

25
26 A fundamental question for this stage of the research was: how far can
27
28 we go in integrating voice and movement without compromising either
29
30 on its own terms? Can one sing and dance without compromising the
31
32 vocal line, pitch, articulation, or intonation; without the loss of upper
33
34 harmonics, resonance or timbre? Is it possible to sing and dance without
35
36 radically adjusting the choices in range of movement and without
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45 EVDC has been presented as a Keynote for the International Movement
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47 Conference at the Moscow Art Theatre, and at The Embassy Studio in
48
49 London, arranged by CETT. EVDC has performed in NYC and Germany at
50
51 the Westside Dance Project, The Playhouse at the Abrons Arts Centre,
52
53 Staatsoper Hannover Ballet Studio, Movement Research, Dance Theatre
54
55 Workshop, The New Dance Group's The Exchange, the Vox Novus
56
57 Composer's Voice series, and at the 92nd Street Y. It was part of a TV
58
59 documentary *Art Or Something Like It*, and was featured in *Backstage*
60
61 NYC, in an article by Lisa Jo Sagolla titled *Experience Bryon's Integrative*
62
63 *Performance Practice*.

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3 compromising flexibility, strength, line, and balance? Could one sing
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5 upside down, or while leaping, doing back bends, or rolling on the floor?
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11 To do these seeming impossible tasks we learned that it was not about
12
13 putting two disciplines together, with the separate skill sets, different
14
15 embodied understandings, and conflicting conditioning practices
16
17 activated as part of the different performance aesthetics required. We
18
19 were working toward physio-vocal integration. We were not interested in
20
21 coming up with a multi- or even inter-disciplinary method that brings
22
23 singing and moving together in a parallel or hybrid model. Most
24
25 importantly, we were not aiming to create an aesthetic, genre or style
26
27 born from a crossing or colliding of the disciplines; we were aiming for a
28
29 *practice* that could work within a myriad of applications. We drew from a
30
31 methodology that was born outside performance practices, an idea that
32
33 has emerged from the social and political sciences, quantum and string
34
35 theory: Basarab Nicolescu's notion of *Transdisciplinarity*.
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46 Artists from both New York City and London joined the endeavour. We
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48 had three actors who self-identified as knowing how to voice and move
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50 but who did not consider themselves singers or dancers. We had three
51
52 opera singers who self-identified as non-dancers, with one being a yoga
53
54 teacher. We had a puppeteer who had sung alternative rock music. We
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1
2
3 had three musical theatre performers who saw themselves respectively as:
4
5 actor first, singer/dancer last; dancer first, acting second with a little voice
6
7 training; and singer first who could move and act. We had dancers,
8
9 trained to varying degrees in Ballet and Modern techniques, who did not
10
11 see themselves as singers. We also had a speech therapist, a movement
12
13 specialist and a few devised theatre performers who did not primarily
14
15 identify with one discipline. As Artistic Director and author of the study, I
16
17 had been trained as a "straight" actor, musical theatre performer, opera
18
19 singer, and in dance. I had performance experience in each, and had
20
21 directed, taught and choreographed within the various discrete forms
22
23 and crossovers of the performance disciplines. I had also practiced yoga
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25 for over 20 years and was a certified teacher.
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36 In short, there were at any point a myriad of language and skill sets in the
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38 room. What was interesting, especially when leaving training and
39
40 conditioning and approaching rehearsal, where performance values
41
42 would be a concern, was what was considered important by each
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44 practitioner as the aesthetic goal shifted. Many returned to the values of
45
46 their primary disciplines (especially when they self identified as being an
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48 actor who sings, or a dancer who acts for instance); issues that arrived out
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50 of this will be discussed in the second half of this article. We worked at
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52 these points to return to an integrated *active aesthetic*, a way of doing,
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3 that would increasingly become the kernel of the practice through a field
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5 of transdisciplinarity. But first— the practice.
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10 11 Centre? Which centre? 12

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14 Centre is articulated by practitioners of different disciplines and different
15
16 cultures in different ways. In modern dance, such as that of Hawkins and
17
18 Graham techniques as beautifully articulated by Eric Franklin (2002),
19
20 movement is often described as initiating in the “pelvis”. In acting, the
21
22 breath centre can reside “deep within the body, in an area roughly three
23
24 finger-widths below your navel” (Benedetti 1997, p.19). It can be also be
25
26 “located in the middle of the belly” where “The natural progression of the
27
28 breath goes freely from the middle of the belly outward to the periphery in
29
30 all directions” (Lugering 2007, p.49). In describing an exercise on “breath-
31
32 control” Zarrilli describes it as “the region two to three inches below the
33
34 navel” (Zarilli 2009, p.26).
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44 Understandings of centre are often influenced by Eastern dance and fight
45
46 forms. For instance, in Kathakali, the highly stylised Indian dance-drama
47
48 centre is at the “root of the Navel” or *Nabhi Mula* (Zarrilli 2000. P93). In
49
50 Buyo, a traditional dance-mime form from Japan, a “power center
51
52 ...could be imagined as a ball of steel in the centre an (sic) triangle
53
54 whose apex is the anus and whose other two angles are the corners of
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3 the pelvis at the level of the navel" (Azuma cited in Barba 2006, p.140).
4
5
6 Eastern centres are about the dance of energy as released through the
7
8 breath-body (recognising no mind/body split), a harnessing and
9
10 readiness, poised, and in flow. This "energy" is known throughout the east
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12 as Ki (Korea), Chi (China), Qi (Japan) and Prana or Pranavayu (India).
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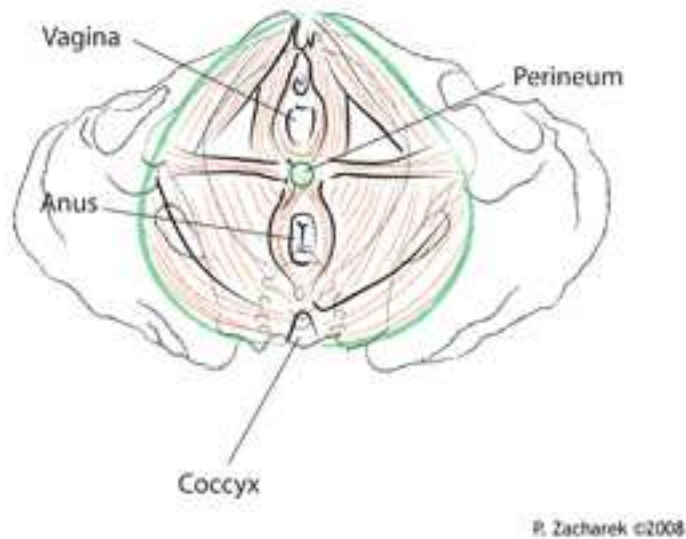
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18 Energy and its relationship to the body and breath is crucial for the physio-
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20 vocal practitioner working in the realm of the active aesthetic of
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22 disciplinarity rather than towards an aesthetic form. We found that we
23
24 needed to be very exacting about where centre is, how we return to it, its
25
26 relationships to breath in motion, breath and sound and moreover
27
28 ourselves as performers.
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36 For us, the action of breath as it engages and stays in constant contact
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38 with the perineum became key.
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42 43 44 Perineum as centre

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46 We found that when drawing awareness to *areas, regions* or internal and
47
48 difficult-to-sense places articulated through *imagery*—which is always
49
50 subjective— the abdominal muscles hooked in. This created a domino
51
52 effect of tensions throughout the body when sounding and moving at the
53
54 same time. The voice often broke, or upper harmonics were lost, and
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4 balance, line and flexibility was compromised. We needed to integrate
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6 the physio-vocal instrument by working from and constantly returning to
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8 an even lower and more precise spot.
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Figure 1 Perineum (female)

The perineum sits at the bottom of the pelvic floor between the genitals and the anus. On the exhale, it will contract upwards in the direction of the top of the head. On the inhale, the pelvic floor releases downward as a symptom of the diaphragm's release as it displaces the lower internal organs. The experience of staying connected with the perineum as centre can feel odd and even scary at first as you give up a sense of "control" that tensions within a particular attachment to form or aesthetic might allow.

1
2
3 We found that when working from the perineum, the versions of centre
4 articulated above were realized in the breath body as a *symptom* of this
5
6 action. Interestingly, we also found that to isolate too far forwards on the
7
8 pelvic floor off the perineum, as in Kegel exercises², created a sharpening
9
10 of the pitch and a hardening of tone; to go too far back towards the anus
11
12 created a dampening of the tone and at times a flatness of pitch.
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21 The perineum corresponds directly with the *Mula Bandha* or the “root
22
23 chakra” in the Indian tradition. Swami Buddhananda’s account of its
24
25 benefits directly speaks to our findings.
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31 Moola Bandha (perineal contraction) stimulates both the sensory-
32
33 motor and the autonomic nervous systems in the pelvic region.
34

35
36 When moola bandha is performed, stimulation activates
37
38 parasympathetic fibers emerging from the pelvic spinal cord. ...The
39
40 overall effect of stimulating both parasympathetic and sympathetic
41
42 nervous systems is to rebalance these two major components of
43
44 nervous activity in the body. This has very definite repercussions on
45
46 the hypothalamus (responsible for the complete endocrine system)
47
48
49 which relays its information to the whole limbic (emotional) system
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53
54 ² Kegel exercises, named after gynecologist Dr. Arnold Kegel (1884-1981),
55 are often prescribed for vaginal or pelvic prolapse, urinary incontinence
56 and sexual dysfunction.
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1
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3 and the cerebral cortex (outer layer of the brain). (Buddhananda
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5
6 2000, p.3)
7
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9

10
11 Principal artist of the company Karen Jolicoeur noted that, “An awareness
12
13 of connection to (and resulting initiation from) and/or perineum is not the
14
15 same thing as attempting to make things happen from a certain
16
17 place. Also, if one has a sense of the abdominal muscles as centre, one
18
19 has some reprogramming to do / ideas to change”! (Jolicoeur 2007,
20
21 Rehearsal Report)
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28 Awareness

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31 A foundation of our work was “coming from awareness”. This differs from
32
33 “focus”, which can be disintegrating. For instance, one way we learn this
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35 is in the difference between two simple tasks. When an artist is asked to
36
37 “focus on their left big toe” (the reader might wish to try this), what most
38
39 often happens is that the person stops breathing; their tongue might get
40
41 rooted at the top of their palate, and they lose the awareness of the rest
42
43 of the room.... In contrast, when they are asked to “draw awareness to
44
45 your left big toe”, the toe can be brought into the *field* of awareness
46
47 along with breath, the room, the entire body and the ability to witness, all
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49 in readiness to move to the next task. We do various tasks within various
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51 structures towards training, conditioning, and rehearsal, from a *field* of
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3 awareness. Awareness is non-verbal, but not to be confused with the non-
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5 intellectual or no-mind. If we can be aware that we *have* thoughts, and
6
7 moreover be aware that we *have* feelings, then we are by definition not
8
9 our feeling or our thoughts. We have them, and our job is to do the task
10
11 through, with, including, and in integration with these. The task, however,
12
13 is where the directional energy resides. We constantly ask ourselves when
14
15 we have difficulty in a task not what we did wrong, but at which point did
16
17 we leave awareness. A key aspect of the practice is to constantly return
18
19 to centre from awareness at each and every breath/task.
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28 This also means that we always do a doing for the first time. We never
29
30 repeat what *felt* right or what looked good on someone else. This shifts the
31
32 language and doing of the practice into process-based terms within an
33
34 *active aesthetic*:
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41 What has not been fully considered is a look at performance
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43 practice. The way of meaning making. Not meaning as in signs and
44
45 signifiers in text (which include composition, choreography and
46
47 stage direction)...But the way of meaning making. The practice of
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49 practice. In literary analysis and in performance theory we look at
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51 the meaning and meaning making but not the way of meaning
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53 making...For us Vocal Dancers this is why the shape of the
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3 movement is arbitrary. Even if you are looking at someone who is
4
5 doing it from centre. This is why the sound of the tone should never
6
7 be repeated in the quest for the correct production. This is why we
8
9 do not use words such as mask, position, placement, or
10
11 posture...This is why we start in awareness before utterance, action,
12
13 movement or emotive expression. (Bryon 2006, workshop report)
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20 21 Three-Part Breath

22
23 In order to maintain the integrity of the entire breath/body in movement,
24
25 we found that a breath dance that maintained a constant connection in
26
27 awareness to the perineum was key. This constant connection meant that
28
29 the intake (not inhale, as this takes superfluous muscles and does not
30
31 make use of the natural vacuum effect within our physiology) started as a
32
33 release of the pelvic floor. The exhale, often voiced (working exactly the
34
35 opposite from many singing trainings) initiated from a contraction of the
36
37 perineum, resulting in a hollowing of the belly first, then a contraction in
38
39 the intercostals and a slight descent of the sternum. This particular action
40
41 on the exhale is called reverse breathing in some yogic practices. For us,
42
43 however, there is a dynamic, non-tensioned resistance to the collapse in
44
45 the intercostals and sternum, so that we are ready and poised for the next
46
47 intake, which again releases the perineum. In doing this particular *breath-*
48
49 *dance*, the better one gets at accessing awareness of the perineum as
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3 centre, the less tension results. We found that in working toward
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6 integration all movement and all sound emerged from this breath-dance.
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10
11 We learned this in constructive rest, standing, rolling, and practicing sun
12
13 salutations while sounding scales. Each person's challenges in allowing
14
15 the breath to remain in contact with the perineum through the intake and
16
17 exhale/voicing were different. These challenges were often the result of
18
19 patternings learned from other disciplines and forms, in addition to
20
21 habitual life patternings. These patternings directly translated to a *leaving*
22
23 of the iliopsoas muscle system, often shifting to the larger muscles in the
24
25 legs and the arms and temporarily leaving the central upward direction of
26
27 the perineal connection with a corresponding loss of *awareness*.
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36 Iliopsoas

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38 The iliopsoas muscle is comprised of two parts. The iliacus and psoas
39
40 muscles are joined to each other laterally along the psoas tendon. The
41
42 iliopsoas originates anterior to the transverse processes of the T12 to L5
43
44 vertebrae and inserts into the lesser trochanter of the femur.³
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57 ³ For two detailed discussions on the workings of the Iliopsoas see: *The*
58 *Psoas Book* by Liz Koch and *Pelvic Power* by Eric Franklin.
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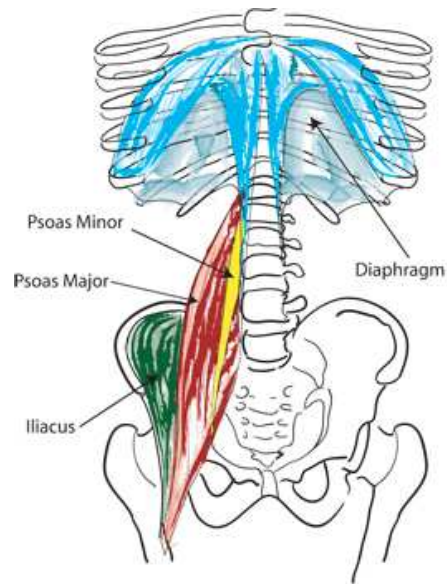


Figure 2 Iliopsoas

Many practices in dance and movement work with locating this muscle system as a centre of the body; however, in practice it is quite elusive, since it is hard to feel. When you do engage it properly, the general experience is that of balance, with a release of the abdominals and an expanded sense of the breath body. Plotting a path from the big toe up the inside of the leg towards the psoas is the key to hearing no jiggle in the voice while leaping. The more exacting the engagement of the iliopsoas, the less extraneous tensions result, with less interference with the breath/body. The physio-vocal practitioner relies on a most exacting use of the iliopsoas. We have numerous exercises that work with the iliopsoas. In sharing with the group between NYC and London I wrote the following.

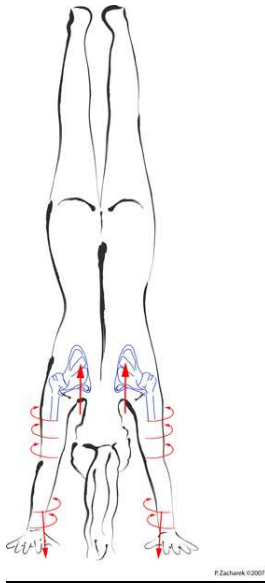
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There is a new exercise...It is designed to help re-pattern the muscles of the leg, feet and lower back to allow for the engagement of the psoas and long muscles in the abs (as opposed to the short that will impede the diaphragm movement in our breath). It is also designed to balance the action from the big toe all the way up to the inside of the leg to the psoas. This will allow more stabilization in our leaps and balances. (I will be choreographing more energetically)...It is important that we do this with the breath so that we pattern the three part breath and perineum action with the toe, inside leg, psoas connection. (Bryon 2007, group correspondence 12/8)

Hands and Arms

Much like plotting the path from the big toe through the inside of foot up the inside of the leg to the psoas as a preliminary action for every time a foot touched the floor, we had a mirror action in the arms. The key was plotting the path from the webbing between the thumb and pointer finger through the inside of the forearm, diagonally under the arm pit down the back body and resting on the base of the scapula, drawing it down away from the ears. This was employed with counter-rotations of the arms, creating the necessary independence of the tongue, neck, jaw, shoulder blade, sternum and scapula. This, when mastered as one action

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3 from awareness with continuous connection to the perineum and isolation
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5 of the psoas, was the secret to our eventually successfully voiced
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8 handstands and cartwheels.
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31 Figure 3 Arm Rotations
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36 Dynamic Alignment

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38 For us, alignment in motion was maintained with a lengthening on every
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40 intake and exhale, assisted by the perineal contraction moving upwards
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42 towards the top of the head. This allowed the creation of distance, back,
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44 front and centre equally, between the pelvic girdle, the diaphragm,
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46
47 shoulder girdle and jaw. With this, we maintain the three-part breath when
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49 folded over and in any physical position. In *Sara's Vocalise*, one of the
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many compositions written by David Wolfson, Musical Director EVDC, the act of dropping and rolling to the floor in dynamic alignment is illustrated.⁴

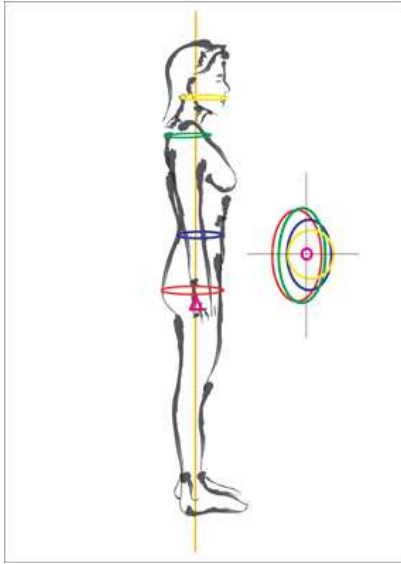


Figure 4 Dynamic Alignment

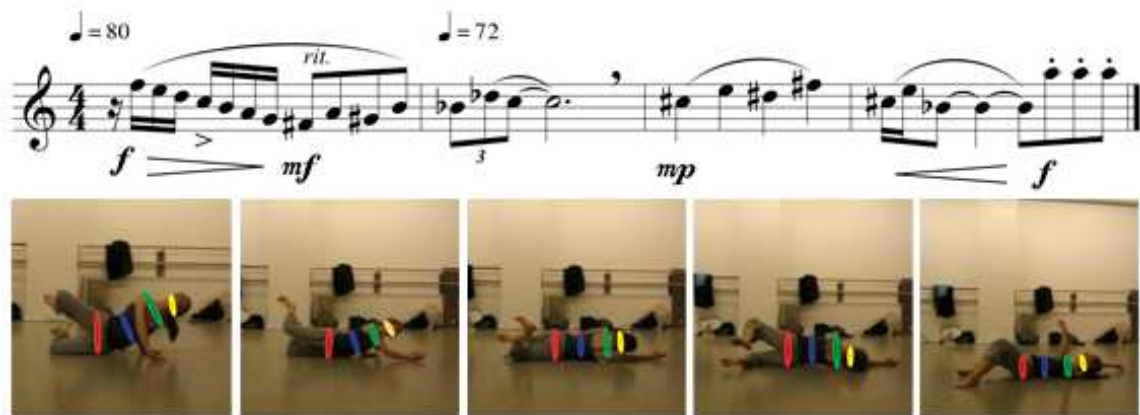


Figure 5 Alignment in Motion

⁴ This work and others can be seen in their entirety on the EVDC Youtube site: see <http://www.youtube.com/user/Experiencevocaldance#p/u>

Tongue/Jaw Breath direction

The ring (see Fig 4 & 5) around the jaw is important. A gentle expansion along the back of the neck, in concert with a breath connected to the perineum, releases the palate upwards, the tongue forward and poises us to exhale or voice, plotting the path of the air off the throat. The directional energy of the breath path is through the level of the philtrum, (the cleft between the nose to the upper lip), rather than lower through the mouth (see Fig 6). This draws from both bel canto singing and Danish speech pathologist Sven Smith's Accent Method. We found that if we sang on the throat in a technique reminiscent of belt or folk, that extreme movement would pinch or jiggle the sound. Staying off the throat and in connection to centre, neck rolls are possible while sustaining a vocal line.

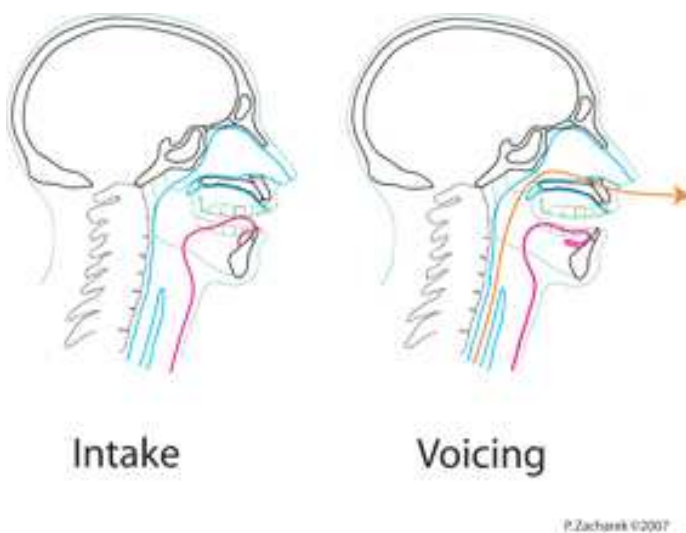


Figure 6 Tongue, Jaw and Breath Action

Putting it together

Although this has been written linearly, these aspects of the practice all happen concurrently, as one integrating action for the physio-vocal practitioner. Awareness first and throughout; then intake, which happens in concert with the release of the pelvic girdle, quickly succeeded by the intercostals' expansion followed by the sternum. At the same time, the expansion of the "rings", with the tongue releasing forward and jaw releasing. Then a suspension (never a holding), and the exhale or voicing begins with a simultaneous perineal contraction and breath exhaled in the direction of the philtrum, followed in quick succession by a resisted contraction of the intercostals and then the sternum—and it begins again, with a constant return to centre from awareness.

Vaccai

To condition, warm-up and train we used the ariettas of Nicola Vaccai from his Practical Method of Italian Singing. They provide incremental vocal challenges to which I added choreography, integrating increasingly difficult movement challenges for the physio-vocal practitioner. They range from walking to rolling, leaping, fast footwork, circling the entire torso and various ways of putting pressure on the hands and arms.

The final 3 figures show a range of movement sequences (taken out of context in select phrases) that were practiced as part of the Vaccai series using the Integrative Performance Practice.



Figure 7 Rolling to standing

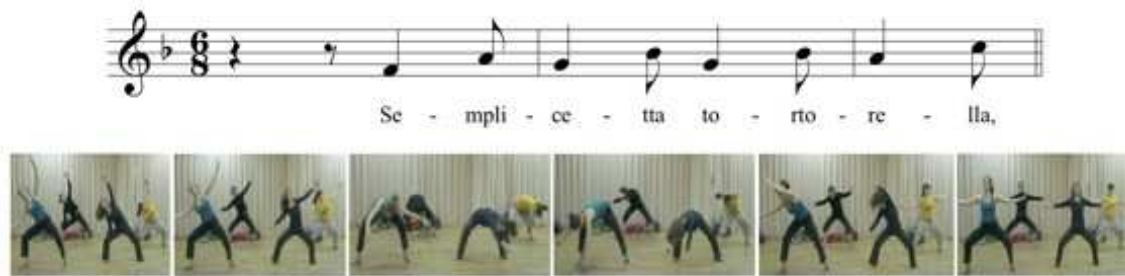


Figure 8 Torso Rotations

Figure 9 Leaping



Analysis and Reflection

As author of the study, I was aware of scholarship examining performance from "cross-cultural" or "inter-cultural" perspectives, especially with regard to merging the practices of the East and West; however, our focus was the cultures of the practices "in the room" and the effects of the language and skill sets of the performance disciplines as taught in the West.

We were working toward physio-vocal integration, searching for an integrative performance practice more in keeping with Basarab Nicolescu's notion of *Transdisciplinarity* which offers a way to think and practice beyond discipline. For Nicolescu, *disciplinarity* can be defined as one practice concerned with itself, with *multi-disciplinarity* as two disciplines operating in the same field but ultimately concerned with

1
2
3 themselves. These are distinguished from *inter-* and *plural disciplinarity*,
4
5 where both or all operate together, with an aim of transferability, but in
6
7 the end return to their own spaces within the framework of their own
8
9 disciplines. *Transdisciplinarity* “takes us beyond disciplines by weaving a
10
11 new kind of knowledge” (Nicolescu 1997, pp.12-14). As the prefix “trans-”
12
13 indicates, “transdisciplinarity concerns that which is at once between the
14
15 disciplines, across the different disciplines, and beyond all discipline. Its
16
17 goal is the understanding of the present world, one of the imperatives of
18
19 which is the unity of knowledge” (Ibid).
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29 In considering current cross/inter-cultural discussions around performance
30
31 practices, this study operates from the position that, “if multidisciplinary
32
33 and interdisciplinarity reinforce the dialogue between two cultures,
34
35 transdisciplinarity permits us to envisage their open unification” (Nicolescu
36
37 2002, p.100).
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44 Within Musical Theatre there is a term for a performer who dances, acts
45
46 and sings: the *triple threat*. A good *triple threat* performer negotiates,
47
48 coordinates and translates the disparate techniques as they fit into the
49
50 required performance task. For the most part, this is *multi-* or *inter-*
51
52 disciplinary within Nicolescu's model. Artists that excel may find a personal
53
54 embodied understanding that links the three into an integrated whole in
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3 moments of inspiration, but at present there is no one taught vocabulary
4
5 or technique that offers a repeatable integrated practice.
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10
11 A fundamental issue is that the ways of breathing can differ quite
12
13 drastically within voice and movement practices, with some dance
14
15 methods completely omitting the instruction of how one even breathes
16
17 and moves. Musical Theatre teachers like Pulliam sympathise, "Imagine
18
19 being a student training in these three areas and you have mastered the
20
21 breath technique taught in your singing studio, only to be told that you
22
23 must breathe another way when speaking" (Pulliam 2009, p.59). This can
24
25 indeed be complicated.
26
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33
34 As McGregor explains, with transdisciplinarity "there is a difference
35
36 between a complicated situation and complex situation. A complicated
37
38 problem is hard to solve because it is intricate and detailed. A complex
39
40 problem has the additional feature of *emergence*, the process of deriving
41
42 some new and coherent structures, patterns and properties." (McGregor
43
44 2007, p.2) With the work of EVDC, I was searching for an integrated
45
46 practice towards an integrated outcome: the emergence of one
47
48 vocabulary leading to one set of skills that would allow as its symptom an
49
50 optimal use of the vocal body. Here, the performer would not negotiate
51
52 or coordinate the languages and skill sets learned within the various
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1
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3 pedagogies of acting, dance/movement or singing/sounding, but rather
4
5 they would do one thing as one artist, which would as a symptom allow
6
7 for exacting voice and movement possibilities.
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9

10
11
12 This aim presented some interesting dilemmas worth examination. As
13
14 mentioned previously, each person in the room came from different
15
16 disciplines, exposed to varied heritages of practices. Of course there are
17
18 many great teachers of acting, voice and movement that come to the
19
20 work with an intuitive understanding that to train best in any performance
21
22 discipline a balanced, poised and integrated performance instrument
23
24 must be cultivated. This work is indebted to such wonderful teachers, and,
25
26 regrettably, in scope of this article all cannot be celebrated. Rather, I will
27
28 critically reflect on the experience of the artists in this study with regard to
29
30 the more general practitioner's dilemmas in coming from acting, singing
31
32 or dance while working in a methodology of transdisciplinarity.
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44 The actor's dilemma

45
46 The actors came from a tradition where voice and body work are mainly
47
48 utilised in exercises for freeing up the instrument. From Stanislavsky through
49
50 to today, movement, and then voice, are often positioned as preliminary
51
52 steps for *preparing* the actor's instrument. As such, they are rendered
53
54 separate moments on a linear path towards a greater aesthetic outcome
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1
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3 grounded in text. Zinder clearly expresses reasons for this method of
4
5 training:
6
7

8 Starting from the body, moving into voice work on a solid basis of
9
10 the well-trained body, and only then moving into the fascinating,
11
12 elusive, complex, and profound terrain of imagination. The basic
13
14 premise here is that actor training needs to steer clear of voice,
15
16 words, or text as long as possible, and to develop the training in that
17
18 order: from the purely physical to the discovery of the sound
19
20 produced by the moving body, and only then using well-trained,
21
22 deeply connected body and voice to support the actor's work with
23
24 words, language, and text. (Zinder 2002, p.5)
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33 In this typical process, actors learn movement and voice exercises, honing
34
35 the body and voice in preparation for the text, role or play, which
36
37 ultimately gives the performance meaning.
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43 In acting trainings that work in areas of voice/movement integration, we
44
45 often get the sort of exercises which engage primal expressive qualities
46
47 that allow for greater or freer expression for the purpose of *taking the*
48
49 *actor out of their heads and into their bodies*. This is useful on its own terms
50
51 towards creativity, but assumptions within this raise interesting issues. What
52
53 we were presenting was not the free movement and sounding prevalent
54
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3
4 in the sixties, or the therapeutic personal catharsis that can come from
5
6 guided non-verbal Dionysian movement and sound trance-like
7
8 experiences. We were working in the realm of exacting disciplines for
9
10 optimal voice and movement.
11
12

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15
16 We found that even many acting trainings that aim to connect the
17
18 disciplines start in an illusive space. For Lugerling, working in voice and
19
20 movement integration of the actor, "all sound and movement work is at
21
22 its very core a type of abstraction" (Lugerling 2009, p.14), with expressive
23
24 action defined as "any physical action that simultaneously contains and
25
26 reveals thought and feeling" (Lugerling 2007, p.5). He further states that
27
28 "when sound and movement exercises are structured based on the
29
30 principles of expressive action, the student is acting in the abstract while
31
32 simultaneously placing a special emphasis on the physical and vocal
33
34 sensorial properties of the expressive action without recourse to the
35
36 intellectual/verbal component." (Lugerling 2009, p.15). Further, "the fact
37
38 of the matter is that our body can yield to the experience of the
39
40 expressive action without the intellectual assistance. When this occurs a
41
42 much simpler and primal type of actor training occurs that is rooted in the
43
44 movement, sound and sensation, rather than predetermined analysis and
45
46 deliberation" (Ibid, p. 21).
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3 For us, however, in our requirement for complete integration of voice and
4
5 movement, there was an imperative to integrate the “intellect”, so as to
6
7 execute exacting and precise physio-vocal challenges. We solved the
8
9 problem of intellect/non-intellect by working from a place of *awareness*.
10
11
12 As a result, we did not come from an idea that the intellect was an
13
14 obstacle or that “the intellect is located in the space between our ears. It
15
16 is what we commonly refer to as our *mind*” (Lugering 2007, p.10).
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20
21 Biophysicist Candace Pert summarises:
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23

24
25
26 The Mind doesn't dominate body; it *becomes* body. Body and mind
27
28 are one. I see the process of communication we have
29
30 demonstrated, the flow of information throughout the whole
31
32 organism, as evidence that the body is the actual outward
33
34 manifestation, in physical space, of the mind.... Thus, it could be
35
36 said that intelligence is located not only in the brain but in the cells
37
38 that are distributed throughout the body, and that the traditional
39
40 separation of mental processes, including emotions, from the body
41
42 is no longer valid. (Pert 1997, p.187).
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51 Working on this basis allowed us to circumvent much of the contemporary
52
53 fetishising around the Cartesian mind/body split, along with any claim that
54
55 our work was a reconfigured version of “psycho-physical” practice. With
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4 *Transdisciplinarity* as our methodology and *integration* as our goal, the
5
6 mere recognition of these dualities would have thrown us into binary
7
8 relationships directly at odds with the very premise of integration and
9
10 trandisciplinarity. For us, the mind became the vocal-body, with
11
12 expression, text and intention, vocal, physical or emotive, all fueled and
13
14 sustained by breath from awareness.
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19

20 21 The vocalist's dilemma

22
23 When first beginning, I mistakenly assumed that those that had studied
24
25 voice, understanding the importance of breath, would have the most
26
27 coherent skills sets and vocabulary for an emerging vocal-dancer.
28
29 Ironically, we found that it was the singers that had the most difficulty in
30
31 working towards sounding and moving. This often came as a result of
32
33 having worked extra hard to protect, learn and establish a personal
34
35 practice of *breath support*.
36
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44 So often a vocalist is taught to breathe almost as if they had never
45
46 breathed before, or had once done so in a *pure* state. They are told that
47
48 as a child they had breathed more freely and more in tune with their
49
50 bodies. They learn that there have been *things* put in the way of this
51
52 optimum breath, which could include personal histories, illness and
53
54 possible trauma, that have created learned physical patternings that may
55
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1
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3 have resulted in *blocks* that adversely effect the voice. This can be helpful
4
5 to an extent; however, when taught this way, it presents a relationship to
6
7 breath and voice that creates a peculiar and precious protection
8
9 mechanism when one finds they have mastered their *damage*. We
10
11 worked hard not to *judge* or *diagnose* or *focus on* these aspects (which
12
13 may include *tension*, a bad day, emotional uprisings...); we rather
14
15 *allowed* and *witnessed* to create a less ego-centred relationship than that
16
17 which invariably situates the *me* as subject and *breath-support* as object.
18
19 We are our breath, after all. We worked with the vocal-body and with
20
21 voice as a *breath-dance*. This is supported by the master of breath, Thich
22
23 Nhat Hanh:
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34 Breathing and body are one. Mind and body are one. At the time
35
36 of observation, mind is not an entity which exists independently,
37
38 outside of your breathing and your body. The boundary between
39
40 the subject of observation and the object of observation no longer
41
42 exists. We observe 'the body in the body'. (Hanh 1988, p.48)
43
44
45
46

47 In some respected vocal trainings breath is often *learned* in *positions* to
48
49 bring awareness to proper breathing *alignment* and/or *posture*. The
50
51 differences between standing and singing an aria that one has
52
53 performed successfully many times in front of a piano and singing while
54
55 rolling, leaping, walking or moving from standing to the floor can
56
57
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1
2
3 completely demolish this learned *architecture* of support. As a result, we
4
5 found a need to completely re-examine what the value of our learned
6
7 *support* was. We found that even with the artists familiar with somatic
8
9 practices such as Alexander Technique, Body Mind-Centering and
10
11 Feldenkrais, for the extreme movements that took us out of everyday
12
13 standing, sitting and walking, these practices were limited. We found that
14
15 none of the somatic practices, on their own, offered a vocabulary or a
16
17 skill set that allowed for coordination with the kind of sustained breath
18
19 required for singing while moving in more extreme ways.
20
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30 The dancer's dilemma

31
32 We worked with a specific breathing practice that starts from a slightly
33
34 different sense of centre than any of the acting, singing or dance
35
36 practices that we had encountered. We worked with *dynamic alignment*
37
38 through an understanding of our *kinetic anatomy*, not within the realm of
39
40 *posture or positions*.
41
42
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46

47 As touched on previously, many traditional dance practices do not
48
49 address breath in motion. Understandably, they revolve more around
50
51 issues of line, extension, flexibility and strength. The high point of centre in
52
53 the body of Ballet, for instance, often creates a high and shallow
54
55 breathing; further, Jazz and Tap, when taught as a progression from the
56
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2
3 physical vocabulary of Ballet, requires a held *maintenance* of the *trunk* of
4
5 the body for aesthetic purposes. In this type of training, maintaining a
6
7 *position* in the upper body renders impossible the kind of full-body breath
8
9 that needs flexibility in the intercostals (lower ribs) and, most importantly,
10
11 the release of the pelvic floor on the intake of breath. This is not to say that
12
13 it is impossible to dance in the forms of Ballet, Jazz or Tap while singing to
14
15 one's optimal capability. It simply means that a different approach to the
16
17 aesthetics of movement is required, different from form and genre (i.e
18
19 aesthetic): a way of doing (*active aesthetic*), entering from *awareness*
20
21 through dynamics of the *breath-body* so that required line, flexibility, and
22
23 even strength become *symptoms* of an integrated practice.
24
25
26
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33
34 Strength, as earned by way of attaining certain positions or mastering
35
36 movement sequences hung on static form, can create the type of
37
38 tensions that impede the *breath-body*. In exploring movement and sound
39
40 as a *breath-dance* we found that often the dancers in the room had to
41
42 release habitual muscular holding, even while doing the same sort of
43
44 movement sequences they were used to in dance. We found that the
45
46 breath itself could provide the sort of dynamic strength that the muscle
47
48 was known to hold. This is not unlike the work of modern
49
50 dancer/choreographer Erick Hawkins, mentioned previously:
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3 The key concept—and the secret behind a Hawkins dancer's
4 unbound, soft muscled quality—is contraction and de-contraction.
5
6 This does not imply movement that is not performed fully; rather it
7
8
9
10
11 suggests using only the effort required to perform efficiently. (Stern
12
13
14 2007)

15
16
17
18
19 Hawkins also believed in the integration of the intellect. "Hawkins invented
20
21 a word to use in the classroom when he is trying to reveal to a student
22
23 how to develop kinesthetic awareness, "think-feel"" (Brown 1971, p.12).

24
25
26 The term is not about being in the body with a position of no-mind or pure
27
28 experience. In vocal-dance this would be considered disintegrating.

29
30
31 Hawkins' term has similarities with way that we use *awareness* rather than
32
33 focus and *witnessing* rather than judging and diagnosing. For us however
34
35 this goes beyond a concept and further is a practical foundation of the
36
37 work as mentioned earlier.
38
39

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43
44 In general, Modern Dance tends to inhabit a lower point of centre in the
45
46 body than Ballet. This is often made apparent through the learning of
47
48 contractions. The contraction part of the contraction/release that a
49
50 dancer grounded in Martha Graham's technique learns is often taught as
51
52 a movement stemming from the feeling of being punched in the lower
53
54 belly, or from a percussive exhale that happens in a laugh or a scream,
55
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1
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3 resulting in a 'natural' curvature of the spine with a hollowing of the lower
4
5 belly. This 'pelvic' centre presents difficulties for a vocal dancer wishing to
6
7 sound on the exhale and while doing the shape of a 'release'. In Hawkins'
8
9 work, movement starts by "initiating and controlling movement from the
10
11 body's pelvic centre of gravity; swinging the legs from high in the hip
12
13 socket to activate lightness and freedom finding the body's midline
14
15 through the spine's four curves—cervical, thoracic, lumbar and sacral"
16
17 (Stern 2007). In Pilates, which many modern dancers use to condition,
18
19 there is a "scooping" of the lower belly or drawing of the "navel towards
20
21 the spine" (Siler 2000, p.20). Although with good training this is not
22
23 considered the same as "sucking in your tummy", even done correctly we
24
25 found that this created difficulties in the complete release needed of the
26
27 pelvic floor on the intake. What we found was that we needed to clarify
28
29 the action of an even lower point of centre than generally used in acting,
30
31 voice or movement practices, the perineum – a centre connected with a
32
33 vertical movement of breath rather than horizontal, one that would
34
35 integrate the practitioner in the act of practice and allow for full physio-
36
37 vocal capabilities.
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51 Conclusion

52
53 While working not by putting voice and movement together but rather
54
55 from a transdisciplinary perspective, new vocabulary and skill sets
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2
3 emerged. We created not from the aesthetics of voice or movement, but
4
5 rather through an active aesthetic that allowed for exacting voice and
6
7 movement possibilities. The use of awareness was increasingly essential as
8
9 the need for choreographic and vocal challenges grew. "Return
10
11 to centre" became our motto. Practitioners found that the work we did
12
13 not only translated well to their work as actors, singers and dancers but
14
15 enhanced their technique(s). There are many paths, but I hope this
16
17 provides a different and interesting entry into the discussion of physio-
18
19 vocal integration. We invite you to play with our discoveries and take
20
21 them further within your own practice(s).
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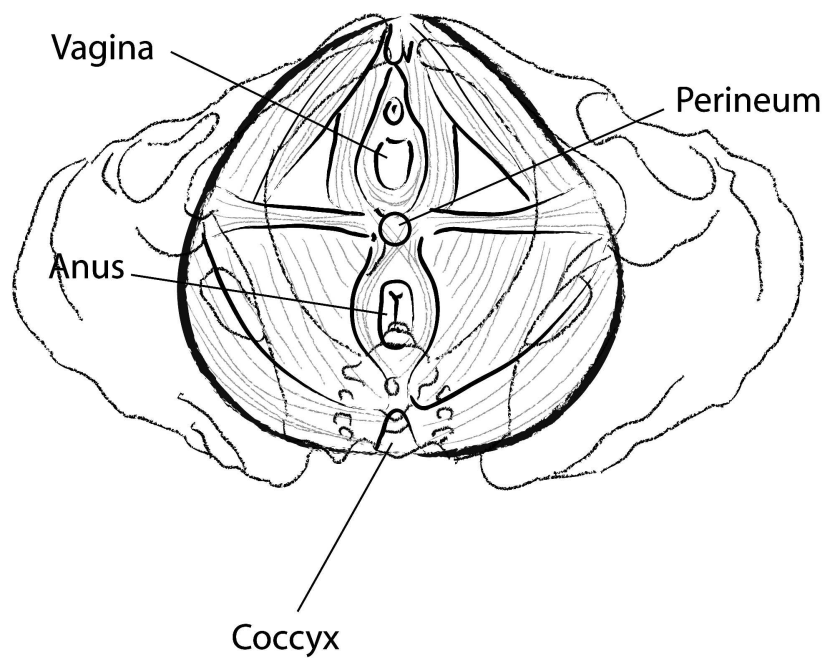
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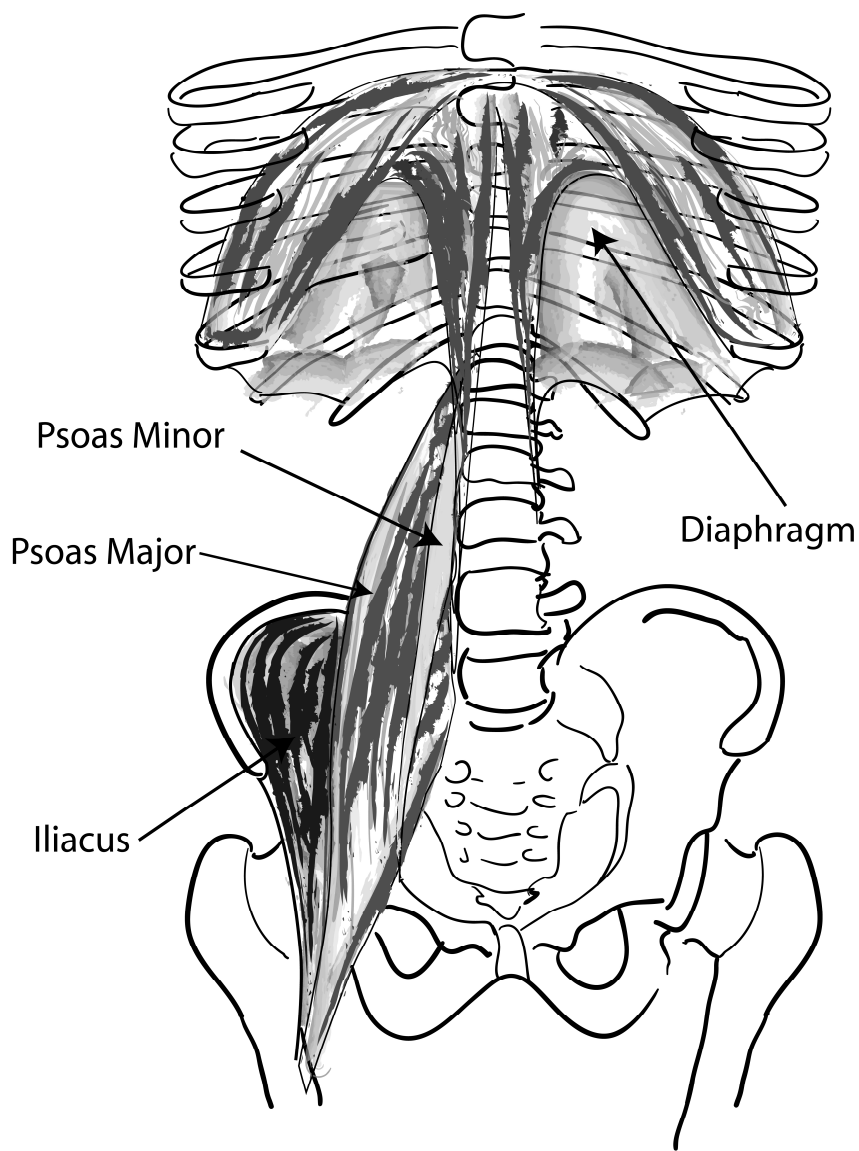


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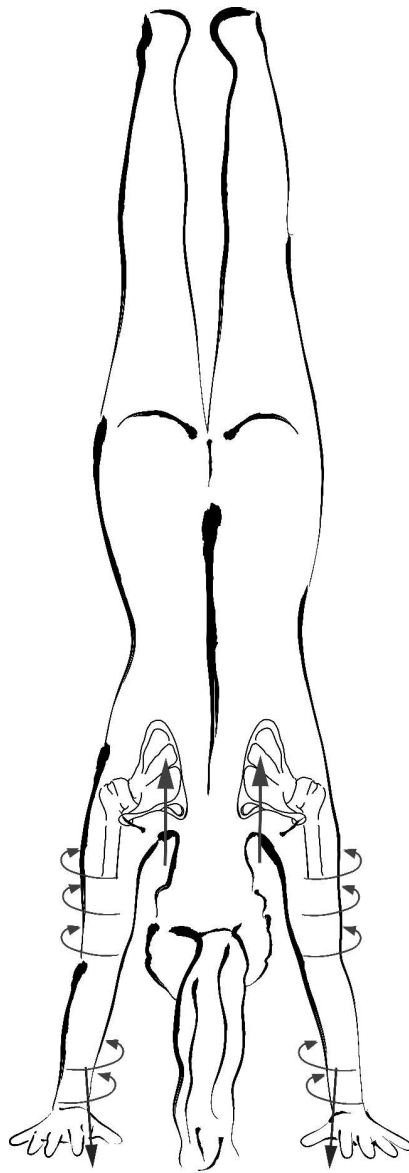
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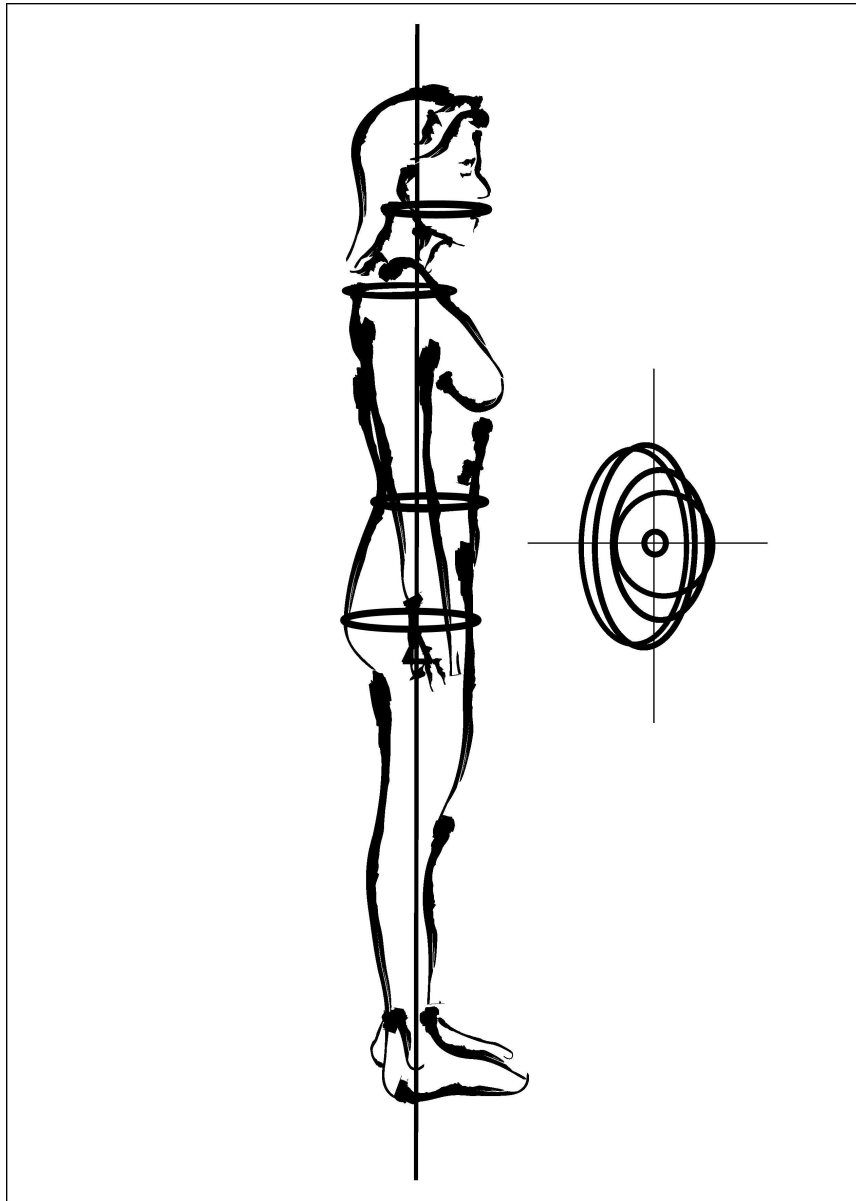
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P.Zacharek ©2007

150x324mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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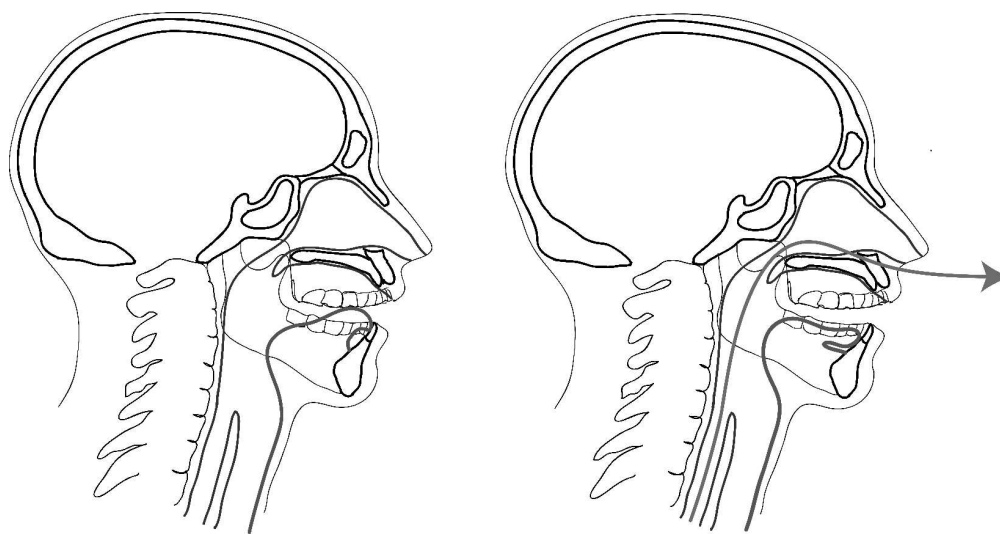
214x299mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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The image displays a musical score in 4/4 time, starting with a tempo of 80 and changing to 72. The score includes dynamic markings (*f*, *mf*, *mp*, *f*), a *rit.* (ritardando) section, and a triplet. Below the score are five sequential photographs of a dancer in a studio setting, illustrating the physical movements corresponding to the music. The dancer is wearing a dark leotard and has white reflective markers on their back and legs. The photographs show the dancer in various floor-based poses, including a crouched position, a side-lying position, and a more extended, arched position.

414x156mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Peer Review Only



Intake

Voicing

P. Zacharek ©2007

555x420mm (300 x 300 DPI)

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Fa - ce che pa - lpi - ta Pre - sso a - lmo - rir.



430x105mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Peer Review Only

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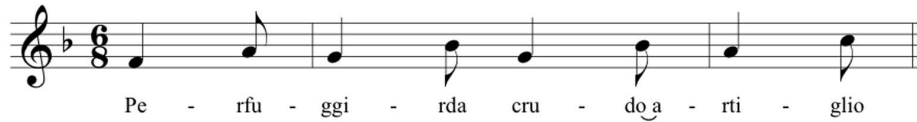
Se - mpli - ce - tta to - rto - re - lla,



430x108mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Peer Review Only

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430x120mm (300 x 300 DPI)

Peer Review Only