

## **Suzanne White Manning Bio Statement**

Working on this statement, I have been struck that even though one can feel isolated working as an artist, in looking back I see the many communities that surrounded me, that I was a part of, including my family. The rather long account that follows here incorporates this developing and surprising realization.

I grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan with family support from parents, many grand/greatgrandparents and other relatives. Seventh-Eleventh grades at "East" was rich with arts, cultural, intellectual and social opportunities: "This is East Grand Rapids High School, the center of each of our lives ... This is the fount of the golden years, those wonderful years of our youth ... For these priceless opportunities, which have been afforded us by the members of our community, we are grateful." (from my class's yearbook, *Interlochen*.) Interwoven was the commercial studio experience with Shirley Keller (former NYC Ballet dancer come home) whose versatile choreography presented in different G.R. venues offered us students vibrant dance opportunities.

My husband says I must have been born singing. It's true I've always loved music, and I sang in many choirs, ensembles and performances, and early on even received a scholarship to Interlochen National Music Camp. But dance is the career path I took. (Possibly because I wanted to keep my voice purely for the love of singing?)

My undergraduate years were spent in a small — at that time — dance program at the (large) University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. There, in the summer of my Junior year, faculty member Jeanne Parsons Bostian formed The Dancemakers with four of us students and brought us to Mexico

for an extended tour over all of the country — into areas of the provinces never scheduled before — for three weeks under the auspices of the American Embassy's Young American Artists Series. This was an exceptional, extraordinary experience for we four young women, providing a look into a dancer's/performer's life while realizing the wonderful benefit of the cultural interchange with Mexico and its people.

After graduating I worked in Detroit for a short time where I briefly became part of a community of dancers at Wayne State University. Ruth Murray was Chair of the dance program and student, Garth Fagan, the most well known of the group, went on to form his own company continuing for many years in Upstate NY.

I became restless in the Midwest ...

As good fortune would have it, I landed in an outstanding, relatively new Master's Degree program in the Department of Dance, School of the Arts and Architecture at UCLA. This opportunity would take me by surprise with its nationally known faculty, great array of class offerings across the spectrum of all that aspiring dance departments had begun to encompass — currently named the Department of World Arts and Cultures — and high caliber students. My emphasis was choreography and performance and as such was required to present a choreographic thesis. The resulting work, *Requirere* — a liturgical dream play-dance — was something of a breakthrough. (They had to add an extra performance to accommodate the response.) Throughout the choreographic process I was deeply affected by my faculty-artist collaborators: Richard Russell, composer, Malcolm McCormick, costume and scenic design, and Penelope Leavitt, lighting design. They gave me so much and not only in the sense of their physical contributions but in the dawning realization, on my part, that

here was my first real experience in collaboration, as well as creating in multiple theatrical dimensions. This was what (creative) collaboration meant. Recently, being back in touch with UCLA, I've again recognized that that seminal experience had been an influence through many years of artistic and teaching work, much of it evidenced in this archival website.

During my time in Los Angeles I also was invited to join the Bella Lewitsky Dance Company and the Gloria Newman Dance Theater— I was honored and grateful — but these years, too, had helped me identify a focus for my arts passion and it was more than performance. I had come to recognize that creativity and expression was primary to who I was, with process and collaboration the touchstones I would employ for the work I would do throughout many decades.

I moved to NYC after my course work was finished and once again took on a big city high school dance job in the Bronx (the others had been in Watts, L.A., and Detroit). My small city, Midwest origins/horizons were greatly expanded by the challenges and rewards of this work. After a brief two-year stint in New York City I accepted a faculty position in the fledgling dance program at Duke University, Durham, NC. Project Synergy was birthed there at Duke four years later with the participation of Duke Media Center staff, myself from the Dance faculty, Duke students and community members exploring a concept with three creative dimensions: visual/audial/kinesthetic art. "The concept became a project, not readily lending itself to written description" so "to wit " in July 1974, Project Synergy came alive in its performance outlet, Synergic Theater.

David Manning became a member in 1976 and injected the Synergic Theater workshops with a new and fresh approach ... (see David's bio statement).

The end-of-the-decade-years were transformative: David and I were married in the Yucatan, Mexico; the second Synergic Theater performance event was staged in the whole of Baldwin Auditorium, Duke University; I resigned from my Duke faculty position and entered the Certificate Program in Laban Movement Analysis (with the charismatic Irmgard Bartenieff), NYC; meanwhile, the American Dance Festival (formerly at Connecticut College) was preparing for its move to Duke the following summer; and after the first season of ADF (David did the PR/marketing), we moved the Synergic Theater to San Francisco.

The half-decade residence in the San Francisco Bay Area developed beyond what we believed could be accomplished, yet as what we'd hoped for ... the progressive, cosmopolitan environment provided a nearly no-holds-barred atmosphere — an artistic, experimental proving ground, if you will — in which we could build the young Synergic Theater's legitimacy as both a dance and a theater company.

The accessibility of the SFBA afforded us time and opportunity to rent our own studio — named the Synergic Theater while the company used the name Delta Carnival — where we offered classes, workshops, self-produced our own work and rented to other artists. It was a richly productive and creative period of time and a time when strong personal and artistic relationships were formed and exist today, if some only in memories.

Early in the new decade we went back to our roots in Durham, NC, where in a significant way we were able to continue where we'd left off through a generous in-kind donation of theater and studio space from Duke University. (Thank you, Julia Wray). We presented six full-evening productions — taking two of them "on the road" to

New York City — over a two-year period. Following late that summer I accepted an offer as Guest Faculty in the Escola de Dansa, Institut del Teatre, in Barcelona, Spain. (Thank You, Marsha Plevin and Anne Deloria).

Our first living and working experience “abroad” was life-altering. Catalan society and culture had at its core a startling creativity and it was inspiring to witness their post-Franco (even post-Columbian) liberation, sharing a history, culture ... community ... that was at once traditional and avant garde. Music. Sardanas. Art. Life. “Old Stones” and “Pasos” both grew out of this experience.

When we returned to the States, I accepted another dance job, part-time, at UNC Greensboro, while The Synergic Theater remained quiet until our departure for NYC where we would reside and work for 29 years.

Again, surviving off donated space, thanks, in part, to my adjunct position in the Theater and Fine Arts Dept of Pace University (Lower Manhattan) along with our developing relationship with the Schimmel Center for the Arts at Pace (Thank you Dawn Knipe, Al Dumais and Jess Atkins). We’ve always felt extremely fortunate when it came to access to space but maybe it came down to the good people we were dealing with and our relationship with them.

After our final performances at SUNY-Brockport and the Ohio Theater in NYC, I went to Turkey as guest faculty teaching Movement for the Actor in the State Theater Conservatory, in residence at Anadolu University. As with Barcelona, this was an inspiring and transformative experience. Wonderful students! After I returned, we conducted our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Workshop in 1994, which officially ended the Synergic Theater,

and we continued with our own individual arts pursuits.

I should pause here and remind observers/readers that other areas of this website chronicle the above Synergic Theater activity, including, six videos as of summer, 2017.

My "professional" career (I got paid!) turned to English for Speakers of other Languages, having earned a Certificate in English Language Studies at The New School, NYC. "ESL" was a transformation, teaching so many cultures, communities, in many different venues, ranging from a Chinese TV station, to the UN to the City University of New York, among others. Although the subject was ultimately verbal (by definition), the process of engaging the students in learning drew on my Synergic Theater/movement/dance teaching experience.

Meanwhile, post-Synergic Theater dance life is alive and well ... Beginning in the 90's: independent choreographers Richard Haisma, Susan Cherniak and myself along with Mulberry Street Theater in NYC co-presented "O GRAVITY, O LIGHT," a program of new dances; I met weekly over many years with members of a movement improvisation group, "Old Enough to Know Better" (we once performed at P.S. 122); I was a member of "The Field", an arts organization aimed at empowering artists; and I was a presenter in the WOMENKIND Sixth Annual Festival of One-Woman shows celebrating Women's History Month at the One Dream Theater, NYC.

More recently, I had met Finis Jhung as he was transitioning to teaching ballet to adults. I became hooked, and by the time we left NYC in late 2015 to move back to Durham, NC, I had been studying with Maestro Jhung for about 10 years. Now, one way I can look at those inspiring classes is that they provided leverage for joining the wonderful

Community Movers series taught by Gerri Houlihan through the American Dance Festival.

... and the beat goes on ... dance remains at the core of my personal and professional identity.

I want to finish by thanking earlier professional and inspirational influences:

Irmgard Bartenieff, Founder and Director of the Laban/Bartenieff Institute of Movement Studies, NYC; Nancy Meehan, Nancy Meehan Dance Company; Bella Lewitsky, Bella Lewitsky Dance Company; Mabou Mines, Meredith Monk and other members of "The Bunch", NYC ... not to mention the hundreds of works by other artists — films, paintings, books, music, performances — that have made my life what it is.