

## Hip Hop: Her Soul's Force

### **An Interview with Dance Mission Teacher Micaya**

*By Stella Adelman and Noelle Durant*



SUMMER FEAST Dos Rios, 2013

Summer Feast was truly magnificent. From the moment I parked the car at the top of the hill, I was engaged. Greeted by warm and welcoming staff who offered a shuttle, I chose to walk down the hill. Along the steep road I enjoyed the colorful tents where artists and staff had been living for the days leading up to the event. I began to see creatures moving through the woods with painted faces and garlands of branches growing out of their heads and then in the vegetable garden, more crawling beasts and wistful fairies.

As I arrived at the main house, long tables were decorated with colorful cloth and flowers inviting us



to begin the feast, sharing the picnics we had brought. Community began to arrive, a parade of the curious, unsure of what they were about to witness but already happy they chose to attend. How can one not be refueled by the brown summer hills of northern California, dry and golden and spotted with evergreens. And of course, there is the

converging of rivers – Dos Rios.

I spoke with a young man from Covelo wearing a big white cowboy hat. He wondered what was going to happen. I said, “I don’t know but I imagine that urban artists are here to experience the rough raw beauty of these mountains and that we the rural ones are here to experience the imaginations of the urban artists and we will bend and blend and if I am a little shocked and delightfully surprised and elevated to joy, then I am certainly glad I came.” He looked at me like I was other-worldly, smiled and said, “I could use some of that. Yes, I would like some of that.” That was one of the many moments of the evening that I will remember for a long time.

I had no idea how “the show” would officially begin and how visionary director Krissy Keefer would move from place to place the 150 or so people who were on the land. And yet, it began with a beautiful woman holding a white parasol and little old man who spoke a non-language and even so, we all knew exactly what to do. They began to move us up the hill towards the open barn theater.





Along the way we were delighted by creatures of humor and mystery. When we got to the theater, the dance began with three magnificent young male bodies dancing in unison – The Alayo Dance Company - strong and individual and intimate – allowing us a moment in this world of horrific truths to marvel at ourselves, our bodies, our agility, our strength. Then the women took the space with heartbreak and power and biting rage. The young women who I knew had been training at Dance Mission since they were pre-teens joined in with the professional Dance Brigade and the men are back and there on stage is Cuba and Africa and Europe and Turtle Island and warriors and witchery.

We are offered a tribute to first people, a scream against violence, a flirtatious moving of hips with brooms in hand and blood roses on the floor. The rage rises and frightens a toddler to tears whose mother quietly moves back from the stage and the child immediately calms.

The child has the most genuine of responses. Yes we are all crying even if our adult selves hold it inside. The Taiko drums take center stage and an ancient global holler comes forth and the drums roar through the hills of northern California.





And we move down the hill, all 150 of us, audience and artists merged. The stilt people – an international collaboration of The Carpetbag Brigade (USA) and Nemcatocoa (Columbia) are now in charge of us and they twist our minds as they twist their bodies around trees and branches and old oil drums left discarded decades ago.



They lead us down to a huge open space that has in the past been filled with water. It is an empty lake now, dry and dusty. We look up to see Hojarasca from Colombia ritualize the setting of the sun with flutes and drums and chant. The stilt people walk in slow ceremony, so slow we cannot imagine why they do not fall over. Once in the circle, they do. They fall and rise, they lift and kick, they dance, they get up unassisted from the most unimaginable positions never departing from their very long wooden legs. Young women bring Arab spring into the circle and belly dance, their hips and bellies honoring the place from which we all come. And then the Taiko drums return and Dance Brigade has the last word. We all yell into the dusk while the sun sets over the hill.





One thinks it is over, we have received so much more than we came for. And yet, as we walk back up the hill, there is more. More creatures in the woods, in trees, staring out from their hiding places. And finally, back at the main house, a thank you to Krissy Keefer and a lovely concert from the Colombian musicians who are traveling in the bus with the stilt people, on tour for months and months and months. A thank you to Stella and Mathew and all the staff who moved quietly, invisibly with their headsets and walkie-talkies.

It is dark now but no one wants to leave. Slowly, people get in the shuttles and head back to their cars. I choose to walk back up, even though it is dark and steep and I know my 64 year old body will complain in the morning. But I want to make the walk up that I took down earlier in the evening. I want to look up at the night sky, less light polluted than in the city. I want to hear the sounds of Columbian flutes and drums still playing, responding to "Otra, Otra!" when they try to stop.



I think about Krissy Keefer, so brave and vivacious. A wild and visionary artist who should be receiving huge grants and MacArthur awards but often her work is so



outside that mainstream funding source, she like so many revolutionary artists are overlooked. She does so much with solittle. She pulled this amazing evening off with only \$6000 – yes with some volunteers but she pays her staff and artists. She would like to pay them more. They deserve more. I sat with her for a moment as she pulled up a chair right in front of the musicians and enjoyed a glass of wine. She was happy. Joyful. Satisfied. And then she said quietly, if someone would just give me \$100,000.

And she is right. She is the right person to give money to. She will do great things with it.

As I walked up the hill I also thought of the fellow in the white cowboy hat who stayed to the very end, dancing to the Colombian music, finding a new sensation in his hips and feet. He had never seen the world like this, never seen brown skinned men touch each other with such strength, never seen women rise up so powerfully that you are forced to pray, never heard flutes and drums from a world far away from Covelo, never danced under the stars with mysterious creatures tumbling out of the trees. And I would bet my life and soul on the fact that if children grew up with regular access to a day like this they would never starve a child, damn up a river, beat a woman or kill another Indian.

Holly Near

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