

TRIBAL INTERVENTION

CAN YOU IMAGINE A MARRIAGE suffused with conflict and disagreement to the point where the partners have buried their love and are ready to call lawyers to arrange a divorce, but instead they call a dance counselor?

Can you imagine two co-workers having such a deep dispute that a professional mediator is needed to help solve the issues, but instead they call in a drummer and a sounding coach?

Suppose you could sing, growl, and grunt out your irritation, disappointment, or hurt before it turned into anger and rage.

Suppose we could jump, twirl, stomp, shake, and shimmy to some kind of beat when we felt frustrated or caged, to keep ourselves from hurting or lashing out at another person.

Can you possibly see us recapturing and actually using “tribal” or “village” ways of rhythmic movement and vocalizing as tools of conflict resolution?

You know, the U.S. of America, at about 400 years old, is the baby on the planet, with the biggest playpen and the most toys. For a long time now, it’s been very much into the “me me me” stage of development. The universe revolves around us and all that is new and shiny is good and valuable. Our older sibling, Europe, is the teenager, almost grown, with closets full of treasures, trinkets, and traditions saved or collected from other cultures.

But the elders of the world, whose wisdom, culture, and consciousness we have greatly ignored, are found across the continent of Africa, throughout Asia, in Australia and Latin America. They have kept humanity’s secrets, revealing bits and pieces in times of dire need. They’ve kept our secrets of self-healing and of using what we in the West call “the arts” as tools for sane survival and community maintenance.

Perhaps we could humbly ask the Kalahari bush men if we may learn from them the movements and sounds that would enable us to diagnose and heal disorders in the human body. Or maybe we could learn from the Sanskrit scholars of India and Tibet the exact tones and mantras to chant, to help us maintain emotional and physical well-being.

As a longtime dancer who has encouraged thousands of children and adults to dance for the joy and freedom of it, I now propose that we all use rhythmic movement coupled with rhythmic vocalizing as a means to diffuse and prevent violent conflict. To help restore the love. We can do this every day in our homes, at our jobs, and at all community gatherings. It must be mandatory in schools for all students, staff, and teachers. Can you stretch your imagination to visualize those in prison and in the military being required to dance and drum? What if every session of Congress or at the United Nations were to begin with movement and music?

Dominic Shodekeh, a young skilled master of the contemporary art of “beatboxing,” and I are experimenting with natural sound, rhythmic breathing, and movement combined as a tool for young people to use when they are feeling antagonistic, threatened, or scared. We are partnering with the Community Conferencing Center, an organization established ten years ago by Lauren Abramson, a former Open Society Institute-Baltimore fellow. The center offers people who are locked in serious and even criminal conflict with each other



Illustration by John Malloy

a means to communicate and work their way through to a place of acceptance and even possible forgiveness. What the center’s staff have done for so many in this city is incomparable and it is the closest thing I have seen to village or tribal counseling.

They now work with groups of students in several schools. Gathering the boys and then the girls in separate circles for a rap session, they allow them to say all that’s on their minds concerning that day’s issue of conflict. It’s often very heated. Shodekeh and I have requested to come and guide a group of ten boys through a session of breathing, grunting, growling, and movement, all with a funky rhythm to contain us. The rules include absolutely no touching and no words—just sounds and gestures and movement to express whatever they’re feeling. We always begin and end the session with silence and stillness and then reflection.

When we demonstrated the whole process with the staff at the CCC participating, the response was varied but enthusiastic. We hope the circle of boys will want to try it at least two or three times, and that maybe afterwards, they feel some relief and will be less inclined to hurt each other. We want to find a name for this that is catchy and appealing. But mostly, Shodekeh and I want dancing and vocalizing, drumming and music-making to be returned to their status as revered therapeutic tools not only for our urban villagers and in our tribal communities, but also for us as we grow closer and closer to our global relatives as well. Can you imagine that?

—Maria Broom

The Skills of Survival

The Skill of Voice ...

... listens with him, The Sounder Blue. Obstacles of throes manifest, attempting to thwart a journey through a hallway of Chaos. The floor flashes, disappearing and reappearing from this reality and the nearest dimension. He views glimpses beneath his feet of a suicidal Archangel, revealing an ever-patient torture of self. Histories of Throat Singing rise from the larynx. Two notes executed at once allow him to levitate across, avoiding descent. The walls dare to liquefy, perhaps to immerse the Sounder in baptisms. A cane floats past in this underwater state, the drowning of Moses is nearby. Thoughts of Wind soothes, he calmly exhales. The water tides away from the path and respects new surfaces of serenity. A reversed earthquake caught in the ceiling congas from subterranean recesses. Abstracts of steel and grain dive into gravity. Demon Knights pressure behind boulders above, with plans of burying his course. The Sounder reflects on experiences of poly-mathematics.

His chords drum at rhythms of such speed, and fragments from forsaken heavens phase through his physicality.

The Skill of Movement ...

... roves with her, The Mover Red, aiding through a forest of peace and warfare. Nature’s way of maintaining unseen balance decides to present her with gifts. Minted Trees, beacons for the Gods and Space, shatter at the bases. Insects of silver continue to jealously eat away at their golden roots. Woods fall in hopes of crashing into her path. The gymnastics of chance possess her thoughts, and a chess-like display of Olympic dodges grants her passage through the timbers. A Silverback Tiger greets her with composure. Eyes of Hunting, Teeth of Pressure. Growls of Poverty. She recalls lessons from the jungles of Brazilian Lore, inciting prayers of Capoeira. The Silverback attempts to discern the Mover’s character, unclear if it’s of Dance or Martial Artistry. The creature leaps away from her set, allowing for travels to continue unscathed. A Hummingbird witnesses her feats, wishing for such adaptability. The Hummingbird flutters, singing songs through wings of envy. The Butterfly Effect ensues, ensuring winds carrying leaves mistaken for Samurai. The Mover graces into a Ballerina’s diagonal leap, inspiring currents to caress her body in hopes of soft friendships.

The Skill of Energy ...

... empowers the Mover and Sounder through a greeting. They prepare themselves at the gates of a castle beset with anarchy. Recruited by ENERGY’s wishes to embody experience, they enter through a door made of dark mornings. His voice and her movements painfully exit their bodies, manifesting as stars of Blue and Red. Their physical frames now rest in mid-air unconsciousness. Two energies trans into one another, a new accord of light providing assistance throughout the estate of despairs. In basements of hidden pasts, spirits quarrel over childhoods neglected, an Abyss becomes born underneath the structure of the kingdom. Relatives from assorted cultures dispute traditions at the grand time of dining. Understanding becomes excommunicated, and screaming throat needles bleed ears at the chief meal of the day. A pair of lovers struggle over who is to wear The Crown of Volition, lightning anomalies magnetize towards the citadel. In one motion of Space and Time, The Red and Blue wash over the castle’s being. Dances of Teleportation are enacted in the basement to trap the abyss. A Language of Shrills is formed to unite in a new cast of perception. Clairvoyant Music is shared between lovers and Telekinetic Passion becomes intimate, tapping into the storm’s potential. The Mover and Sounder refuse their bodily hosts. Traveling into possibilities throughout, searching for skills to be developed, acquired, and passed on into the Future-Pasts of our sons and daughters.

—Dominic Shodekeh Talifero

TEAM 1



photo by La Kaye Mban

Known as an actress for her recurring roles in HBO’s *The Wire* and *The Corner*, **Maria Broom** is also a storyteller and dancer with more than forty years of experience performing and teaching. She is a native of Baltimore and a member of the theater faculty at the Baltimore School for the Arts.

Human beatboxer and hip-hop artist **Shodekeh** can vocally embody many sounds, from didgeridoos and ocean waves to sleigh bells and crickets. He has completed musical interpretations of gallery exhibits at Towson University and the American Visionary Art Museum and serves as an accompanist at Patapsco High School and Center for the Arts and the American Dance Festival, among other places.

For more from this team, go to www.urbanitebaltimore.com/project/teams/team1.