



Interview with Andy Au

by Andy Raine

Excerpt from the ICDF Network for Men in Dance newsletter

AA: We've been working with staves, with permission, and of course a lot with men.

AR: Staves?

AA: As in plural of staff – they're big sticks.

AR: Sorry, I thought they were called staffs! Tell us first about percussion.

AA: We've been experimenting with moving with drums, and keeping rhythm.

AR: That's sounding wild, and good to be developing. What else have you been doing?

AA: We've been doing a lot of something we call 'dynamic mass sculpturing'.

AR: 'Mass' as in weight?

AA: No, 'mass' as in many. This dynamic mass sculpturing is not choreographed, but is designed to release individual creativity collectively!

AR: Sounds wonderful. Now tell us what happens.

AA: Someone creates a shape, then the next person adds a shape of their own onto or around it. Each new person adds their own shape onto the picture that is building up.

AR: Like a developing tableau?

AA: Yes, but from that you create a pulse, rhythm. One person, still keeping the shape, flexes or pulses, then that pulse ripples through the group till all of the dancers have kept

their positions, but all move slightly in response to the recurring pulse as it reaches them, and they are all doing it.

AR: This sounds a bit like the piece you did with two other guys when we saw you at Glastonbury last summer – but you all had staves.

AA: Staves! Yes, it's the same idea. You create a shape with your body and the staff, then the others add on one at a time.

AR: Yes, it was quite fast – and very impressive with the staves.

AA: The staves help to make manly forms of dance, and this releases creativity.

AR: It was all changing very quickly, when we saw you, but I don't remember you using the pulse.

AA: When you use the pulse, you create the shape, each add to it, introduce the pulse, then dissolve the combined shape or sculpture and begin to create a new one.

AR: How does that work?

AA: We may have decided that when we check out the stage area, for example, that there will be three pre-determined possibilities, so people really are focussed, not just looking vaguely the same way. There need not just be one group, either. There may be multiple sculptures around the available space, happening simultaneously or at random timing.

AR: How about women with staves? Do you reckon they look good?

AA: Men look better.

AR: Ted Shawn used to reckon there are some ways of moving only guys should use, some only women should use, and then a cross-over grey area that both should approach with extreme caution.

AA: We have one girl, Kirsty, who is alright with a staff. But because they haven't the musculature it doesn't usually come as naturally to women. Men and women move differently. [...] Men have a linear walk, but women have a compound walk. Now, when you see men with staves there's a powerful dynamic there, seeing men move together – it makes an astounding spiritual difference.

Once we had these 250 worship leaders from Ichthus churches and did dynamic mass sculpture with the staves and drums! It all became sort of 'tribal' with about half of them moving like that and only 40 or 50 had been to the workshop!

AR: Enough of them to give the others the feel of where it could go.

AA: In one church there was this non-Christian guy joined in and he felt a belonging. Being part of this proves he worked into a spiritual sense of reality.

AR: If people can experience being around vital worship the presence of God does the evangelising.

AA: Yes, when you do a prepared *presentation* that has only one shot for evangelism. It's not exactly relevant to that person then it misses. But *worship* in evangelism is powerful if God orchestrates it.

AR: So where does it go from here?

AA: The dynamic mass sculpturing can lead into spontaneous prophetic action that really cuts it. I've already been developing that congregationally or cross-congregationally in Switzerland. We're about to do more with it right here in Brighton.

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