

## MAGPI ARTS AND HUMANITIES FORUM

MAGPI - Mid-Atlantic Gigapop (point of presence) in Philadelphia for Internet 2

For participants in:

PENNSYLVANIA, NEW JERSEY, DELAWARE

4/6/06

### INTRO

Hello, my name is Beth Miklavcic I am the Founding Artistic Director of *Another Language Performing Arts Company* and the Assistant Director of the *InterPlay Series*.

### COMPANY DESCRIPTION

Another Language Performing Arts Company is a dance based Interdisciplinary Performing Arts Company founded in 1985. From 1985-1995 we focused a very strongly on modern dance performances—I hold BFA and MFA degrees from the University of Utah Modern Dance Department.

The mission of Another Language is to combine different art forms in innovative ways and to broaden access to community arts education with the aid of today's communications technology.

So, in 1995, Another Language created the first Artistic Website in the State of Utah. The website [www.anotherlanguage.org](http://www.anotherlanguage.org) serves as a venue to show our artistic works. Other projects from 1995 to present are several *Dance For The Camera* pieces, an educational DVD-ROM that covered ten years of the evolution of a dance in the company repertoire. (which is available free to educators, by the way), a humorous 56 minute movie – a

Mockumentary poking fun at artistic obsession called *Music for Bubble Biters* and the InterPlay Series.

## **INTERPLAY PARTICIPATION AND PIECES**

I'm going to talk briefly about the pieces I have created for the InterPlays, the context motivations behind the works and about what it is like to be a performer in the InterPlay projects.

Within the context of the InterPlay subject, all live performers are responsible for creating their own works or performing the works created by a choreographer or director.

We have presented four Interplays since 2003

The first was *InterPlay: Intransitive Senses* – I created *Tea Party* and performed with our daughter Hanelle, she was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade at the time. The sets and props took four months to build. I thought of the *Tea Party* piece as an event, a voyeuristic slice of life, and on the upstage blue scrim I painted eyes, which symbolized people watching us through the Access Grid system.

2004 I created *The Surface of Things* for *InterPlay: Hallucinations*. This was a scripted theater piece that focused on assumptions that we tend to make about people without really knowing them. This was a trio with two opponents and a judge in the center, but as the opponents found their resolution, the judge moved into the role of an opponent with two new cast members coming into the scene to represent that many people experience

being judged incorrectly. The opponents held cameras to show their point of views from inside the piece and all camera work was choreographed.

2005 I created *Dressers* for *InterPlay: Loose Minds in a Box*. This was a solo that took place in a closet – which was my box. I changed into a series of costumes each one getting more extreme, representing the box of our daily dress. Each costume represented a character as defined by the six scenes of the InterPlay. I started in neutral black and went through a series of characters to finally becoming a crone in a cape walking away out of the scene. It was a crammed thirty minutes that represented a complete cycle of life.

2006 – most recently was *Mind Waves* for *InterPlay: Dancing on the Banks of Packet Creek*. I think of this piece as a quartet, but locally in Utah it was a duet performed by an eight-year-old girl, Kate Bradford and myself. The other two participants were from Boston, Cellist Junko Simons and performer Jacqueline Combs. I focused *Mind Waves* around a Zen Garden that started simply and traditionally, but as the piece progressed it moved away from contemplative simplicity and became more complicated and filled with stuff, until finally it was too full and we had to walk away. Kate, the little girl, was the physical representation of the idea of the Internet. She starting out knitting on the side of the room creating her web, then becoming a silhouette-the beginning of an idea, and then, by stringing white yarn back and forth through the scene, she moved the web into physical space, as the strings multiplied it became harder and harder for us to move in the space, we got tangled up in it. Jacqueline Combs also strung the performance space in Boston creating a visual correlation between our two locations. For me,

our tangled spaces were very representative of how computers can influence our lives if we are not careful. For example, where I used to receive just a few pieces of mail from the postal carrier, now I open up my email and I have over 50-70 or more messages to deal with daily.

## **CREATING FOR INTERNET VIDEO STREAMS**

I believe that the main focus of the participant/performer involved in the development of an *InterPlay* is to create a high quality work that addresses the context of the collaboration, but after that, within the *InterPlay* format, the participants responsibility is to send useful images for the director to use in the main mix. The role of the participant involved in the *InterPlay* performance is to provide the director with a sequence of text, or images, or audio events or scenes that are useful to the director as he threads the needle of image relationships together between the streams into the main mix.

Images provided should help move the theme and performance sequence along.

Since this is a visual and auditory art form, which we are describing as Real Time Surrealistic Cinema - awareness of the quality of the streamed images sent by the participant is imperative to providing material that the director can use in the performance. Providing useful images is achieved by knowledge of camera technique and effective lighting. The participant may have created the most stunning work in his or her own space, but if we can't see it through the video stream then the work is lost. The visual stream needs to be addressed even if the main emphasis of the participant is the audio component. Looking at someone's back for thirty minutes isn't

interesting. Not being able to see the instrument that is played actually causes frustration in the viewer. Dark lighting detracts from the dynamics of the sound. The participant needs to think through what they want the network audiences to see and to spend the time working out how to achieve that goal.

The participant, either in the development of a work, should take the time to imagine moments that can be seen through the eye of the camera, just as a cinematographer would think through the storyboard of the shots for a movie. Some questions the participant should investigate are: Where do I want the remote viewing audience to focus in my piece at any given moment and can that be shown through the camera? What angles should be used at any given time? Should this be a close up, medium shot or wide shot? Thinking through the piece as a filmmaker, improves the stream that is sent during a performance and will be more useful to the director.

## **LAYERING AND TECHNICAL SYMBIOSIS**

I just want to add, that doing this work is number one incredibly difficult it is so multi-layered and there are many participants involved in these collaborations, but it is so incredibly exciting as well. It really is emerging – the Access Grid Video Conferencing Technology is still not available to the general public. It is only available to researchers connected to Internet 2. To achieve an InterPlay performance there is an integral relationship between the people who are running the Access Grid and the performing artists. If the grid isn't working there is no show. A lot of the people involved are

skillful as both technologists and artists. It takes a lot of patience and problem solving to put these InterPlay performances together.

Each InterPlay we undertake is an experiment and an investigation on what we can do with the tools we currently have, and we work towards increasing our options available to us for each show, but the tools are only that, the InterPlays are ultimately about the art we create - unlabeled, unboxed with boundaries removed-pure artistic expression.

## **BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS**

On a final note, the children and teenagers I've worked with in these InterPlays get it. Which is really cool! Because of this, I know that there are many applications in education for this work, especially using artistic creation for interesting springboards—we can help students with identity, self-acceptance, as well as, using this work as a medium for discovering the magic that exists all around us.

By emphasizing details through the eye of the camera, we can investigate all sorts of elements, texture, color, etc. I find working with the camera can help us see the details of even the simplest things. It helps us to move away from our normal perceptions toward something new and different.

The communication potential to make the world more accessible is incredible. We have the potential get to know people from different cultures by working on projects together. The possibilities for making worldwide connections are unlimited.

This is an incredibly exciting time!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

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