

Summary Documentation: PERFORMING WORDS WORKSHOP

Four sessions of four hours each
Friday (19.1.2001) through Monday (22.1.2001)
The White Room at the Odin Teatret

The group consisted of twenty participants
The leaders of the group were Gilly Adams and Geddy Aniksdal.

One didn't have to spend much time around this workshop to know that this experience was very productive for the participants. Somehow, the partnership between Gilly and Geddy created a chemistry that caused creative things to happen. They truly complimented each other. They clearly had definite plans, but were open to change responding to the moment. The group followed their lead with great spirit.

There were a series of activities that were regular and consistent, and numbers of activities that appeared "out of the blue" to surprise and challenge.

Most sessions began with Geddy's badminton circles, aimed at relaxation and concentration. Keep the bird in the air with your feet and count how many hits in a row the group can accomplish. The first day, we had to do push-ups for failures, but fortunately, that didn't last into the second day.

Another regular activity was "The Choir." Geddy in the center, conducting the circle of women in sound – many musical tones and notes, but also breaths, sighs, laughs, and text - all creating a dynamic ensemble event.

And a circle group massage was often a welcome suggestion.

The principal focus of the workshop was the exploration and development of writing. This included the option of communicating the writing through performance to others.

One recurring and provocative exercise was "Write Me." The procedure usually involved the energetic Geddy moving and sometimes sounding in a defined space. Writers watched on, tablets and notebooks in hand, and wrote impulsively from what they saw. This was a timed exercise, usually two minutes. Options for reading aloud followed. Occasionally, other persons moved into the space and provided stimulus for the timed writing exercise. Extraordinary small pieces were generated, sometimes involving the possibilities of expansion into longer pieces.

Another productive exercise for generating stories and material was Gilly's "Matchbox" exercise. Sitting in a circle, participants had the opportunity to speak about any topic during the time it took a (very long) match to burn down.

Occasionally, there was time set aside for group creations and presentations. Broken down into small groups, performances pieces were developed in short rehearsal periods and presented to the group. One of these revolved around an improvisation based on journeys; another evolved out of a controlled writing exercise involving an emotion chosen by the small rehearsal group and integrated into a presentation. Unpredictability, excitement, and fun were often the result. And sometimes emotion and meaning as well.

A big surprise occurred on the last day, when participants were told “You have five minutes to write a song. Begin now, please.” What ?!#!? But by that time, the group had found its freedom: they recovered quickly from the request and went to work with wonderful results. It goes without saying that this exercise begged to be shared. Like many other moments in the workshop, we didn’t know we could do it until we did. Anyone for musical theatre writing?

In general, the workshop proceeded much of the time on a positive and productive balance between the solitary experience of writing and the group experience of sharing what was written. The two parts of the process served to sustain and feed off each other with rich results.

On the final day, members of the group had the opportunity to present one of their pieces from the workshop period. Presented were four monologues, two poems, one song and a two-person play. There was great pride in the accomplishments of others.

Every workshop session included “a round,” where each person reported on how they were doing on that day, and might describe their plans and problems. This helped us to consider each other as we continued together.

Of course, the last part of the last session required a meaningful closing activity: the group ended with a Matchbox Round, where members and leaders expressed whatever they wished to express. Among these:

- Appreciation for the supportive, nurturing atmosphere
- The return to confidence in being able to write productively.
- Friendship and caring among members of the group.
- The wonderful environment of many languages and many cultures
- Compliments and appreciation to Gilly and Geddy for their leadership and skills
- The determination to continue the habits of writing.

A solid success, all around.

(Submitted by Beverly Brumm, workshop member)