

Ecstatic Dance as a Spiritual Practice

Movement Meditation

Dawn is one of the most experienced teachers of 5 Rhythms Dance in the country, practicing for over 16 years. She trained with Gabrielle Roth in America and has been teaching weekly classes in Moseley, Birmingham for the last 8 years.

Tell us your journey into dance?

In my family we often danced. My brothers and sisters, my mum, my granny and occasionally my dad, would all dance. It was always a way that I had to connect with others, express myself and let go. I remember that adolescent phase of being self-conscious and not really knowing how to speak to people at parties. I found that if I could get myself onto the dance floor, after dancing I would feel more relaxed and confident and be better able to socialise. I'm still like that, it's a very healthy alternative to alcohol!

Like many of us do, at some point in our lives, I went through a time of searching, of breakdown and breakthrough. When I started getting into healing, and personal growth, dancing was my way of taking a break from my worries and it also became a way I could creatively work things through; expressing feelings that I didn't know how to verbalize and letting go of the past. Dance was and still is a kind of retreat space for me where nothing except great music is required to experience a natural high and feeling of wellbeing.

It was around this time that I discovered the 5 Rhythms. Here I found a body of work dedicated to movement expression, awareness, healing, fun, spirituality and natural ecstasy, it was like coming home.

Why do I dance? To strengthen and resource myself on all levels. It keeps me fit and in touch with my heart, I dance to remember the wordless mysterious place of being (it is probably a similar feeling to prayer, appreciating a beautiful sunset or hanging out with someone you love). I love meeting people beyond and beneath

words, reminding me that we are all unique, we are all connected. A beauty emerges in us as we let go.

Some people are shy and feel embarrassed to dance – what would you tell them?

I would tell them that it's natural to feel embarrassed, don't let it stop you! Our culture generally is not that at home in our bodies... let alone a dancing body! We pick up pretty early on that to express ourselves in a physical and creative way is a 'no no' so there is a lot of containment. Strange really isn't it? I meet quite a number of people who come to a class after years of

Interview with international 5 Rhythms Dance teacher Dawn Morgan by Marketa Rozsypalova.



dancing alone at home with the curtains closed. There are probably millions of us all doing that, makes me chuckle to think of streets of people all dancing behind their curtains hiding from each other.

The 5 Rhythms Dance is one way to move through inertia and self-consciousness into the freedom of your own dance. It gets you into your body and into the moment, so the usual mental distractions like; worrying about what you might look like, or planning your 'to do' list, just melt away. Feelings get moved and expressed naturally. The 5 Rhythms offers simple tools for the journey of your own unfolding.

Many people would not put dance together with a spiritual practice, what would you say to them?

I think it is similar to the idea that the body is separate from spiritual practice. This practice acknowledges the flesh and blood of our sensual earthy physicality – an invitation to embrace the body as our home and temple. Historically people have always danced as a way to celebrate and pray. Being a wordless activity people of all faiths or no faith can come together. You can take the dance on any level you wish. Some people want to give their body a good work out and love the social aspect of the classes. And it can be a way to explore other dimensions of being and prayer. We have all got bodies, let's enjoy them!

What is your experience when dancing?

I experience everything in dancing that is about being a human being on this planet. All my beauty and

all my neurosis may arise. However, it is much harder to get stuck or attached to any particular state because I am moving. I might begin a session feeling physically stiff and my mood might feel 'flat' but as I move, the body starts to open and I feel more alive. Similarly I may arrive feeling stressed, I can either dance right into the stress or I might slow down to let it go. Very often I feel relaxed and at peace when I've danced.

The peak moments for me are when my body, heart and mind are moving as one, and there is a sense of the spirit of the dance happening through me, I am not doing it anymore. I feel blissful. I am totally present in my body and aware of my place in the web of all things. It is particularly wonderful to move into this experience with a group of people.

What is the 5 Rhythms Dance?

It's a map of how energy moves. Any kind of energy that you can think of when allowed to move naturally moves in waves. Light, the ocean, sound, sexual energy. Gabrielle Roth broke down the wave into 5 different rhythms - Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyrical and Stillness. Each rhythm is a gateway into a whole world and a way of being. (See her book 'Maps to Ecstasy'). Gabrielle has initiated an international community of 5 Rhythms dancers. You can just about 5 Rhythms dance your way around the world.

What are the main benefits of 5 Rhythms Dance?

People come alive on all levels. Like flowers blossoming and opening into more of who they are and can be. You are encouraged to go at your own pace, it can take time to remember how to listen the body without pushing or holding back. You get fit, and you are having fun, which in its self is a huge benefit. Emotionally and creatively it is a wonderful way to express how you are feeling. We all have hearts and feelings, vulnerabilities and histories - on the dance floor there is a lot of permission and space for the heart, our feisty passion, tenderness and joy. It's a great place to practice life skills like boundaries, making contact and even flirting! There is an atmosphere of safety, play and permission.

It is a brilliant way to get out and connect with new people. The Birmingham class is very friendly. I deeply appreciate this class. People make connections and friendships that may last their whole lives.

What can someone do to connect with their dance?

Well, if you can't make it to a class you can just put on your favourite music, feel the ground and how it supports your weight, breathe and start to move. Experiment with moving and following different parts of your body. Move your hands, let your whole body follow. Shift to your shoulders, play around with different movements and rhythms. Check out your hips, find them by moving them; side to side, forwards and backwards, in circles and so on. Let your knees 'speak' through movement, what do they have to say to your elbows? Its fun, and can be profound. Go through the whole body don't forget the feet and the head. Enter the body's dance with curiosity. Try out different music. Let your body unwind and de-



stress. Explore how you feel while moving, let your heart dance. Take pleasure in the movement, if you find tears or shyness allow this as another expression of life energy. If you get bored, just stay with it, breathe, move, trust the process. Let out your joy, explore the movement of pleasure and passion.

What can someone expect if they come to one of your classes for the first time?

You would very likely have a lot of fun and hopefully just the right amount of challenge to interest you. You may experience a sense of let go and playfulness within a welcoming community of dancers of all ages, sizes, shapes, abilities and backgrounds. I would say that even a complete beginner could experience states of profound presence and bliss. They might well leave feeling relaxed and energised.

In the first part of the class there is a 'free dance' space - that is an important part of the session where people arrive and transition into movement. They might warm up, stretch and dance, preparing for the wave. Then we come together and I might introduce a theme. I endeavour to offer a balance of guided structures and free space to let go and have good boogie.

In these times of uncertainty and change, dance offers an environment of creative expression where a profound and wordless connection may arise that transcends the personal.

See her at the Tree of Life, Mind Body and Spirit Festival Party for an hour, 5 Rhythms Dance class 8-9pm on 4th April 2009 in Moseley Village (see Page 10 for more details).

Dawn Morgan runs a weekly 5 Rhythms class every Thursday (during term time) at the Main Hall of Moseley School, Wake Green Rd, Moseley, Birmingham B13 9QD (Gate B entrance). She also regularly runs weekends and longer retreats. For further info please see her website www.shapeshift.co.uk.

SHAPESHIFT

DANCE

5 Rhythms® with Dawn Morgan

WEEKLY CLASS
 • every term time Thursday
 Moseley
 Secondary School,
 Wake Green Rd,
 Moseley, Birmingham
 • 7pm-9.15pm
 • £12, or 5 classes for £50

WOMENS RETREAT
 27th-31st July, Snowdonia

CRETE
 8th-15th September

AUTUMN DANCE
 2nd-4th October, Bilberry Hill, Birmingham

For further info about weekend courses and other events please check the website
WWW.SHAPESHIFT.CO.UK

This is the practice of ecstatic free dance, integrating and transforming on all levels: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual.
 For all ages all levels of ability and all kinds of people!
 And it is great fun!

Dawn is one of the most experienced teachers of this work, practicing for over 16 years, she welcomes newcomers and experienced dancers.

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