

## Removing Boundaries to Enhance Communication Between People

Hello. I am the Associate Editor of *Dance for Medical Problems of Performing Artists* since my appointment in January 2018. These times are troubling. Regardless of your view of national or global politics, we are living through an era of toxic partisan rhetoric. From belligerent tweets on Twitter to “fake news” on Facebook and Instagram, where is this taking us? It is so easy to misunderstand a text and even an email.

I’ve been thinking about the artists we work with and what we do in our professional lives. Performance is a form of communication between the artist and audience. The artist on stage can feel the unspoken response by the audience (even before there is or isn’t applause or boos). There is an energy, a connection.

I’ve also been thinking about the creativity involved in the performing artforms that are dance and music as well as in the scientific process of being a researcher. As the late David Featherstone, Professor of Biology and Neuroscience at the University of Illinois Chicago, put it: “*Art = science.*”<sup>1</sup> Both art and science seek to understand our world. Creativity is indispensable to the process of both: artists and scientists experiment and test and then share. Albert Einstein once said: “*The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science.*”<sup>2</sup> Albert Einstein, who was an avid amateur violinist, also said, “*If I were not a physicist, I would probably be a musician. I often think in music. I live my daydreams in music. I see my life in terms of music.*” I believe he truly was both because music embodied his inventive problem-solving of space, time, and gravity in concepts of relativity.

As they harness their creativity and hone it into dance or music in the case of the artist, or in the case of the scientist, craft it into a testable hypothesis and eventually a manuscript for others to read, both the artist and scientist must communicate their understanding to be successful. And in this world, we desperately need to communicate and to understand. Many of the healthcare practitioners and researchers who contribute to *MPPA* began as artists. They speak this language of creativity and they pass it on.

When we go to a theater to experience a performing art or visit a city outside our usual sphere, we can contribute to this creative dialog. This year I was the recipient of a Teaching and Research Fulbright Fellowship through the Fulbright Scholar Program, part of the United States State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.<sup>3</sup> In July and August, I spent time at three host institutions, Federal University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte,

University of São Paulo in São Paulo, and Federal University of São Paulo in Baixada Santista. During those visits, I invited Brazilian students who had traveled to work with me in New York to accompany me. Together, we learned about the research at each lab and interacted with graduate students. Together, we exchanged information about our research. I gave lectures on dance medicine topics with my students interpreting. I observed rehearsals and performances of dance schools and companies that included Balé da Cidade de São Paulo, Ballet: *Thiago Soares, Cisne Negro, Fabrica De Artes*, and *Grupo Corpo*, and I was invited to visit physical therapy clinics that treat dancers. In formal lectures and workshops, over coffee and wine, we got to know each other and share our stories.

The *Fulbright Program* was established in 1946 under legislation introduced by Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas. He was inspired by his graduate studies through a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford in 1925 and his travel through Europe. These were transformational experiences for him, which shaped a vision for encouraging mutual understanding through the Fulbright exchange program. With the support of the United States government and through bi-national partnerships with foreign governments, the Fulbright Scholarship Program sponsors U.S. and foreign participants for exchanges in all areas including the sciences, business, academia, public service, government, and the arts. In this era of political conflict and divergence, we desperately need programs like that of Fulbright Scholarships to increase mutual understanding. There have been more than 370,000 Fulbright students, scholars, and teachers, operating in over 160 countries worldwide. Each, in their own way, contributes to interchange and knowledge that transcends borders.

In 1962, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater (AAADT) toured the Far East, Southeast Asia, and Australia as part of President John F. Kennedy’s “President’s Special International Program for Cultural Presentations.” At that time, the company was a relative newcomer that was founded only in 1958. Yet that recognition by our government began a tradition of extensive travel to reach an estimated 23 million people in 71 countries over the past 60 years.<sup>4</sup> AAADT was recognized by a U.S. Congressional resolution in 2008 as a vital American “Cultural Ambassador to the World.” Why, do I mention Ailey? Because of the extraordinary ability of his ballet *Revelations* to communicate. It transcends boundaries that include language and religion. And, of course, there is Ailey’s

famous quote: “Dance is for everybody. I believe that the dance came from the people and that it should always be delivered back to the people.”<sup>4</sup>

William Fulbright said: “Our future is not in the stars but in our own minds and hearts. Creative leadership and education are the first requirements for a hopeful future for humankind. Fostering these—leadership, learning, and empathy between cultures—was and remains the purpose of the international scholarship program that I was privileged to sponsor in the U.S. Senate over forty years ago.”<sup>5</sup>

PAMA and the University of Illinois at Chicago Health in the Arts Program have co-sponsored the Cuba Health in the Arts Program for the past 6-years.<sup>5</sup> While the purpose is “to enhance the abilities of healthcare workers and artists to recognize the health hazards in their work and better prevent and treat occupational disorders in the arts professions,” these people-to-people trips permit exchange between healthcare professionals and artists in both formal and informal ways. Those exchanges are priceless diplomacy.

I wish to thank our authors, our reviewers, the artists that we work with, the Fulbright Committee, my hosts in Brazil, my Editor and Publisher at MPPA, and the researchers who have become friends through discourse both formally and informally. Each time we attend a conference, visit another university, watch a class, rehearsal,

or performance, we share, we discuss, we exchange, and in doing so exceed our personal boundaries as well as those between each of us. May you marry art and science throughout your journey. May we continue to communicate face to face and in person as often as possible.

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