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## **ATME Peer Profile**

### **Jeanine Thompson: Marcel Marceau Lineage Holder**

submitted by  
Annette Thornton

Jeanine and I first met in 1985 when she and Gregg Goldston observed the second American Mime Intensive taught by Mime Artist Marcel Marceau. I was a participant in that workshop. I remember Jeanine very well. She was tall with striking features and beautiful long hair. But I also remember the focus of her gaze, as if she were recording in her mind's eye every moment, every gesture, and every nuance. The next two summers I attended the Gregg Goldston School for Mime, a six-week intensive at Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio where Gregg was in residency. We also studied with Marceau those summers. I had not been in contact with Jeanine until the ATME Colloquium at George Mason University in Fairfax Virginia in 2006. The Colloquium was organized and hosted by Sarah Barker, then

ATME president, and Ken Elston, then ATME Treasurer and professor at GMU. Ken was a student of Jeanine's at OSU, which is how Jeanine came to be at the colloquium.

Jeanine and I reconnected like long-lost friends. Over the subsequent years we have talked about our shared experiences and learned about each other's work. We met again at the 2007 ATME Colloquium in Staunton, VA, hosted by Colleen Kelly and Marianne Kubik. It was there that both of us met Thomas Leabhart, Etienne Decroux teacher who was the guest artist for the colloquium. In 2008 at the ATME in Denver, Jeanine and I presented as part of the ATME Legacy Project. Marcel Marceau passed away the previous fall, and we presented "The Language of the Heart: Marcel Marceau's Legacy."

Jeanine and I both recognize and deeply appreciate the role that ATME has played in our lives to bring us together on several important occasions. We may not otherwise have come together. This Peer Profile begins with a brief bio of Jeanine followed by excerpts from an interview conducted in February 2013.

**BIO:**

Jeanine Thompson is an Associate Professor and the Movement Specialist for The Ohio State University's Department of Theatre. She has worked professionally as a performer, choreographer, director and deviser in Modern Dance, Theatre, and Mime. She specializes in the creation and performance of movement theatre work. Her artistic studies include the University of Utah's Modern Dance and Theatre Departments, The Ohio State University's Department of Dance, the American Conservatory Theatre of San Francisco, director and creator Anne Bogart and the SITI Company, and the French mime artist Marcel Marceau.

In the fall of 2011, Jeanine took six OSU students (three actors and three dancers) to London, England to perform her new dance theatre work *Ordinal 5* at the Tate Modern Museum. This work is a live performance of the mathematical equation ordinal 5. The idea of presenting this math equation through dance was conceived by mathematician Brian Rotman. It was performed as part of the "Embodying Transformation" Topology conference at the Tate Modern Museum.

Jeanine has toured her solo performances since 1980 and has conducted three residencies for the Ohio Arts Council's International Residency Program in Concepcion, Chile. The Edinburgh Fringe Festival considered her solo show "one of the best shows to see." The French mime artist Marcel Marceau has said of her work, "Even her subtlest movements express the essence of thought and emotion."

Jeanine co-directed and choreographed *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* produced at the 2002 Edinburgh Fringe Festival that received a five-star review. Other plays she has directed include *Trojan Women 2.0*, *Big Love*, *O' Pioneers*, and *The Mystery of Irma Vep*. Group works Jeanine has created include *Interior Day*, *The Camouflage Project*, and *Uncommon Clay*. Her solos shows include *An Evening of Impressionistic Dance* and *Breaking the Current: Ms. Toad's Wild Ride Through the Twists and Turns of the Psychedelic Journey Called Life*.

Jeanine teaches many of the foundations of techniques and styles that she draws upon when creating performance work. Her courses include: Laban for Actors, Viewpoints Training, Tadashi Suzuki's Physical Acting Training, Mime – Etienne Decroux and Marcel Marceau Techniques, Composition, and Devising New Works Creation.

### **Thompson Interview, February 28, 2013**

AT: I am really thrilled just to get to talk to you and connect for this article for ATMENews. I am excited about the new ATME executive board and our desire to move ATME forward. We're trying to get younger people involved but also trying to look back and reach established members and profile people who are doing incredible work that other people may not know about. So, you're the first one that I am doing. Let me begin by asking about your background.

JT: I started with one of the innovators of children's creative dance so instead of going to more of a traditional tap, ballet, jazz school I went to Virginia Tanner's Creative Dance School in Utah (Salt Lake City). She was one of the innovators of children's creative dance. The technique was modern dance and the emphasis was on creating and telling stories through dance. Her company was brought out to perform at the White House by President Kennedy.

AT: Were you a part of that?

JT: No, that was a little before my time. But that was my beginning.

AT: So how did you get involved in mime?

JT: I went through the University of Utah's modern dance department and the department of theatre in their acting emphasis program and I found that with studying and researching dance and theatre that my personal interest was in studying a combination of the two. But there weren't too many people doing that then. You were either an actor or you were a dancer. And I was very interested in what technical finesse, and accuracy, specificity that dance brought to my acting. But at the same time I really loved how acting fueled my dancing and how both informed my choreography. I was working with Repertory Dance Theatre, the dance company in Salt Lake, and I also formed a company with some peers, called Dance Theatre Coalition. I believe that company still exists. We were interested in combining the two. This was at the beginning of dance theatre in this country.

AT: About when was this?

JT: 1980. I had some old friends who were from Los Angeles who were involved with theatre and had trained with Richmond Shepherd who is a mime artist and has his own school in LA. Two of them moved to Salt Lake and we started to work together and that was really my beginning, of being influenced with the techniques of mime. That specifically came from Gregg Goldston and Noe Zavala.

AT: Those were the two who had studied with Richmond and moved to Salt Lake?

JT: Yes. We were like young punks taking over the world. Creating new works and performing them whenever and wherever we possibly could.

AT: Why did they move to Salt Lake?

JT: We were a part of a non-denominational Christian Church. There was a church in LA and there was a church in Salt Lake and they were doing exchanges. The arts were vital and they were extraordinarily important from both of these churches. They ended up coming to Salt Lake to work together.

AT: And then from there did you all go to Ohio?

JT: Well Gregg did. He moved from Salt Lake to Gambier. He moved in 1980. I had moved to southern Utah and had taken a break for the first time in my adult life. I was homesteading in Moab. I was this little hippie chick hiking and river running the Grand Canyon and I was taking a break for the first time for my personal life. And he called, after I had been there for a year, year and a half and he said, are you ready to get back to performing? He had established this school at Kenyon. I would love to have you teach dance and acting and I need a stage manager and lighting designer for my national tour. Do you want to come on board for a five-month western circuit tour? I said sure. I left Moab and climbed into his van with my Great Dane and his Irish Setter and we did a five-month circuit tour. Then I moved to Ohio and taught at the Goldston School for Mime.

AT: When did you start teaching?

JT: Summer of 1985.

AT: 1985 right because that's when we first met. Because you did the first Marceau intensive that year.

JT: We sat in on it.

AT: You sat in on it and I took it. That was my second year taking it. I did Marceau's summer intensive four summers in a row. And also the third and fourth years I did six more weeks with the Goldston School in Gambier.

JT: You were in the school that we took on the road to Ann Arbor? We started in Gambier, 6-8 weeks, and then got on the road to Ann Arbor and did the training with Marceau? I think it was 1987. Weren't you in Lina's piece (Lina du Carmo Melo)? That was the year we did Lina's piece for Marceau on the big stage – that was 1987. I recently came across a photo of that piece. She was really pivotal to me.

AT: She was to me too. I remember the piece that she did where she was in a swing and she was swinging. This woman swinging. It was amazing.

JT: I don't remember that. Was it her piece about Isadora Duncan?

AT: I don't know I was so taken.. with everything.

JT: It was amazing work.

AT: It was amazing work. Are you still in touch with her?

JT: Yes I am still in touch with her. She's still very active working in Germany. It was through her that really I saw the potential of where women can be in the art of mime. It was also through her that I saw the struggle because it was not easy for her. Granted she also brought her own degree of struggle to the situation but the first time it could have been 87 when we brought the mime company, the Invisible People, and performed up in Ann Arbor, and it was at a coaching session with Marceau and Stefan (Niedzialkowski – Polish Mime Theatre) after a performance where I did "Images of Women" and "The Tornado," which was more of a dance-mime, in whiteface. Marceau's point was "I just don't think you should be wearing whiteface." We went around and around and I asked "Is it because I am blending the artform?" Stefan was adamant that you just can't blend – you can't just put the two together. And Marceau said that maybe it is because "you're not neutral." And we got into a big discussion about what is neutral and how the man's body is neutral. And at that point he was saying "I don't think that a woman can wear the whiteface." And he also said to Stefan, "Maybe you shouldn't blend dance and theatre but she does it so well. And she is at least learning *our* art form. So perhaps she is going to do something new with it." It wasn't for many, many years until I finally heard from Stefan that he liked one of my pieces. He said to me once, "Now *that* is a piece of mime." That was years later.

AT: Have you made recordings of those pieces?

JT: Oh yes, I have recordings and photos. What I haven't done is transferred them to digital.

AT: That's what you need to do.

JT: You are one of the few people that I can tell this story to who understands. I have talked about this period of time before and people thought, "Yes, you were doing mime; you guys were clowning around and goofing off." And it's like, that's the farthest thing. We were all so committed to working eight hours a day, then going away trying to create pieces and then coming back and showing them to Marcel Marceau. Trembling!

AT: I remember doing a piece called "The Letter." And I showed it to you and Sandra Hughes, because you were helping me be not such a dancer in it. Anyway I just remember that. I didn't know what I was doing but I just loved being there.

JT: None of us knew what they were doing. We were forging new territory.

AT: I tell my students that I have influences in my work. And Marceau is one of my influences. How does it continue in your work?

JT: For me it continues in the acuteness of my vision, my perspective on the distillation of image. So when I'm looking at something I look for the acuity, the exactness of what is this moment trying to say and how can I craft it to most exquisitely, effectively capture the thought and emotion and with brevity.

AT: It's like condensing it.

JT: Yes, it is learning how to write in haiku with your body. And to this very day that has influenced my work whether I am working more in the style of dance or theatre or movement theatre it influences me. And also the weight of mime – that was the hardest thing for me to get. And it's still difficult for me because I think being raised in dance I'm more "on top" of the world, like I exist more in space than in weight. I really need to be conscious of how things are weighted and the *emotional* weight of something, of a moment.

AT: When did you start at OSU?

JT: I was hired in 1994. My hire brought about a shift from going to one movement class maybe two, to a different movement curriculum every quarter. So, that was for the graduate training. Additionally I was teaching the same class at a different level on the undergraduate level. And we officially changed the focus of the MFA in 2000. But that was when we changed our curriculum. I was posed this question by our chair at that time: "Why would people want to come and study acting in Columbus, Ohio?" When I was hired the chair who hired me said, "We're hiring you so that you can develop and train students to do what you do as an entrepreneurial dance/theatre artist." And I knew that I had an opportunity in answering the question why come to Ohio State. I knew what was unique about our program. And one was the emphasis on movement training along with our connection to the Wexner Center. The Wexner Center is one of the country's leading contemporary art museums and presenting organizations. So they regularly bring in the SITI company, the Wooster Group, DV8, all sorts of contemporary movement theatre original performing artists who are creating original work. I made the link. This is what is unique about us. Yes, we are going to cover the classics and traditional work but our real aim the reason to come to Ohio State is because this is what we are looking at. We are looking at the future, not necessarily replicating the past. The past is important to know about and to have solid technique. But then what are you as an artist going to do about it? Especially knowing now that the jobs aren't in regional theatre. And the jobs aren't in academia. You need to be an entrepreneur. You need to think like and have the skills of an entrepreneur.

AT: Who have you studied with?

JT: In dance, I come out of the Merce Cunningham, Alvin Nikolai Martha Graham technique and with one of the most influential Nikolai principles, Tandy Beal. She was working, probably still is, on the west coast. She was a major influence in starting to pull dance and

theatre together. Marceau, Gregg Goldston, Anne Bogart, John Giffin – was a principle performer with Pina Bausch. Ken Washington. He is someone we should connect with. He was the movement instructor for University of Utah in the theatre program and he was one of the only faculty members who encouraged me to pursue what *my* passion and vision were. He left Utah early 80s and he has been the head of the internship program at Milwaukee Rep. He made a huge impact on me as the movement person.

AT: Can you talk about Anne Bogart's influence on your work?

JT: I'm absolutely in love with and intellectually impressed with what they (the SITI company) employ when creating work. I am also a huge fan of their training systems – Viewpoints, Suzuki, and harnessing all that into composition.

AT: Do you teach that?

JT: Yes, I teach Viewpoints and Suzuki and I have my own composition class I actually started before I trained with the SITI company. And all of those are on the grad level. I teach Suzuki and Viewpoints on both grad and undergrad. But it is a part of the required curriculum of the MFA. And I love, the actor in me loves – exactly what got me involved in the beginning – the precision, exactness, specificity and the ability to repeat with their technical finesse yet at the same time it is infused with the generosity of spirit of the actor.

AT: I've never seen them live in performance.

JT: I think you would love their work. I find that people either like them or don't. I find that those who are very harnessed to the structure it makes them crazy because she does not follow literal thinking but to me it is the best world of dance and theatre. I don't know that they would call themselves dancers but they are highly capable and finessed physical actors. I'm starting to pull away from my capacity to teach Suzuki in a way that I really think I need to hand those reins to a younger instructor. But the viewpoints.

AT: I would love to come learn that. Do you do workshops?

JT: I am teaching that right now. And yes I do workshops. So maybe if you can't get there I can come up.

AT: I would love that. I have had a little experience with Viewpoints in graduate school but it wasn't enough and I felt at the time that the tools were similar to my mime training and Meyerhold Biomechanic training. I know I wasn't getting the full picture but I felt I was doing similar work anyway.

JT: Absolutely. And I find that the elements are present in all of the arts. It is how you come at it. How you come at it is the essence, the gold, of the viewpoint training. And what I am loving now is that I have graduate actors and choreographers, directors, and a playwright in the class. What I am able to discover and what I am able to witness, we are truly going into areas that you would never imagine before because you are, rather than generating

thought, you are responding to thought generated by others in the space. In the place that you could never have possibly pre-determined.

AT: Do you teach mime?

JT: Yes, I teach Decroux – the inclinations, rotations, transtations, and then I teach Marceau’s techniques and style of pantomime and *Metamorphosa*.

AT: I love *Metamorphosa*. It was one of the things that has influenced me in my work.

JT: I think that helped you and I to find our place not only with him but together. I think that may be because of the dance background. Because I understood viscerally and compositionally how to make that world work for me whereas writing more narrative illusion pantomime my brain didn’t work that way. And that was really hard for me. But the *Metamorphosa*—I understood flow and transformation.

AT: We both first met Thomas Leabhart in 2007. What a nice man.

JT: Another great thing that ATME did. It introduced me to one of the legacy holders of the art of mime. Without that opportunity, I don’t know if I would have ever pursued it, or had that opportunity to actually have been before him, and seen his work live three-dimensionally and be able to receive feedback directly from him. Those opportunities are vitally important to us. The fact that the organization has made those opportunities happen is really remarkable and I am a testament to the value of it.

AT: Thank you for saying that because I do agree and I will highlight that in this article along those lines. And some of what we’re trying to do is really champion what ATME does. And so what you just said is, yeah, that’s what we do but it was really profound in the impact that it can have because I didn’t realize that you hadn’t met Thom.

JT: No, at the time when I started working with Marceau there was a great divide between those who worked with Marceau and those who worked with Decroux and the Decroux technique. At that time you either had to do one or the other. Even though Marceau always said, “If you are going to excel in my work you have got to start with Decroux. That has to be the start of your warm-up.” So I understood, and he always gave great respect to Decroux but I never heard the respect coming back from the Decroux people. Which was a perfect reflection of Decroux and Marceau’s relationship. But as a result I came in contact with very few people that were the lineage holders of Decroux. So when I met Thomas, he was the most important person and the kindest person. Not only is he the lineage holder, he is a kind soul. It shattered every expectation, what is the word, prejudice, that I held about people in that work. He shattered it.

He also, like Marceau, taught me about the beauty, the elegance, the strength, and the grace of an aging movement specialist. And that was something that I posed at that conference, “How are we aging? How do we talk about that?” And I remember sitting around in that circle and people going, “Oh my god, do we have to talk about that? I don’t know what to



say." And we have got to, I know I have needed to, come to terms with that. And I am very aware when I see it before me, Thomas was an example of that. Marceau was an example of that. And my other teachers, Virginia Tanner and Joanne Woodbury, dance teachers and dance artists I have worked with, and we now need to become examples of that. Not to just give up but make adjustments as we need to and then continue. Where I'm struggling now is "how can I continue?" and "is it still valid?" At times I really question that and then I look at masters in front of me and I just say ok.

AT: Yes, I think it is worth it because there is an economy and a wisdom in the body that you can only express through a lifetime of experience.

JT: Oh that is beautifully said.

### **Conclusion**

Jeanine and I talked about the Marcel Marceau Archives, which she writes about in this same ATMENews, and about her plans for a performance honoring the life and career of Marceau to be presented in spring of 2014 along with a Symposium, and her plans to motion-capture movement masters and/or their lineage holders. In our many conversations while working on this article, Jeanine and I made a distinction between "lineage" and "legacy," both of which are vitally important to the field of movement specialists. Lineage refers to continuing the technique of the Master teacher; Jeanine is a "lineage holder of Marceau" because she teaches his technique regularly. Legacy refers to the documentation of the teacher's life, work, career, and technique; I am a "legacy holder of Marceau" because I work to research and preserve the life and career of mime masters. Jeanine is also a legacy holder. And together we are working to honor Marcel Marceau.

#### **Author Bio:**

Dr. Annette Thornton is the Director of Music Theatre at Central Michigan University. She is the current president of ATME.

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