



InterPlay
unlock the wisdom of your body

Got InterPlay?

By James Schattauer

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One day a friend asked me if I would go with her to what sounded like a dance class. She called it InterPlay. She went on to explain that there were no steps to learn and that there was no requirement to perform or compete. She told me that the intent of InterPlay was to bring a greater sense of ease, playfulness and community into people's lives. More ease, playfulness and community? I needed all three, but did I have to dance to find them?

With my heels dragging, I soon found myself in an InterPlay class led by a spirited woman who began by telling us to shake out a hand (I can do that, I thought) and shake out a foot (no problem there; so far so good). Then she told us to shake out what we were sitting on. Even though we were all standing, we followed our leader as she shook her hips, shoulders, head and legs. I found myself enjoying these small, doable steps.

Through various InterPlay activities, I was encouraged to move my body the way it wanted. As I joined with others in the beauty of discovering our playful selves, unanticipated tears welled up in my eyes. I had only been with these folks a couple of hours and they were already feeling like family to me. I heard a voice inside of me say: I have been looking for these folks my whole life: people to play with.

I learned later that InterPlay is happening all over the country in California, Washington, Texas, North Carolina, Pennsylvania. Interplay has spread abroad to Australia, Thailand and Germany. There are InterPlay workshops available in different parts of the country where people gather to play together and learn the many forms of InterPlay that include improvised music making and storytelling.

In June of 2004, one hundred and eighty InterPlayers from around the world gathered for the first International InterPlay Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. The founders of InterPlay are Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter. They both are teachers and performers from Oakland, California who travel internationally, giving workshops and programs that spread the InterPlay experience. They are authors of numerous publications, the most recent being, *What the Body Wants* by Northstone press. In 1989 they formed WING IT! Performance Ensemble, which uses InterPlay as a performance art, combining dance, theater, music, comedy, improvisation and ritual.

In their writings they point out that our culture is constantly bombarding us with information and stimulation that can be quite overwhelming. Our brains and our bodies are like sponges as we consciously and unconsciously take in all the data that comes from TV, newspapers, billboards, strangers, friends and even the chatter inside our own heads. With so much information coming in, we need to find ways to move this information out of our bodies and minds to make room for fun and delight with ourselves and with others.

In their literature Cynthia and Phil often ask the question, What if life didn't have to be so hard? They answer their own question by offering some solutions. One antidote that InterPlay offers is called "exformation." As opposed to information, exformation is an activity, through improvised movement and storytelling, that moves this information through the body, creating more ease and less stress.

With my friend watching in total surprise, I got up in front of our playgroup and told a story with words and improvised movement. I told about the time, where in the span of an hour, I ran into a pole with my car and later locked myself out of the car with the keys in the ignition. Not a very fun experience, yet in the embodied telling of it, there was much laughter and empathy that came from my listeners. This exformation had helped me integrate and let go of this trying experience. The laughter of my audience told me I was not alone.

Another invitation that InterPlay offers the reluctant dancer is to put movement into five doable forms: swinging, hanging, shaping, thrusting and stillness. In the class I experienced, we started out by putting just one hand in the air and swinging it for a while. Then we made shapes and found different ways to hang them. We experimented with all the ways we could thrust our hands and then stopping in stillness in-between the thrusts. We then stood up and were invited to use all five forms in any fashion that we desired, but this time we could use our whole body as well as our hands. The music started and immediately, like children out at recess, we moved around the room swinging, shaping, hanging, thrusting and being still. It was playful and we did it with ease. I looked around the room and I saw people of different ages, cultures, shapes and abilities. Some moved like athletes, some moved slowly, some enjoyed just being still. All was accepted. There was no right or wrong.

When we were done we all clapped for each other. We took time to talk and notice what we experienced. I looked at my friend and remembered what she had said: "The intent of InterPlay is to bring a greater sense of ease, playfulness and community into peoples

lives.” After this playful workout, I felt the ease in my mind and body. I heard the echoes of the laughter and glee I had shared with newfound friends. My heart smiled as I remembered the song we made up at the end to celebrate our time together. I don’t remember the words but it felt like community. Maybe life doesn’t have to be so hard.

Picture this

People not afraid to touch

Children looking up

To dancing elders.

Rowdy lovers, every one

Snatched up in each other’s arms.

Hips curved,

Hair clipped or flying,

Opposites attracting, stories of consequence,

Failure, curse,

Trust and victory

Picture this!

A southern white millionairess

And a black man embrace.

An ex-con and suburbanite dancing.

Addicts full of only themselves.

Pagan and Christian laughing

A lesbian mom taking center stage.

Gay and straight men carry on

And everyone is in love with the beauty

Of an unwed mom!

Picture thousands of stages

Altars, halls, and schools

As home to dancing bodies.

Hospital workers singing to those in bed.

Song and dance raised up

in prison, ghetto, and war zone.

Fear taking second place to love

As we know we are

Each other’s bread.

I have seen all this again and again

In the gathering of willing players.

Unbelievable beautiful

So believably human.

Can you picture this?

—Cynthia Winton–Henry

Other books by Cynthia Winton–Henry and Phil Porter: *Body and Soul: Excursions in the Realm of Physicality and Spirituality*; *The Wisdom of the Body*; *Having It All: Body Mind, Heart and Spirit Together Again*.

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