

# InterPlay in the News

*Activists, educators, artists and helping professionals put art and play back to work*

*from*

**Conscious Dancer Magazine**

**WNC Woman**

**Washington Post**

**Utne Reader,**

**Edge Life**

**The Tennessean**

**Article by Celia Swanson**

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**Conscious Dancer Magazine: InterPlay: A Top 10 Movement Modality**

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**Swing Your Hips, Feed Your Soul**

*By Rachel Winner*

WNC Woman <http://www.wncwoman.com/2013/07/08/swing-your-hips-feed-your-soul/>

InterPlay, an opportunity to liberate the mind, heal the heart and release one's inner child, also incorporates various modalities of dance.

**Created by Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, InterPlay defines itself as a social movement whose sessions...lead participants to movement and stories, silence and song, ease and amusement.” Program leaders explain, “We are often cut off from the wisdom [within our bodies] by the expectation of others, by external authority, by fear or repression.”**



InterPlay strives to reconnect ourselves with that inner wisdom by empowering our insight through simple activities. Sessions start with a warm-up and may include the setting of an intention or concern...Forms involve singing, movement, dancing, telling stories and playing. For example, participants are asked to place their hands into the palms of another and silently convey an aspiration for themselves. Upon releasing that aspiration, they stand and dance or move based on the hope they had shared...followed by a conversation of feelings and observations made by both parties.

Each creative progression is about more than the pleasure of freeform dancing, it's about the freedom of expressing oneself through various non-traditional mediums. The idea is to free the mind to let the body to become the decision maker.

If this entire experience seems way outside the realm of social norms, that's exactly the point. The whole intention of InterPlay is to momentarily shatter that business-casual container in which we hold our egos to unshackle our creativity. InterPlay's workshop...helps to break down social judgments and barriers – like a chiropractic adjustment for the soul.

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### **Utne Reader–Bodies and Souls : InterPlay fuses movement and storytelling to create spiritual discipline**

*by Jon Spayde 2007 Issue*

The Minneapolis dance studio is packed with people of various ages and sizes. Some seem wrapped in reverie; others are intensely focused on one another. Groupings of bodies develop and dissolve in motions that look a bit like dance, a bit like theater, and a bit like aerobics. But it's not a rehearsal or an exercise class--it's movement for its own sake. There's a feeling of cohesion, of something being cooperatively created.

This is InterPlay--a fusion of movement, storytelling, and interpersonal awareness that, according to its founders, is also a spiritual discipline. Practiced in some 120 cities in the United States, Canada, Australia, Britain, Germany, and Thailand, the American-grown alternative to yoga provides both a way for adults to play and a serious tool for personal and social change.

InterPlay is the brainchild of Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, two modern dancers with an affinity for matters of the spirit. In the late 1970s they were members of Body and Soul, a dance company that taught and performed in Bay Area churches. "Movement was an important part of our theological understanding," says Porter. "There are elements of the spirit that are beyond words, and one way to contact them is through the body."

When the company folded in 1988, Porter pursued solo projects and Winton-Henry followed her Christian calling all the way into the ministry. She soon realized, though, that her denomination defined clerical dignity in ways that bridled her dancer's body. "I was always getting into trouble for moving even a little bit," she says with a smile. She reconnected with Porter, and the pair decided to explore the intersections of movement and spirit beyond the boundaries of religion.

Both dancers enjoyed group improvisation. "Acting in the moment, I was accessing a lot of information that was in my body and doing it with others," says Winton-Henry. "I loved that." They believed that a practice based on these values and focused on experience rather than performance could change people's lives.

Their choreographic training suggested that structure was needed, too. "If you want to play and create with others," Porter explains, "it helps if the elements you are playing with are limited." They developed what they call "forms," which became the building blocks of InterPlay.

In InterPlay groups, basic vocal and physical warm-ups are typically followed by the leader's choice of a form, such as "Walk, Stop, Run." The InterPlayer is free to do any of those three movements, in any order, alone or with others. There's no critique, and anyone can opt out and become a silent, motionless "witness" at any time.

Simple forms like "Hand Dances"--in which pairs of players move their hands, shake hands, or take hold of each other's wrists--help new (or shy) InterPlayers build confidence. "Everyone is responsible for doing only what feels right for them," says Twin Cities InterPlay teacher Celia Swanson.

"Babbling" brings in an element of storytelling by inviting people to talk for 30 seconds. "I might suggest: Babble about what you see out your kitchen window," says Swanson. "Or I might make up a nonsense word and have people babble about what they think it means." At a more advanced level, "Big Body Stories" combine movement with storytelling, letting the body elicit a personal story that inspires movement.

The spiritual dimension of InterPlay is fourfold--"moving your body, telling your stories, honoring your personal voices, and claiming your stillness"--says Winton-Henry. "If you're not doing these things in your own way and being witnessed by others as you do so, chances are you're not feeling the vitality and wholeness that comes from possessing your own soul." In a world where work, relationships, anxiety about the future, and a host of other things claim pieces of our souls, Winton-Henry sees this act of soul-repossessing as vital for spiritual and psychic health.

In some places InterPlayers have explored both spiritual and social change. In Oakland, California, where Porter and Winton-Henry are based, and in Nashville, Tennessee, InterPlay leaders have deliberately brought together people of all colors to experience one another in more direct and personal ways. "InterPlay turns out to be a healthy, easy way to move through the tensions between us," says Winton-Henry. Similarly, Oakland-based InterPlay teacher Masankho Banda has led groups in juvenile detention centers and prisons.



However it may be elaborated, though, InterPlay's idea of community always begins with individual bodies. Swanson, a self-confessed "former couch potato," says InterPlay taught her that "my body is beautiful and full of wisdom," and that self-knowledge helps her connect with others. "There are people in InterPlay whom I only know by their first names," she says, "but I would give them the keys to my house."

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**Washington Post: *King and Mandela inspire community connections through dance and music***

by [Ann E. Marimow](#), Jan 20

Masankho Banda first came to the United States in the 1980s when his father was a political prisoner in Malawi. On Monday, he returned to use his firsthand experience with political oppression to host a celebration of two global leaders for justice — [the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.](#) and Nelson Mandela.

Through free-form dance and music, Banda guided a multicultural, multigenerational group in a Northwest Washington storefront church in exercises designed to channel the teachings of the slain civil rights leader and [the South African icon who died last month](#).

Standing in a circle in stocking feet, nearly 50 participants swayed, strutted and spun in a quest for a deeper understanding of the King and Mandela legacies — and to make community connections. There were teenagers from Maryland, retired government workers from the District and South African students on a cultural exchange trip.

Long after the fights against segregation in the South and apartheid in South Africa, Banda said, it was important to remind people that the teachings of King and Mandela remain relevant. "There will always be people who suffer injustice. Equality is something that will be an ongoing struggle," said Banda, bearded and wearing an orange patterned kente shirt from Ghana.

Throughout the morning, the group paid tribute to the long marches of King and Mandela, walking through the sunlit room to the beat of Banda's drum. They contemplated compelling questions: What is the meaning of justice? What does freedom mean to you?

“When you engage the heart, you can change the mind,” Banda said as participants stood palm to palm with their partners. “Martin Luther King and Mandela engaged people’s hearts.”

Some participants were regulars in the program at Seekers Church in the District’s Takoma neighborhood, one of many groups across the country that engage in the exercises known as [InterPlay](#). Others had come for the first time to celebrate the holiday and to join the potluck lunch of Moroccan chicken, spicy greens and traditional South African porridge known as pap.

Amy Angel of Fairfax returned to Banda’s program for a third year, impressed by the power of making connections with people of different cultures, colors and ages. She brought her three sons, ages 12 to 17. “We hear the words. We hear the speeches. This is an opportunity to experience it a little more directly,” Angel said.

In a serious-minded city like Washington, where so many are defined by their professions, the event also provided an outlet for letting loose and having fun.

“We don’t have many opportunities to be playful as adults, to do things that look foolish to the rest of the world,” said Kathy Tobias, a retired federal government worker from Cheverly, Md. The experience, she said, is about connecting with people and “meeting each other in ways we never have a chance to.”

In one of the most powerful moments of the morning, Banda played a recording of [King’s 1963 “I Have A Dream” speech](#) as the group danced hand to hand in groups of twos and threes to his words: *I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. . . . One day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.* When King’s March on Washington speech built to its “Let freedom ring” refrain, the individual groups seemed to spontaneously connect into a swaying, chanting train of humanity. Their voices crescendoed until the group erupted in loud applause and laughter.

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## **Interview with co-founder Phil Porter** **InterPlay: Unlocking the wisdom of our bodies in community**

*by Tim Miejan, June, 2007 The Edge*

Creativity and play, relaxation and reflection, are the hallmark of InterPlay, a 15-year-old system of creating in the moment that allows participants to regain integration and connectedness, with their own bodies and with each other, in community. Founded in Northern California by Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter, who have been collaborating as artists, performers, teachers, writers and philosophers for nearly 28 years, InterPlay presents "untensives" (the opposite of intensives) nationwide and in Australia, and it continues to change lives in the process.

InterPlay's founders will present a five-day untensive "The Unbelievable Beauty of Being Human" June 13-17 at Inver Hills Community College in Inver Grove Heights, Minn. Veteran InterPlay members and new workshop participants will present a 7:30 performance on Saturday, June 16, in the college theatre.

Through movement, improvisation, breathing, voice, song, storytelling and play, InterPlay helps participants develop the ability to express themselves, collaborate with others, expand their personal awareness, find their creative power and recognize their leadership potential.

"One of the things we keep seeing happen over and over again in our communities," Phil Porter said in a recent interview with Edge Life, "is that if you give people some space, and if you provide an open attitude, which we do through a lot of affirmation, then all sorts of things can happen for people and they really discover how much power they do have."

### **Let's explore more about what InterPlay is.**

**Phil Porter:** It's a system of practices that are based in the creative arts. One of the things that we're doing is helping people reconnect with the way their bodies work. Bodies really want to move toward integration -- body, mind, heart and Spirit. When we talk about bodies, we're really talking about all of those things. The kind of playing that we do happens almost automatically -- and people experience that integration. In our particular way of creating in the moment, we teach people some simple ways to improvise, through movement, storytelling and singing, and then various combinations of those. When people are able to do that, they're also able to access a lot of their own information in ways that don't often happen.

### **And it will open up different channels within themselves?**

**PP:** Exactly. A lot of our work is about relationships, because we're creating with someone else. It's very much about the interaction between people, both the process of noticing what we've done, what we've created, and what we notice and what other people are doing. I've been talking recently about in-betweenness. We're playing a lot with what happens in-between people. Interplay creates a lot of that, so it's a strong community building process, as well.

### **How did InterPlay develop?**

**PP:** The short version of that story is that many years ago, Cynthia Winton-Henry and I were in the Body and Soul Dance Company, which was looking at how theological themes and images might be used in choreography. Essentially, we were dancing in churches, and we had to build some of the bridges to help people see the relationship that we saw between physicality and spirituality. What we were experiencing ourselves was how closely body and Spirit were integrated, and we needed to find ways to articulate that and also have other people experience it. So we were performing and teaching workshops and started to find some ways to help people kind of all ages and abilities to get access to their own movement vocabulary and their own stories.

We decided we wanted to focus more directly on how to teach people to improvise and also to continue to explore the ways that body and Spirit were integrated. At that point, we started InterPlay consciously. That was the name that we gave to our technique, and we started teaching classes and had a performance company. Just through experiments with various forms, things have developed and continue to develop. It's a constantly changing system, because other people are doing it now and they are teaching us things. It just continues to be refined and expanded.

### **Do you have a company that travels, or do you invite the community to come and be participants in this?**

**PP:** We do have a performing company in the Bay area, called WING IT! Performance Ensemble, and sometimes we travel with that group of people. But what we're doing in Minnesota is actually a form that we first developed in 1997. We just call it a UBBH, the Unbelievable Beauty of Being Human. We go someplace, we use local performers who have worked together, other people come in from other parts of the country, and we bring some of WING IT! as well. For the Minnesota trip, seven of us are coming from the company, and then there'll be another 30 or so people involved. It will be a big group of people. We did one in Chicago and had 70 people involved in it.

### **If I signed up because I wanted to explore it, what would I experience?**

**PP:** We will do a lot of community building activities so that people can get to know each other, and then we will spend a fair amount of time teaching some large-group

forms (activities) and playing with them. Some of them are movement forms. Some of them are centered around storytelling. They are simple structures that a whole bunch of people can easily take part in and that you could learn quite quickly.

Some of this will have core spots in the performance itself, and then the other parts of the performance are based on people's past experience with InterPlay, doing solos and various sorts of duets and contact work and what we call big-body stories. Over the course of the evening, we'll just do a whole series of those sorts of pieces.

**Your web site states that the motto of InterPlay is "What if life didn't have to be so hard?" That implies that we make it more difficult that it has to be. Why do we do that?**

**PP:** That's a good question. Quite frankly, I think it's because a lot of times rather than paying attention to the way that our own bodies work and follow that, we easily get moved into -- sucked into -- the forms and structures that have been created, sometimes not necessarily for our own good. I think there's the idea that there are certain things that we're supposed to do to fit in. We haven't been taught a lot about how to listen to our own information. What we've noticed is that once you start doing listening to your own body, within any given structure, there are actually many ways that we can change the way that we're doing things to make it easier on ourselves. It turns out that things can be a lot more fun than we thought, and that it ends up being good for everyone -- and we can still be productive and we can still be effective. We can still do all the things that we need to do to work together as a group. And it actually creates more space for other people. There's quite a strong ethos, I think in the InterPlay community, around community, and realizing that we can have community without having to sacrifice major parts of ourselves.

**Why is the timing right now for Interplay in our society?**

**PP:** We've seen over the last 10 or 15 years or so how much more talk there is about integration. More people are talking about the relationship between the mind and body, and body and Spirit. Health people are talking about spirituality. It's just in the air. When we first



started with InterPlay, we had to convince people that there should be a relationship between body, mind, heart, and Spirit, and now we don't have to do as much convincing. I think people more people are recognizing, "Oh, I really need to be able to bring all of myself to the various parts of my life, and I don't want to be leaving parts behind."

### **How does watching an InterPlay performance for the first time affect people?**

**PP:** I think that there's a kind of directness and "personalness" to Interplay performance. Cynthia often talks about InterPlay as being a folk art, because it's for just folks. I think people can recognize a lot of what we create quite directly in their own lives. An InterPlay performance feels quite immediate and quite real. One of the characteristics of InterPlay is that it can be funny, but it can also be quite profound. Humor is really important to us, but we also let ourselves go to some of those deeper places. There's an honesty to it, and a transparency that I think people recognize.

### **How has InterPlay evolved since it was created?**

**PP:** The first major thing we noticed was that we started meeting people we had not taught who knew InterPlay. People were coming to the Bay area or wherever we might be teaching with this experience. People no longer have to come to Cynthia and me to learn InterPlay. There are lots of people they can learn it from. The other thing about InterPlay is that it has the potential for being applied to various sorts of subjects and communities and disciplines. For example, there are people who are using InterPlay in therapy, spiritual direction or counseling, and there are people who are using InterPlay in health care situations. Other people who are using it in schools as a way of training kids in the arts. People who are learning InterPlay are taking it into situations, experimenting with it, and seeing what they learn. What we've been doing over the last couple of years is to gather some of those people and have them talk together about what they're learning and spread those ideas out. This summer, for example, we're gathering a group of people who are interested in applying InterPlay forms to worship. There was one conference like that on the East Coast and we're doing another one on the West Coast.

### **As a co-founder you must be pretty excited by what you're seeing, how it's developing.**

**PP:** It is exciting, but it's been a pretty gradual thing. InterPlay tends to be one of these things that only a few people take on very deeply. The process of its spreading has been both surprising and what we would describe as at the speed of the body. It is very exciting to have co-created something that has spread like this. So, we'll see where it goes.

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## **The Tennessean**

*by Linda Bryant, Staff Writer*

VANDERBILT/MUSIC ROW — Organizers of Friday's second annual Cultures of Peace at the Scarritt-Bennett Center (Nashville) want people from all walks of life to enjoy the event.

But they have extra high hopes that it will make a difference to Nashville's growing immigrant and refugee population by giving some of them a chance to spontaneously share stories about their lives.

The event isn't an ordinary performance, concert or festival because it's improvised; includes dance, music and storytelling; and even uses a little audience participation.

Diane Saliba Ault, a Nashville-based teacher of the InterPlay form of interactive improvisation, said the technique is an artful form of self-expression that doesn't require a lot of preparation or training.

She said that there were 60 grass-roots InterPlay events in Nashville last year and that they attracted a wide range of ages and cultural backgrounds.

Nashville will play host to the first InterPlay convention in June, an event expected to attract a few hundred people, Ault said.

"It helps people build a community. InterPlay can be frivolous and fun, and it can be deep and significant."

Although it can be hard to describe a performance that's based on process and experience rather than a planned outcome, Ault said there's rarely a feeling of pressure or fear. There's "always plenty of laughter" but also a healthy measure of reality, she said.

InterPlay "involves simple forms of storytelling, dance and song, and helps people find confidence in self-expression," Ault said. "The deepest transformation comes when people find their voice."

She gave the example of a Mexican woman at an InterPlay event who was invited to tell a story based on any association with the word 'baby.' The woman told a story about being separated from her children in Mexico.

"It created an opportunity for her to come forth with this story," Ault said. "A depth of connection was made really quickly."

Ironelly Mora, who is from the Dominican Republic, studies the InterPlay improvisation technique and will be a part of Friday night's performance.

“You never really know what’s going to happen ”at an InterPlay event, she said.

“I think the audience will see the beauty of what we are doing. What comes out of people is just amazing.”

At last year’s Cultures of Peace event, Mora read a poem about growing up in the Dominican Republic, and several InterPlay performers created an on-the-spot dance in response to it.

“It was very intimate,” Mora said.

Oakland, Calif.-based artists and educators Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter developed the InterPlay form of improvisation and also formed a training program to teach others about the technique. Winton-Henry will attend Friday night’s event.

Ault also said the event has added meaning this year because one of Nashville’s most dedicated InterPlay leaders, storyteller Adora Dupree, recently died of cancer. “We are looking for ways to celebrate her life,” Ault said.



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***What if life didn't have to be sooooooo hard?***

*by Celia Swanson*

Several years ago, a friend of mine kept telling me, "Oh, Celia, you HAVE to do InterPlay!" She explained that InterPlay, an improvisational movement form, had no steps to learn and that there were no requirements 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? Well, OK. It was worth a try!

During my first encounter I found myself 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. We learned several simple "forms", like finding swings, hangs, thrusts, shapes and stillness in our bodies. The teacher put music on, and we all moved around the room, letting our bodies move however felt good. 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. We learned how to create on the spot: solo dances, duets, group movement, songs, and stories.

As I joined with others in the beauty of discovering our playful selves, I started realizing that this InterPlay practice was what I'd been waiting for all my life! The more I did it, the more I got comfortable being in my own body. I started learning to let go of my fear of trying new things, and I rediscovered the joy and wisdom that humans find in the act of play.

I have been an avid InterPlayer now for about six years, and I have even started teaching InterPlay classes. What started as something I did to please a friend, I now do to bring ease, creative energy and joyful community into my life. I have learned to open up my singing voice again, after years of neglect. I've discovered how to access the thousands of stories I have in my body. I've experienced the practice of "exforming", getting out of my body all of the excesses of information and tension with which my culture bombards me. All of this has helped me live a far less stress-filled life, and to bring humor and playfulness to all aspects of my life, even the really difficult parts.