

Dance and Music Therapy as Anti- Ageism: In View of Jimi Solanke

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Introduction

Ageism, like all other forms of prejudice, undoubtedly has a variety of causes and serves a variety of functions. Ageism can simply be defined as negative attitudes or behaviors toward an individual solely based on that person's age. Negative attitudes toward people because they are young or old, would qualify as ageism. With this ageism, many older people, engage in self-debasement, hating themselves and their lives and the company of their peers, feeling they are worthless and there is nothing left to live for. As Tony Ward has noted with regard to the images of ageism:

Negative and discriminatory stereotyping is widely practised on TV and in the media, and can have considerable ill-effects not just on attitudes towards the elderly, but also on the self-perception of the elderly themselves (8).

In most cases, there are several explanations for the "invisibility" of abused older people and the lack of attention given to them. In organized societies, older men are often located in rather "invisible" settings where their abuse will not be seen (and reported). Such settings include inner cities and rural areas, and within prisons, "homeless" shelters, halfway houses, boarding homes, and institutional settings (such as mental health facilities and long-term care facilities). The fact that there may be relatively few older men in some of these residential settings adds to the lack of awareness of their problems. Moreover, because older men are often found within domestic settings, their abuse is less likely to be witnessed by non-family members. Older people, living on the streets, are often a faceless group, and their mental illnesses, substance abuse, and impoverishment can lead to stigmatization that can be coupled with sexism and ageism. The result cannot only be their invisibility but also their irrelevance to the larger community. With these negative attitudes, physical support is gladly given to the dependent young, whereas it tends to be given grudgingly to the dependent old. Perhaps, this has something to do with the fact that the old have a long past, while the young have a long future. Future potential in the young is more highly valued than a lifetime of past experiences in the old, which are seen as obsolete. The needs of the very dependent elderly are contained in institutions where they can be kept alive until it is time for them to die. Under these conditions, dependency needs are multiplied by the loss of personal identity and autonomy, and by the feeling that life is nothing but a grey, anonymous existence. When life has reached this stage, elders really do need positive input from the society as a whole to counteract the negativity of existing in a shrunken life space, which may feel more like a prison or place of abandonment than a warm and safe home lacking in action and activity.

Whereas, one of the results of inactivity and a lack of movement and body awareness can be what Eva Desca Garnet describes as a 'postural set' (59), evident in many older people, characterized by the contracture of the unused muscles and ligaments that connect the bony framework. This can lead to stooping, a shuffling gait, a fear of falling, and a body that moves with great distress. The postural set will sometimes be a further exaggeration of a person's earlier physical and psychological character structure. Dance is, therefore, an appropriate physical choice and has a special place in helping the abandoned populations which have sensory loss and difficulty with verbal or intellectual insight, for example, by maintaining the integrity of the body image, the ego, and self-image. It can also provide a much needed sense of belonging and purpose, and an opportunity for validating past life experience, bringing them into the present as real contributions.

This study is a product of the writers' personal interactions and observations of many theatre performers. It focuses on Jimi Solanke, one of the most popular Nigerian musician and dancer as a template which suggests a positive power of music and dance on one's physical appearance. The work accordingly, sees music and dance as supplements to human diet that could be applied to keep the performer hang around his prime's physical appearance through body posture and movement. It is through this realization that this article is considering music and dance beyond entertaining the audience, but also having unconsciously direct impact on the performers' body in the interior contexts of socio and physiological wellbeing. Hence, this situates music and dance within the realm of the applied theatre that is germane for the psychological and physical wellbeing of the individual performer(s). Using this dancer and performer as model, the essay concludes by upholding dance as an appropriate exercise for both young and ageing men and women in order to live a positive and healthy life. To make it more explicit and unquestionable, this study does not take a clinical test of the group of person under

discussion. It is therefore, foreground on the theoretical and critical persuasions relating to the efficacy of the arts therapy in general, and by way of reference, using Jimi Solanke, *a theatre and film actor, playwright, poet, folk singer, dancer and choreographer, as well as an accomplished musician as a model.*

The proposition here is largely with the assumption that human movement patterns involve emotional tonalities that have intrinsic meaning, while the body structure determines the species' movement habits. It is the same way human bodies have been shaped by the effort habits they have developed in their relationship to the environment through the ages. The notion that therapy is an art form, whose creativity is lost if too closely examined, has in the past led to the resistance of clinicians to empirical study. We recognize that therapy is a 'process' and as such is difficult to examine; research is often hard to do because of the complexity of the therapeutic relationship and because the findings are often difficult to interpret. Yet this should not put us off. What matters here is that

It is important to note that dance has had a therapeutic role and function in many societies around the world. For instance trance dancing in countries such as Bali allowed men and women to be released from mundane conflicts and anxieties. Dance in these countries is seen as an important part of everyday life and has an essential role in maintaining a stable environment in the communities (Ann Cattanach 156).

It is instructive to mention that dance is a great equalizer that enables all of us to communicate through our bodies in our own unique way. It is primarily a non-verbal medium, therefore allowing communication to be facilitated at numerous levels. By way of generalization, we are all dancers. We use movement to express ourselves – our hunger, pains, angers, joys, confusions, fears – long before we use words, and we understand the meanings of movements long before we understand those of words. Thus, dance movement involves affective tonalities that are inevitably expressed, although on occasions they remain at an unconscious level for the mover. A complex system of processes and degrees of muscular tension relaxation allows affects to emerge during dance. The inhibition, repression, or suppression of emotions (by means of extreme tensions, sometimes chronic ones) and at the opposite end, the explosion, outburst, or loss of emotional control, make up the range of expression.

The realization of the above manifestation came to consciousness when one first met Jimi Solanke in 2012 celebrating his 70th birth day at the Pit Theatre of the Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State in Nigeria. Taking a cursory look at this man, one may think he is in his mid 50s. Secondly, in 2013, at the 26th International Conference and the Annual General Meeting of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA) held in Makurdi, Benue State, Bongos Ikwe, also a popular Nigerian Musician who reigned in the 70s performed live at the Cocktail Party which according to him, was part of his 70th birthday celebration. At this age also, the music icon was still looking young and strong. Again, in 2014, Chris Agilo, another popular musician performed live at the Pit theatre of the Obafemi Awolowo University, on the occasion of the Music Concert organized by the Institute of Cultural Studies of the University. His appearance on stage attracted a standing ovation, while he moved and danced with his saxophone. At the end of his performance, the anchor man of the concert demanded to know his age. One was surprised because of the appearance and dexterity he exhibited, to hear this great aged musician saying it loud and clear that he was 86 years old. It was at these points of personal encounters and experiences with these performers that one muted an idea of an article within this context.

Conceptual Framework

Jimi Solanke, to a great extent has substantiated that theatre performance in general, and dance in particular, has a universal and multifaceted application to the totality of the Homo sapiens. These applications range from the social, political, physical, and the economic context. In one of the interviews with the writers, Solanke states categorically that

Apart from the physical therapy of theatrical engagements, I have reached a point of self satisfaction and emotionally fulfillment as an adult who does not have a fixed pension. My works are really taken care of me and my family. I have an invitation to go to Germany next month for a performance and lecture on the creation of African music (OAU, Staff Club, 5th, March, 2017).

Considering the age of Jimi Solanke in relation to his local, national, continental and intercontinental patronages, one would wonder if the stigma of ageism could be found around his personality. On this very premise, Palmore, Erdman Ballagh states:

The millions of older workers who continue to be productive and efficient either through paid employment or volunteer work break the stereotype of uselessness. The stereotype of isolation is broken by most elders who

maintain their social networks or even increase their social activities because of their greater leisure time (169).

This is apparent because dance or any allied performative genre, as a special movement, is considered in recent times to transcend the mere purview of expression and entertainment. Scholars have started researching into the therapeutic vantage position of dance and other expressive genres in the arts. According to Hilda Wengrower and Sharon Chaiklin:

Over the past several years, there has been a gradual recognition of the importance of the interrelationship of the “bodymind” and how it affects human behavior—psychologically, physically, and socially. The concepts of embodiment and attunement are becoming commonplace in the literature of various psychotherapeutic disciplines as well as related fields. Understanding has evolved of how illness, both physical and psychological, is influenced by emotions. The body relays information—our emotional history—that remains stored in our musculature and other physiological systems. It is manifested in the individual’s postures, gestures, use of space, and movements large and small. It became clear that we cannot discard the body as a source of information, whether analogical or symbolic, or ignore it in the process of healing. The *bodymind* as one entity became clear to many involved in dance in conjunction with the role of creativity as a means of bodily expression (xv).

Today’s dance and movement therapy (DMT) evolved from this traditional idea that dancing has the power to heal, and dance therapists use the power of dance and movement to help individuals access their own natural ability to heal and grow. Dance Movement Therapy is therefore the use of expressive movement and dance as a vehicle through which an individual can engage in the process of personal integration and growth. It is founded on the principle that there is a relationship between motion and emotion, and that by exploring a more varied vocabulary of movement, people experience the possibility of becoming more securely balanced. Through movement and dance each person’s inner world becomes tangible; individuals share much of their personal symbolism and in dancing together, relationships become visible. The dance movement therapist creates a holding environment in which such feelings can be safely expressed, acknowledged and communicated.

Therapists are part of mental health professions; they participate in the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance for emotional, cognitive, social, behavioral and physical conditions. This is feasible because as a kind of calisthenics, dance can be useful for both physical and emotional aspects of quality of life. This is what is referred to as Theatre in health education (THE) which is a fairly recent initiative that combines the principles and practices of theatre in education and health education to address issues of health, safety and well-being (Bury, Popple & Barker 13). For instance, the sound of music penetrates the whole of our being. It not only stirs our heavy muscled skeletons. It also resonates in our ‘heart’, exciting or pacifying. It may make us tense and scared, thrill us or carry us to peace and rest. It may lift us from the present bringing to mind remote places or persons, reconstructing events. The spirit that answers to music is in the activity of both soma and viscera. It changes both the substance and quality of experience by engaging with the motives that regulate our life:

Music also projects voice sounds from inside the body, carrying signs of the visceral joy of affection, of calm pleasure, of painful tension and of violent anger. It describes all the levels of the body’s movement – the pulse of stepping feet that run, walk, trip and dance, mastering the earth; the rhythmic swing of hips and belly that glide and sway with dignity, light grace or flirtatious impudence. It can stimulate enfeebling pain of anxiety in the belly or the burning ardour of the breast and the alert intelligence of the head and eyes and lips, those parts that can break free with a versatility of invention that leaves the heavy limbs behind, telling metaphors for imagined worlds and activities in other times and places, abstracting symbols and putting them into words (Daniel Perret 8)

Again, conjecturing histrionics as an instrument applicable to therapeutic ends and means, Boal identifies three essential attributes that make up the knowledge-enhancing power of the dramatic art:

the plasticity which allows and induces the unfettered exercise of memory and imagination, the free play of past and future; the division or doubling of self which occurs in the subject who comes on stage, the fruit of the dichotomic and ‘dichotomising’ character of the ‘platform’ [that is theatre], which allows – and enables - self-observation; the telemicroscopic property which magnifies everything and makes everything present, allowing us to see things which, without it, in smaller or more distant form, would escape

our gaze (ix).

This means that when we engage in any physical activity in a consistent manner over a period of time, we encourage the development of synaptic connections in the brain. These connections allow "new moves" to become part of our vocabulary of motion, just as crawling, walking, and running become part of our automatic response. These learned systems share a common feature: a broadening of the base of habitual actions that we can use consciously and with intent. When we talk of technique, we refer to training methods that employ a patterning process, that is, the repetition of specific motions until these motions become part of our physical vocabulary. Like in dance, correct posture is achieved through the practice of the basic vocabulary. These steps are the building blocks of all future motions; within them they encompass all the permutations of the dance technique.

Contextual Discourse

Uncle Jimi Solanke, a.k.a. Baba Agba as fondly called, born July 4, 1942 is a trained theatre practitioner from the University of Ibadan. He has an interdisciplinary practice, embracing the literary, histrionic, and visual arts.



Jimi Solanke performing live at the PIT theatre, OAU, Ile-Ife, on 25th January, 2017 in a Musical concert

A critical observation reveals that Solanke is a healthy person who has not been to the hospital for serious ailment for a long time. These observations became an open discussion at the Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife Staff Club when colleagues were wondering the kind of energy and stamina Solanke had which enabled him danced all night long during several functions in and outside the club. As younger colleagues one had no contribution, but as a dancer, theatre practitioner and dance teacher one understood the magic behind his energy and stamina. This is because through the unity of the body, mind, and spirit, dance provides a sense of wholeness to all individuals irrespective of age. Through a careful observation of Solanke within the feel of his histrionics, it may not be an overstatement to say that dance as a movement, involves affective tonalities that are inevitably expressed, although on occasions they remain at an unconscious level for the mover. This is simply because, it has to do with a complex system of processes and degrees of muscular tension relaxation that allows affects to emerge. Thus, Mind-body medicine uses music and dance which hitherto helps improve both mental and physical wellbeing as well as using to help boost the body's infection-fighting abilities of which Jimi Solanke is a benefactor.



Jimi Solanke in a musical concert

Complimentary with music, in a famous paragraph of Plato's *The State* (Book III) we are informed about the influence of music on the human mind. In his dialogue with Glaucon, Socrates praises the use of certain rhythms and modes that encourage man to a harmonic and brave life (the Dorian and Phrygian mode), while he makes reservations to modes encouraging indolence or sadness (Lydian and Mixolydian). Even if it is obvious that these considerations inform us more about Plato's ideals for a perfect state than about music, we still find similar ideas about the direct influence of music on the mind in music theory and medical theory through the centuries. The axiom is that music has a direct effect on the human mind and thus influences mood, character and health. Music and dance create new synaptic connections that will allow the body to respond immediately to commands from the brain.

Therapeutically, the result of music and dance is a general improvement in health; hence music and dance can be used in a variety of settings with people who have social, emotional, cognitive, or physical concerns. So in applying the concept of performance, music and dance are akin to medication and the search is undertaken for exploring how the properties of music and dance as autonomous entity can lead to desired positive changes in humans.

According to Chris Ugolo:

Any dance training focuses on the emotional, physical and psychological aspects of human development. The objective therefore is to bring out the qualities of endurance, flexibility co-ordination, balance, strength/stamina, agility and creativity/resourcefulness. Also the analytical and critical perceptions of the individual are targeted (220).

As for music, Tyson believed "that music arose as an audible expression of our internal reactions to sensory, motor and psychological stimuli" (1). As well, she felt that the physiological basis of music as a reflection of biological rhythms provided the foundation for music therapy. She identified the inhibition of, and dissociation from, affect as a pervasive concern for all music therapy work. Because music represents an outflowing from the internal state of the individual into the environment, it is naturally suited to address the core issue faced by clients for whom the lack of capacity for productive emotional expression was debilitating. Incorporating dance within this framework, there is a position that

Bringing together sport and dance as ethnographically distinctive but analytically commensurable forms of body culture and social practice represents a departure from previous ways of thinking about these two fields within anthropology and other disciplines. Sport and dance are conventionally viewed in the West as residing within separate and even opposed cultural realms. Yet they share not only a common status as techniques of the body, but also a vital capacity to express and reformulate identities and meanings through their practiced movements and scripted forms. Sport and dance spark widespread participation, critical appreciation and endless interpretation by performers and their audiences. Indeed, the embodied practices of athletes and dancers afford not merely pleasure and entertainment but powerful means for celebrating existing social arrangements and cultural ideals or for imagining and advocating new ones. (Noel Dyck and Eduardo 4)

The above observation is apt as far as Solanke and his body posture is concerned because both dance and sport are as prime sites for not only leisure, but also for the production, reproduction and contestation of identities; sport and dance balance precariously between a set of recurring contradictions. The person in discourse does not need any physical exercise to make him mentally and physically fit. On a more analytical premise, the embodied identities spawned by athletes and dancers are frivolous yet serious; categorical yet personal; ephemeral yet abiding; and, relegated to the field of leisure, supposedly on the margins of everyday life,

yet the focus of burgeoning economic industries and formidable political interests. Precisely because sport and dance are performed within these oscillating contradictions, they provide penetrating analytical vantage points from which to apprehend the taken-for-granted arrangements and assumptions of social life. Noel Dyck and Eduardo went on to say more the connectivity between dances and sport that

The roughly concurrent emergence of dance and sport as parallel fields of study that are not only provoking, innovative and exciting insights into the social uses of the body and the nature of embodied performance, but are also linking these forms of body practice to broader contexts of social and cultural life, makes this a propitious time to begin to explore interconnections between the two (6-7)

A cursory look at Solanke reveals that dance like sport helps in developing body image; improving self-concept and self-esteem; reducing stress, anxiety, and depression; decreasing isolation, chronic pain, and body tension; and increasing communication skills and feelings of wellbeing.

Dancing is the most strenuous profession of all! Here are members of the Ted Shawn group in rehearsal at Shawn's farm atop Jacob's ladder in the Berkshires. These lads, besides doing all the work on the farm, train five hours daily. They're more rugged and better fit physically than any other athlete in the world and this dancing business, though it may seem simple, is more hazardous than any he-man sport (Boston Post 4)

Using Solanke as a paradigm, it is just to conclude that dance as a human bodily activity is a panacea for physical fitness which is an ability of the human body to function with vigor, alertness without undue fatigue with ample energy to engage in leisure and other activities. Muscular strength and endurance, cardio respiratory integrity, and general alertness are the overt signs of physical fitness.



Jimi Solanke in a musical theatre performance

Through observation and personal interview with Jimi Solanke, it is noted that, physical fitness is usually measured in relation to functional expectations—that is, typically, by periodic tests measuring strength, endurance, agility, coordination, and flexibility. In addition, stress testing, which ascertains the body's accommodation to powerful, sustained physical stimuli, is used to analyze fitness. If individuals are able to accommodate the stressors, they are assumed to be fit. This is simply for the fact that we express ourselves unconsciously through movement but words operate differently; they entail an intellectual process, which movement does not have to do. Words can describe a dream, a movement, an image, or a relationship but they are further removed from the unconscious processes themselves.

Therefore, the level of physical fitness can be influenced by regular, systematic exercise through movement of which dance is part and parcel. Moderate activity will maintain the individual at a level that is usually adequate to handle ordinary stress. If the fitness level is to be improved, however, it is necessary to participate in more intensive exercise that overloads the physiological system and thus promotes change. This is because

Dance Movement Therapy has a particular contribution to make here because movement is about the physical self and catharsis is a physical discharge of emotion or energy. Other therapies and methods may stimulate catharsis, but it is something that has been borrowed from movement work. There is a danger that catharsis is seen as the ultimate goal of therapy; that ventilating emotion can expunge it. Ventilation must, I believe, lead to integration, and I treat catharsis as a stepping-stone on the path to healthy integration (Payne Helen169).

The cathartic nature of dance, with its concomitant of insight, releases the tension built up by stress, bringing relief. Dance movement (like other movement forms) is a pleasurable expenditure of energy, different

from everyday movement, which offers relaxation and sublimation. It can sometimes lead to altered states of consciousness. There is a feeling of wellbeing induced after dancing which suggests that it improves affective states (Jimi Solanke, Oral Interview). This is empirically recognized to be the case in most other forms of exercise. Involvement in dance provides for distraction from stressful situations and anxious thoughts.

Conclusion

It will not be an overstatement to say that music and dance are serious therapies and antidotes for physical, social and psychological deformations which are strong and visible characteristics of ageism. This paper in any way is devoid of generalization as far as the performance aesthetic therapy is concern. The benefit from the efficacy of music and dance to an ageing body is a long term physical investment. One cannot begin the journey into dance practice at an older age. The benefactor here is expected to have started the art of music and dance unconsciously overtime without recourse to the medical and social advantages. This where Jimi Solanke and many other performers have come to benefit from the economic, social and the therapeutic aspects of music and dance.

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Oral Interview

Jimi Solanke, at the OAU Staff Club, 23/2/2017