

Movement Matters

An Interview with Gabrielle Roth By V. Wade Contreras

Gabrielle Roth is a modern Renaissance woman. She is a dancer, musician, writer, spiritualist and philosopher. She's released 16 albums with her band, Gabrielle Roth & the Mirrors, is the author of *Maps to Ecstasy* (New World Library) and *Sweat Your Prayers* (Tarcher/Putnam), and is producing and directing a play called *Savage Love* that will be performed in New York this spring and fall. Roth's music spans several genres, including, world beat, ambient and New Age, but is perhaps best summed up by one critic as "ambient-tribal." One listen will clue you in to the hypnotic vibe -- and make you want to move. Indeed, movement is what she spends a great deal of time teaching others about at the many workshops she leads at her Moving Center, with schools in New York, California and the U.K. It's extremely difficult to try to encapsulate what a woman like Roth is all about, so rather we'll let her explicate herself to some degree with the following interview.

Beyond Mainstream: How do you perceive yourself as an artist? Are you a musician first, and then a dancer, and then a novelist, or do you not see one as more important than another?

Gabrielle Roth: I think I began as a dancer and that everything else came from the movement. I fell in love with dance, and then, through dance, with just pure movement. And from the pure

movement everything else just ... happened. The music came out of the dance. The writing came out of the dance ... My basic language is movement.

BYM: Your music has been characterized as "trance," "New Age," "world beat," "ambient" -- all these words used to describe the music. Do you see it fitting into any of these categories?

GR: It's world beat music without a world. Like, usually world beat music is African or Indian, or it belongs to a specific "world." This is American world beat music. We borrow from all the worlds, depending on the musicians, and every musician brings many worlds within him or her to the process of making music ... It is really drum music. It is really beat-driven music.

BYM: Yeah, I definitely hear the tribal element.

GR: I made my first album, Totem, because of a need in my dance world, which was for songs that were longer than three minutes, and at that time, none of these music categories existed ... and the New Age bookstores wouldn't take it because it had too much energy. So I basically just distributed it on my own, and then we began to explore the "Five Rhythms" that I teach through music.

BYM: How did you come up with the Five Rhythms, and what they do for people?

GR: Well, I came from the world of the dancer to find myself teaching, at a very young age of 16, people ... who had never had a dance class. So I began to find ways to seduce people into movement, and I began to see that there were certain patterns that emerged. When a group of people started moving, there were certain predictable patterns of motion that they went through.... And then I began to experience those patterns in other parts of my life -- when I had an orgasm, and when I had a baby. And I began to see the rhythm everywhere, and that by dancing in these rhythms, people began to unleash and expand a lot of vocabulary that just been hidden or repressed.

BYM: What was it like working with Boris Grebenshikov on your Bardo album, a person known as Russia's John Lennon and who's created his own language to sing his music?

GR: Well, he's the coolest guy in the world. He's a total mystic. He is the true spirit of rock and roll. In fact, he started making rock and roll in Russia when it was against the law, so he's an outlaw and a rebel ... He was very much to me like Bob Dylan, a voice of his era, a very political voice and very poetic.

BYM: What do you do at your workshops?

GR: In the beginning, we're just getting down into the body. For me it's meditation, but it doesn't have to be. It could be a workout ... I have about 150 teachers out there who teach in various parts of the world, so it's available in many places ... I mostly teach

advanced work at this point, but not only, and I'm doing a lot of theatre work.

BYM: Your career as a classical dancer was cut short by injury. How did that contribute to your becoming what you are today?

GR: That was one of those turning points, where, if that had not happened, I certainly would have taken a different trek, but because that happened the whole world of teaching opened up for me.

BYM: At what age did it happen?

GR: About 20, in a skiing accident.... I felt very sorry for myself for a short while, like my life had been taken away or something, and while I was going through my mourning period for what was, what was going to be had already started to take place. While I was mourning my own dance, I was teaching other people how to move, and through the process of doing that, I found another style of movement that I could do -- a much more tribal, natural, organic and fiery form of movement than I ever would have discovered in the context of ballet or modern dance.

BYM: So that really had an impact on your whole path. Does it still affect you today?

GR: No. It was something I went through. I could never do certain kinds of turnout. I couldn't twist my legs into positions they weren't meant to be in. So it took a language away from me, but because of that I discovered a whole new language. So you never know what's coming at you, what you'll go through and what you're going to receive from it. Life has these little dips and changes, and they're not what we expected.

BYM: How do your books work in conjunction with the music? What are you trying to elucidate for your readers?

GR: My books are meant to give the intellectual underpinning of the dance work that I do and the philosophical context in which we move. They're basically so far about the Five Rhythms....There's really specific instruction in Maps to Ecstasy, my first book, and you get a lot of specific information in Sweat Your Prayers. It's not necessarily a how-to-do-the-dance, but it definitely describes the dance and all the teachings that come from the dance.

BYM: So if someone wanted to learn your movements but didn't want to go to a workshop, what would be the easiest way to do that?

GR: They could always get the CD Tribe that has the Five Rhythms. We've done the Five Rhythms on many CDs...There are three videos. There's a Website (www.ravenrecording.com or

www.gabrielleroth.com), and the books would certainly be some form of initiation into the voice of the work.

BYM: I notice in your bio, it speaks of you in terms of "contemporary spirituality." What is your philosophy?

GR: God is the dance. That is my philosophy ... I was looking for a way to be free and every path to freedom ... you ended up taking on more than you let go of, like most religious paths. I just wanted to dance....And through the dance, I went into these deep trance states - deep, ecstatic places...Inside of us there is nothing but rhythm and emptiness, and in that place where you and I are nothing but energy and rhythm and emptiness, there's an incredible freedom there.

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