



TaPS MASTER CLASS RESOURCE PACK: Kathakali dance theatre.

By Fenella Kelly

October 2010, London TaPS

**Kathakali dance theatre - Fenella Kelly
ISTA TaPS resource pack, London TaPS, October 2010**

Outline

A series of exercises will introduce students to the main physical training aspects of Kathakali. Examples will be included of characters and make-up, and students will also watch a section of a dance theatre piece performed in Kerala, India.

Warm-up

The first part of the session will be to warm the entire body up doing a series of stretches and sun salutations. This will also touch on some strengthening exercises such as shoulder stands and stomach exercises.

Salutation and foot work (Kal Saatagam)

After the warm-up students will learn the four patterns of footwork training that are conducted in all Kathakali training. These will be practiced at four speeds, and students will focus on posture and foot positions while learning the patterns. Students will also speak the rhythms. Before starting any work students will learn the salutation to the gods.

Facial expressions (Mukhabinaya)

There are nine expressions used in Kathakali performances, and they are very precise in the way they are projected to an audience. Students will initially learn the facial expressions alone: love (shrimgaaram), mockery (haasyam), sadness (karunam), anger (roudram), bravery (veeram), fear (bhayanakam), disgust (beebhatsam), wonder (adbutam) and tranquillity (santham).

Once the seven expressions have been practised there will be additional body movement and eye focus added.

Hand gestures (Mudras)

Students will be introduced to the 24 basic mudras and will learn the English and Sanskrit names for the mudras. Students will then try to remember the first 6 and be introduced to how this 'alphabet' becomes words.

Eye practice (Kannusadhakam)

The use of eyes is critical for expression in Kathakali performances, and the eyes need to be trained to show a variety of expressions and be trained not to blink. Students will be led through 5 forms of eye training exercises.

Body training

The core of the body needs to be strong to hold the weight of the costume and headdress, so body training is essential preparation for the performer. Students will participate in some or all of the seven body training exercises.

Make-up, characters and performance

The colours and characters in Kathakali performances are very distinctive and all very different. Students will be introduced to the different characters and shown images and photos of the make-up and costumes for these characters.

They will also be told more about the locations and process of performance, with a brief introduction to the main instrument that accompanies the performances, the chenda. Students will then watch a section of a performance that was done in Kerala, India to see the costumes, foot work, mudras, facial expression and eye movements, in practice.

Finishing steps

The workshop will end with some practical work going back to the first steps learnt in the workshop, where students will review the footwork and posture, but add finishing steps, mudras and facial expressions to their own practical work. The session will end with a final salutation.

Emphasis is on immersion in the Art form to experience the rigour of the training and empathise with the discipline of the Kathakali performer. We are identifying all the aspects of Kathakali that make up this complete theatrical form and discovering for ourselves what we find interesting, beautiful or challenging. What inspires everyone varies, but there may be seeds of this workshop that grow into the participant's own practical work or research.

Introduction

My introductory talk will focus on the following points:

- ❖ Where Kathakali comes from and where it is performed.
 - ❖ What is the inspiration for the art form, and how it relates to Kutiyattam.
 - ❖ Examples of my own experiences as a student and audience member.
 - ❖ Kathakali as a way of life and art form that can take ten years to learn.
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Facial expressions - Mukhabinaya



1. SHRIMGARRAM – LOVE



2. HAASYAM – MOCKERY



3. KARUNAM – SADNESS



4. ROUDRAM – ANGER



5. VEERAM – HEROISM



6. BHAYANAKAM – FEAR



7. BEEBHATSAM – DISGUST



8. ADBUTHAM – WONDER



9. SANTHAM - TRANQUILITY

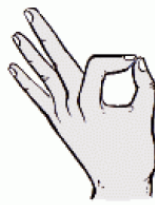
KATHAKALI Mudras and Nava Rasas

(Source: 'The Language of Kathakali' G. Venu, 2000, Natana Kairali, India.)

There are 24 Basic Mudras (hand gestures). There are 'Asamyutha Mudras' (that is shown using single hand), double handed mudras are called 'Samyutha Mudras'. About 470 symbols are used in Kathakali. Below are the first 16 of the 24 Asamyutha Mudras:



1. Pataka
(Flag)



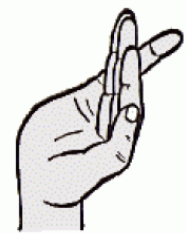
2. Mudrakhya
(Seal)



3. Kataka
(Golden Bangle)



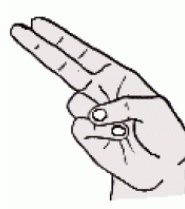
4. Mushti
(Fist)



5. Kartharemkha
(Scissor's point)



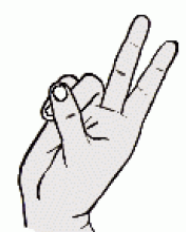
6. Sukatunda
(Parrot's beak)



7. Kapithaka
(Apple tree)



8. Hamsapaksha
(Swan's wing)



9. Sikhara
(Mountain peak)



10. Hamsasya
(Swan's beak)



11. Anjali
(Salutation)



12. Ardhashandra
(Half moon)



13. Mukura
(Mirror)



14. Bhramara
(Bee)



15. Suchimukha
(Eye of a needle)



16. Pallava
(Tender leaf)

Resources

Books

There are many books available about Theatre of the Oppressed or based on development/projects from it. Below is just a small selection of what is out there.

- Pilaar, A.J (2003) *Kathakali plays in English*, India: D.C Press Ltd
- Schechner, R (1985) *Between theatre and anthropology*, USA: Philadelphia Press
- Schechner, R (2006) *Performance studies: an introduction (second edition)*, USA: Routledge
- Venu, G. (2000) *The language of Kathakali*, India: Natana Kairali
- Venu, G (2004) *Kathakali, Kutiyattam and other performing arts*, India: Natana Kairali
- Zarrilli, P.B. (1984). *The Kathakali complex: actor, performance & structure*, Abhinav Publications

DVDs and websites

- Kathakali Centre, Kerala (2004) produced by Kerala Kathakali centre, Cochin, Kerala, India. www.kathakalicentre.com
- Kathakali (2006) produced by Invis Infotech Pvt. Ltd, Kaudiar, Thrivananthapuram, India. www.invismultimedia.com
- Theyyam (2008) produced by Culture Vistas Marketing Services Pvt. Ltd. Kerala, India. www.culturevistas.com
- Kutiyattam ((2006) produced by Venu, G. Thrussur, Kerala, India.
- The International Centre for Kathakali: <http://www.kathakalicentre.in/home>
- Kathakali and carnatic India: <http://www.carnaticindia.com/dance/kathakali.html>
- Kathakali news: <http://www.kathakalinews.com/>
- A multilingual site for Kathakali: <http://www.kathakali.info/>

Practitioners Pathway

My career path into theatre was quite by default. I had been interested in everything at school, but I excelled in sport, being the captain of many team games, and was also an accomplished dancer and musician, taking my GCSE in music a year early and then taking on a new instrument for A level. I always thought I would study sport, dance or music later in life, or teach one or all. When it came to applying to University I decided to train to be a junior school teacher so that I could carry on doing everything. By chance I was offered a place at Homerton College, Cambridge, to study primary education and Drama. Before I knew it I was doing a drama foundation course at the University, was cast as the lead in Strindberg's 'A Dream play', was

performing original music for a play about Sylvia Plath and was directing my first piece for a Footlights' theatre festival. Drama and theatre had never been my plan, but I found that I loved it – the team work, the challenge, the flexibility to include music and dance, and the constant learning from every practical experience.

After University it came to looking for a job, and there were not many appealing positions available in the UK, so I looked further afield and found myself flying off to Crete to co-run a language school (I did a TESOL course as soon as I left University, as a stand-by option for working abroad). Working in Crete was crucifixion by fire as I had to teach groups aged 6-40 and they were all quite different in their needs and discipline. This job was excellent grounding for my next position in Istanbul, where I was employed by a company to teach ESP (English for Special Purposes) to bank managers, tele-secretaries and groups of teenagers that wanted to work as travel agents. While in Istanbul I met some wonderful people through the British Council that wanted to set up a theatre group, so within a few months of arriving in Istanbul I was part of 'Speech Bubbles' and we were writing our first play to tour round Universities for teaching English through Theatre. The company later expanded to write their own educational material and go on tours of Turkey and Hungary, but also putting on charity focused productions annually or biannually in Istanbul theatres with local and foreign performers.

Several years later I was running workshops in using Drama in ELT (English Language teaching) at the British Council, where I also worked as an examiner for spoken English exams, and had been offered a job in Yuz Yil Isil, a new International School that was opening in Istanbul, to set up the drama programme in the whole school. I leapt at the chance and then also found myself working freelance training teachers in schools across Istanbul that wanted to use Drama in the classroom or across the curriculum. My next door was opened when ISTA came to Uskudar American Academy, on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. I was asked to run a workshop on Shakespeare, and on the strength of my work was invited to join ISTA staff. At the same time I was asked to join the Uskudar staff and run their Middle and High School Drama and Theatre programme.

My next stop was Brazil, where I was head of Performing Arts for four years, and saw a department grow from a team of five (Drama, Band, Choir, Art and Ceramics) to a team of 14 that included photography, IB Film, dance strings etc and we now had a brand new Fine Arts centre in which to play. My time in Brazil was when I grew most professionally, as the school work was demanding and professional, but outside school I had joined a contemporary dance company (I had continued with contemporary and Latin dance since school) and also joined a physical theatre company called Teatro Oficina that based their ideas on Butoh, Brook, Boal and Suzuki. I also took advantage of the dance scene and learnt samba gaffiera, carnival samba and more salsa, competing in local dance competitions with various Brazilian dance partners. On trips to Argentina I had tango and milonga lessons and ran classes for teachers after school.

Next stop was Egypt for four years, and by this time I had been teaching the IB for a while and was an examiner. I was also asked at this time

to be a teacher trainer for the IB so travelling every month for a festival or training event became the norm. At the school (Cairo American College) I was head of performing Arts, and had the freedom to develop new projects within the school. We started to embrace the local arts of the country more and made links with the university to bring in local actors and also have regular belly dancing lessons and tanoura spinning. Outside school I developed my own belly dancing skills, but also set up a theatre group to write original material and perform our own work at the Cultural Wheel in central Cairo. I also set up an annual trip to Ethiopia where my students ran theatre of the Oppressed workshops in rural villages that focused on Child Labour or FGM (female genitalia mutilation). The students also taught the local people various skills and crafts that they had requested. We worked in Wolliso with the local youth trust there.

On leaving Cairo last year I headed to India to learn Kathakali intensively, as the complexity and discipline of the art had fascinated me for a while. Immersing myself in the life of a village in central Kerala I trained daily with my tutor from Kallamanadalam. Not being able to quiet the musician in me I also learnt to play the chenda, the drum that accompanies Kathakali performances. It was a gruelling and rewarding experience, in equal measure, and now the fire of Indian life runs in my veins.

This last year has been spent back in the UK studying a full-time MA at Warwick while I play in the Uni Orchestra, salsa at the Uni latin nights, teach adults EFL full-time at the local college, Henley, work for the IB as an examiner and trainer, and jet off to ISTA events to run workshops for students and teachers. So, I have ended up doing everything, just as I had planned when I left school!