

## Intimate Voices

In the social landscape we inhabited separately and together, a landscape full of oversized personalities, big egos, and stunning beauties, Drew shone brighter, and not just in my love soaked eyes. He stood out for his lighthearted charm, quick wit, and sincere interest in other people. He had charisma, attracting attention from both men and women, both on stage and off, and I got giddy in his glow. Rather quickly, both my work and my life were all about him.

I remember our excitement at being asked to house-sit, starting in the fall, for the artistic directors of the baroque dance and opera company. They had received a grant to do research in England for a year. While they were away, their spacious apartment on West 100<sup>th</sup> St was ours in exchange for feeding their cats. I left the Brooklyn dive to my roommates, and Drew and I got a chance to live together for a price we easily could afford.

That sprawling apartment became our co-creation incubator. The big living room with its well worn oriental rug that had seen countless rehearsals of Baroque music and dance was just enough space to invent and rehearse new body voice theater material. Besides choreographing sections of "Sequenza III," we explored vocal harmonies and musical structures for a new piece I'd started working on with my company. Drew not only agreed to be in it, but also began to operate as musical director for the entire concert of pieces I was producing that January.

Our performance venue that year (1981) was Beverly's newly remodeled loft. It was enough out of the way, and none of us were well known then, so the weekend of performances again garnered only a passing mention in the major papers. Maybe that was for the best. I was a late bloomer in so many things, so it was probably a good thing not to have too much attention till my work matured more. The one little review that did appear, however, mentioned only Drew.

We lost little time rehashing things and moved on to start working on new pieces...no particular performance in sight. And while we still had free reign in that big West 100<sup>th</sup> Street apartment, Drew and I began work there on a new piece just for the two of us. Although we had no specific form in mind at the beginning, it was to be a statement about our relationship—a tapestry woven out of the many colored threads of our love—a gathering of ordinary moments from our lives orchestrated into an ornate entertainment, perhaps?

Our creative process began simply enough. We started capturing moments of our daily fooling around—singing together in the acoustically resonant bath, rolling all over each other and wrestling for control in the king sized bed, chattering back and forth in a deliberately syncopated rhythm while we made dinner, slow-dancing in the living room accompanied by whispered rehashing of yesterday's rehearsal downtown with the company. We gathered these little moments from our new life together like wild flowers intended for a glorious bouquet. I took copious notes,

successful only in jotting down the rhythms and patterns we structured. The feeling content, the sound qualities, the movements themselves eluded all my attempts to capture in word or pictures on paper. They lived unerringly in our bodies, though. Body memory we trusted completely. We knew we could re-create what we felt. We did it daily. It was part of us.

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A few months later, as the piece was beginning to take shape, we began scheduling actual rehearsal dates to work on it. Section by section, we refined our structures, balanced our harmonies, and ironed out most of the glitches in our performances. But after many rehearsals, the extended vocal duet section in the middle was still giving me trouble. I couldn't quite match Drew's vocal clarity. With no instrumental accompaniment, I wasn't as good at picking my notes out of the air and hitting them with the precision that he could. He was getting frustrated, I could tell, although he kept denying it.

At the end of a long working session on a rainy day in May, as we finished the final cadence of that section with gusto, I thought I had finally nailed the difficult harmony, my voice exactly a fourth lower than his perfectly pitched melody line. Before I could be sure, I needed confirmation from him.

Standing side by side, close but not touching, breathing heavily, we were poised for whatever would come next. In our working process, we had not yet decided where this piece should go next. I turned to look at him, then rested my head on his shoulder, content at least that he and I were still in the development phase of our creative process, that he wasn't ready to throw in the towel.

"Uh huh" he whispered into my ear. "Good job." With a nuzzle to my neck, he confirmed that he was finally satisfied with that part, that our many repetitions had paid off.

A shiver of pride lifted the hairs on my arms and propelled me forward away from him. My body wanted to dance the pleasure of this praise—praise I had learned was only offered when it was deserved. I slid further into the center of the living room with a couple swift lunges that flowed into a twirl, a quick stop, and a balance on half-toe, body and attention tilted slightly back toward him, a question.

"I love turning and balancing." A hesitant suggestion.

He gazed at me with a soft, appreciative grin. "Then go for it." With slightly exaggerated dramatic flare, he spread his arms in a formal gesture of deference, and with a step back and a slight bow, he ceded the floor to me without a hint of irony. "Let this be your moment to show off for me, Master Choreographer."

He was right, and I knew it the moment he said it. Dancing something showy, something technically difficult, deliberately for and to him, was exactly the right response to the carefully structured song we had just finished. My pride at getting the harmony right demanded I display my delight for him. And it had already started, unpremeditated, with that unexpected, one-footed balance—lifted knee, lower leg hanging, extended right arm with fingers in a soft curl that gave a lightness and decorative prettiness to the strong inner push from my left foot.

“Then maybe something like this?” With that question hanging in the air, I lit out around the room, a rush of movement full of startlingly swift changes of direction, a luxurious arch of my back with arms unfurling toward the ceiling, and a swing of my torso as if calling forth the gods of wind and thunder to bless our union with rain. I repeated this rhythmically erratic pattern several more times, changing it slightly each time, and with each pass, deliberately added more lushness to the flow of movement, deliberately underscored the meaning of this danced solo with salacious smiles, challenging stares, and finally, a long lingering gaze. Then I pulled my arms in tight and spiraled toward him with a fast series of spins, ending in a jump-turn that I landed silently right in front of him, leg and arm trailing after me with a flourish — my signature style.

“How was that?” Not really needing an answer.

He laughed. Amused? Pleased? Perplexed?

“Per-r-r-fect.” He spoke this word, but extended the vowels so much it sang. “Just like the extravagantly ornamented cadenza at the end of a Baroque aria.”

I beamed, and swooped in for a quick kiss as my reward. He pushed me back, jumped up and wrapped his legs around my waist — his signature hug — knocking me back onto my hands to straddle me. With me still supporting part of his weight in a crab-crawl position, he perched there like a prince on his throne and improvised his own sung ending to the previous musical section—starting and ending in the same key in which we had been singing but straying completely from the rhythmic structure into extended trills, hopping grace notes and rippling scales.

It thrilled me on two levels at once. Being so close to that much vocal virtuosity and beauty sent my ears ringing, my mind spiraling, my heart soaring. And at the same time, my choreographer’s eye hovered above us and saw the exquisite rightness of those three moments juxtaposed to each other in quick succession—the vocal duet, my danced cadenza and his sung response.

When I told him what I’d seen, the kiss that he allowed me rewarded us both this time—a long and luscious punctuation. It signaled the end to that rehearsal and provided a seamless transition into lazy grappling and unhurried peeling away of clothes for well-deserved lovemaking—love and art blending right there on that well-worn rug.

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This piece, “Intimate Voices: Duet” took pride of place in a concert of dances produced that summer in a festival of gay arts. It felt natural and authentic to Drew and me to express our feelings for each other in dance and song. Gay men in our audiences were brought to tears by the presentation of what felt and looked like a new kind of relationship. In performances, we were open and easy, casual about our love being seen. We were very sensual in our caresses and strong flowing movements, implying a freshly spent sexual passion. We showed no interest in roles like top and bottom, nor any concern about expressions of masculinity or femininity—just two young men in a deliciously and deliberately equal give and take. We were both capable of commanding the stage or taking a supporting role when the flow of the piece demanded it, and then without a moment’s transition, we let ourselves be supported, guided, swung, tossed, or even lifted.

With Drew's haunting countertenor taking the lead vocals, and his perfect pitch holding our complex harmonic patterns together, we were able to contain the free ranging feelings in a tight musical and rhythmic structure.

From the critics, we received remarkable, glowing reviews hailing our courage and talent in crafting a deeply moving piece out of our personal lives. And as our relationship found its way into dance reviews of various periodicals, our artistic collaboration flowered.

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Drew was my artistic partner, my perfect counterpart both in bed and on stage. We also shared social circles in which his brilliant presence dominated the room like a diamond in a string of lesser gems. He charmed my family, and rose easily in the eyes of my parents to the same status held by my siblings’ spouses. He was welcomed wherever I went. I found similar inclusion in his musical circles. With more conservative parts of his family, his relationship with me didn’t go over so well, but that seemed to bother him more than me.

Together we explored a wide range of training in somatic and psychic approaches to self healing and personal growth. We changed our diets several times, including a foray into macrobiotics, and he encouraged me to take a year long training in Food and Healing.

My years with Drew were also years of spiritual growth. Drew stayed connected to his Episcopalian upbringing while embracing a much broader spirituality. I had let go completely of my Brethren heritage, but with Drew's encouragement, I began reading about Eastern spiritual traditions and philosophies. I dove deeply into Oriental Five Element Theory and its applications in living a healthy, spiritually grounded life.

In a workshop we took, I experienced a mind expanding opening into a vast and beautiful emptiness in my heart. That spurred me to explore psychic therapy where I learned ways of dissolving into altered states and internally witnessing striking images of past lives. From these experiences, I later engaged in a several year course in intuition training. We started meditating daily, dabbled in various Buddhist practices, learned to sit in the Zen style, and together embraced the Buddhist ideal of living the middle way.

In the following years, as each of us expanded our consciousness and grew in self-confidence, and as our budding artistic talents began to bloom, there was more clashing of egos. Eventually, Drew made a unilateral decision, devastating for me, to steer all his professional and artistic focus back toward the early music world for which he was so much more thoroughly trained.

I would completely lose him to the world of Baroque music after his highly acclaimed debut in the title role of Handel's "Orlando". From there, he gradually worked his way into an international operatic career, a world I admired, but one for which I was not trained nor particularly drawn to. As Drew got his footing there, I began to feel less and less a part of his world.

When he pulled out of my performance pieces after only three short but glorious years, I lost my vocal soloist, my musical director, and my best collaborative partner.

I knew he was growing fast, both personally and professionally, and assumed he stopped working with me because I was growing slower. I was destined to be a late bloomer. I had started dancing late and it would turn out that dance and choreography was only a stepping stone toward the healing and teaching work I was really meant to do, work that was to become my true calling.

The most devastating loss for me occurred a few years later when he announced that he was leaving me, and moved out of our apartment. At the time, I was totally unprepared. His stated need was to strike out on his own, discover himself, try out living with a woman he had become infatuated with. Much later he revealed to me that he left because he felt betrayed by a short affair I'd had.

Whatever his reasons, it was emotionally wrenching for me. And as before with Tom, I met the loss head-on. I threw myself into the grieving. I went back into the dance studio daily, rolled and thrashed on the floor, wept and groaned, and hurled myself through the space, daring my body to withstand the powerful currents rushing through me. When I had the studio to myself, I sang, and chanted, and wailed, then curled up and heaved. For months after Drew left, I gave myself permission to be raw and vulnerable in rehearsals with others as well, and danced my way through waves of feeling. Eventually my dancing would find its way back to a steady and reliable center, my mind would find new creative juice, and I would

push myself to choreograph even more personally revealing material. But it would take time.

My healing was aided by a meditation practice I had recently learned. Whenever anyone mentioned Drew's name, or whenever I thought of him or felt the lack of his presence in some activity we had previously shared, I took a deep breath, touched my heart, and with all the sincerity I could muster, wished him happiness. I focused on my gratitude for the time and love we had shared. I invited his face lovingly back into my mind and wished him well. With repetition, this proved particularly potent as a salve to my pain, and built, slowly, incrementally, an inner peace.

Following our break up, I would opt for a period of celibacy, a period that would eventually last 18 months, to turn my attention more fully to my meditation practice and the re-stabilizing of my body, heart and mind in myself alone.

I took so much away from that relationship. We were golden boys, the two of us, floating effortlessly on a swirl of artists in the gay community in the thriving dance/theater/music scene of New York City.

It was during those years with Drew that my lifestyle graduated from unknown starving artist to "privileged poor". We were young men with good educations, creative and dynamic in our energy, ready to jump on opportunities of all kinds, and attractive to both men and women of all ages. The two of us together were a social power couple. And yet we had no money. We earned practically nothing. We saved nothing. We lived on the edge, and always shared whatever apartment we were in with at least one other roommate. But we were privileged in our contacts, in our opportunities, and in our lifestyle.

As I look back, I realize with astonishment that I was earning, and then living on less than \$3000 a year in New York City. Our parents were certainly a safety net, but didn't support us. I do thank my dad, even though he was never able to understand my impulse to be an artist, for steeping me in the skills of thrift that let me enjoy a lifestyle like that without any real financial means.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about my relationship with Drew, was that, to us, it did not seem remarkable at all. It felt natural and right to both of us. It was simply real, and we submerged ourselves in it. It happened in the middle of a swirl of artists, in the middle of a new phenomenon of social expansion, amidst a thriving culture of openness and exploration. We exemplified it all, but rarely took notice of how extraordinary the opportunity was.

By being together during those years, by living together, and sharing everything with each other, we may also have helped save each other's lives. Neither of us became HIV-positive, and for many years I believed it was largely a result of both of us having grounded our sex lives in a lived, embodied spirituality. This sort of naive

and magical thinking has often been my sail, carrying me over choppy waters and through stormy seas.

Even now, through less rosy colored lenses, I can see this was a life-altering relationship. And the way I danced out my grief at its ending built a strength of character I didn't know I had.

Three decades later, I sent an early draft of this story off to Drew, living with his husband in upstate NY. I received this in reply.

*"Our meeting and early times together were exactly as you described. Very caught up in a stunningly magnetic physical/psychical/spiritual bonding that, however, had its grounding in sex. How great that time was, and I will always cherish it.*

*I remember feeling a great sense of freedom in our time together. Perhaps it had something to do with what you spoke of when you mentioned that we really didn't have any money, but we were very rich in experiences and friends. Remember that amazing birthday party on my 30th in our apartment when more than 100 people squashed into it? And you spoke of yourself as naive, but I remember feeling utterly naive when you took me up for that first dance piece of yours that I saw (with Geoff Wright's music) at Tanglewood. Then going with you to Aix, and our subsequent trip to Corsica -- sleeping on beeches. How beautiful some of those times were!*

*I don't think I ever appreciated how deserted you felt in my moving toward early music! I'm not sure I realized I was doing that, because it seemed like the natural outcome of my life's work up to that point. I've always considered myself a musician first, a singer second. It's funny, because most of the workshop teaching I do now is about acting for singers. I am teaching that with a lot of movement, and my first movement training was with you, my dear. I remember being very moved by watching you dance. You used to say to me that I had more the body of a dancer, but I never had the confidence in that.*

*I spent some time asking myself what the uppermost emotion I remember from that time, and part of what came to me was "innocence"! I felt like we were two innocents exploring sex and connection with each other to the utmost. It's a very special relationship. I will never have it with another (and indeed, never have had)."*