

Creating Dance in the Hatha Yoga Concept

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Abstract

This article explores the integration between yoga concepts and the art of dance. It aims to discuss the genesis of a dance performance inspired by Hatha Yoga and specifically its concept of balancing hot and cold power. The terms Hatha Yoga and the art of creative dance and other terms related to Hatha Yoga concepts are accordingly discussed. Six areas of inquiry were considered in this research project. They were: a survey of source documents, expert interviews, the standard criteria of Thai national artists, audience evaluations, student dance workshops, along with other media and online information.

The resulting dance creation consists of four acts centered on the concept of balance between the hot and the cold power of Hatha Yoga. Its stylistics are an intercultural combination of Thai and Western contemporary dances and yoga with symbolic white and black costumes relating to coolness and warmth, which together reflect the main theme – the power of harmony. The outdoor venue and time of day was selected for its natural ambience, lighting and sounds conducive to relaxation and congruent with the aims of Hatha Yoga.

Keywords: *Dance, Creative Dance, Contemporary Dance, Performing Art, Yoga, Hatha Yoga*

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Introduction

This was a creative research project with the objective to create a dance inspired by concepts from Hatha Yoga. The foundations incorporated into the design of this dance was collected using various methods: A literature review including various multimedia sources, interviews with experts both in dance and Hatha Yoga. This also involved Thai national artists familiar with the standards and evaluation criteria used by the government as well as utilizing an evaluation/feedback form from preview audiences. All data was collected to develop and support a foundation of a dance performance congruent to the precepts and objectives of Hatha Yoga. Yoga by definition refers to “the joining, the uniting or the endeavor thereof as given by Pat Anjali (the founder of the Hatha Yoga school), “Yoga is the endeavor to achieve the completion by controlling ones body, senses, and mental focus.” (Sharma, 1964:169). Hatha Yoga is one branch of the discipline of yoga. The principle of Hatha yoga is to focus on the proper respiration which leads to Asana – the posture for human body exercise for completeness (Kanjanaaree, 1997:114).

Hatha Yoga is primarily concerned with the two types of vital power, that is, hot and cold. Then secondly, the process to balance these two types of power, and lastly, the ability of humans to control them both (Kanjanaaree, 1997:114). The author has studied the science and philosophy of yoga as it is reflected in movement with a resulting significance for the creation of beauty of body and mind. The idea of dance with yoga centralizes an importance on the body, mind, and balance. Ancient Greeks posited that dance is the harmonious and balanced expression of body and mind (Steeh, 1982:8); while the science of yoga is considered to be the art of movement combining the body with the mind, which leads to a balanced condition (Desikachar, 2003:14).

Objectives

This research project aimed to determine a method to create a dance performance utilizing Hatha yoga concepts. The objectives were as follows:

- Search for a method to create a dance performance following the concepts of Hatha Yoga
- Create a dance performance inspired by Hatha Yoga

Conceptual Framework

The researcher has employed: (1) the concepts of Hatha Yoga which is important to the body’s vital power – balancing the force of hot power (Sun) and the cold power (Moon); (2) the study of aesthetics; (3) theories of creative ideation and (4) the importance of balance as an art theory. In addition, the researcher has examined the *Site Specific* dance technique of *Tableau Vivant* by Dr. Narapong Charassri, the *Motionless Theory* by Doris Humphrey, the *Law of Gravity* by Martha Graham, and the importance of respiration which is considered to be a foundation in all kinds of dance. The *Bolero* performance with a table as centerpiece designed by Maurice Bejart or the *Green Table* by Kurt Loose, were studied as examples of how to enhance the art of dance focused on movement. These led the researcher to the main theme of creating a performance utilizing the concepts of Hatha Yoga.

The topics studied and analyzed to prepare for the creation of a Hatha Yoga derived dance performance were the origin and precepts of yoga, Parana power, and the facets related to the importance of hot and cold power together with the inclusion of balance.

Interviews, Observation, and Participation

The researcher observed and interviewed experts in the practice of yoga and the field of dance movement along with receiving formal training in yoga.



Figure 1. Both the researcher and dancers participated in yoga classes for a fuller understanding of yoga concepts via first-hand experience.

After the researcher's investigation, she then synthesized all of her analysis in order to determine the best method for its creation. The resulting ideas and dance elements are described below.

The researcher decided to present the founder of yoga, Pathanjali Yogi, (Rachiefchandra, 2006:1) in the first act following the concept of hot (Sun) and cold (Moon) powers, which are harmoniously combined in balance in what is to be considered the core of the performance. This same theme is divided into four acts.

Additionally the choreography has to also be consistent with the concepts. The researcher adapted the similarity of yoga and both Thai and Western dance and explores them through the eyes of contemporary dance. The movements portrayed should express the balance of the body while the composition of the performers should be compatible – meaning not too forced during the movements expressing cold power and powerful, yet stable during the movements depicting hot power.



Figure 2. Yoga poses depicting from left to right: hot power, cold power, and balance.

As both Yoga and Thai traditional dance were influenced by the 108 dances of Siva, (Sittivet, 2011: Interview), this connection allowed the researcher to design and

develop various poses and achieve multi-cultural diversity. Moreover, the belief and respect for the gods or the founder of an art form conforms to those of Thai dance traditions as well. This concept is shown in the first Act: The Origination of Yoga, where Patanjali, yoga's founder, displays the Parana power hidden inside a yoga practitioner.



Figure 3. Creative Dance depicting from left to right: hot power, cold power, and balance.



Figure 4. Western Contemporary dance – left and creative dance movement on the right.



Figure 5. Thai dance on the left and creative dance on the right.

The Tableau Vivant technique, which places importance on the poses, and the ideas pioneered by Prof. Dr. Narapong Charassri, the creator of the Kon Dee Sri Ayudhaya Performing Art (1993), which is considered to be a site-specific art form, were adopted to be a part of the body movement choreography used to create the perception of balance that reflects Hatha Yoga.

When considering the costumes, the researcher concurred with the idea proposed by the experts that colors should correlate to a representation of balance. Using

the concept of Yin and Yang, black and white was selected to symbolize the hot and cold power in Hatha Yoga. Natural cotton is the main fiber of the fabric selected as Yoga is regarded as a natural science, and since the dance will be performed outdoors, cotton's breathability is important. The fabric should also be lightweight and be able to flow with movement. Elasticity for both male and female performers costumes is also necessary since they have to move their bodies fully in a variety of poses and extensions, such as spreading their arms and legs. The costumes must be flexible and do nothing to impede the full range of motion.



Figure 6. Yoga practitioners on the left, Yin-Yang symbol and dancer performers on the right.

From the opinions of music experts in Thai dance, experienced yoga practitioners, and the opinions from the participants, the researcher created sounds and music compatible with conveying a natural and relaxing setting with moderate beat and volume. The music was chosen to supportively convey the different feelings of hot and cold power and the movement towards their balanced expressions.

With regards to portraying yoga's meaning and objective as meditation, the researcher paid attention to *control*, which manifests one's ability to control one's body and mind together with the practice of balance that leads to a form of meditation.



Figure 7. Yoga and nature on the left. Site-specific art-performances center and right.

Bringing together the aforementioned concepts, an outdoor set of polished stone tables (in front of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University) was selected as a foundation for the performance as relating to the concept of a throne of meditation. This arrangement matches with the conventions of *site-specific art* which is performed in a particular area and the performer must relate and incorporate theatrical elements with the environment. The design and creation of

this art piece must also correlate to a performance in a natural setting. The stage is outdoors and surrounded by numerous trees and other natural features. The yoga practice is done on the stone table as a seat (Asana). The members of the audience can be seated around the table and adjacent area chosen to be the stage as several stone benches and tables are nearby. The stage level (of the table) was elevated to be higher than the eye-level to bestow the feeling of watching yoga with admiration (i.e. one is looking up to view when the audience is seated).

To resolve the problem of the visually cluttered and distracting “stage floor,” the researcher brought in sections of large white fabric to cover the different heights of the stone tables that could later support various poses, serve as a hidden off-stage area for waiting performers and work in conjunction with a smoke machine to enhance the audience’s visual focus on the main performers. Moreover, the waves of the fabric in the wind and the white smoke from the smoke machine made the performance area appear more natural and smooth. The limitations of the marble tables were corrected or greatly improved.



Figure 8. Original stone tables left. Fabric covers center and the addition of fog – smoke machine, right.

Natural outdoor lighting was used and no artificial lights were added. However, there were considerations made for the most suitable time for the performers, the audience and the representation of this project’s blend of Hath Yoga together with Thai and Western dance. The choice of between 4 - 6 pm was made in order to have the natural soft light conditions supportive of Hatha Yoga practice and cooler comfort for the performers and audience. It is also a convenient time for those departing work to join the audience. From the research on the creation of dance performance for children with hearing loss (Wanwichai, 2011:66), it was found that a visual show could improve their level of happiness.

Motion, positions, and posture were given primary attention in this performance rather than the utilization of props or other theatrical equipment to create the illusion of authentic movements. This was done to convey the idea that dance and yoga focus is the body, the mind, and balance without the need for anything else. In this regard, the creation of a dance utilizing Hatha yoga concepts is similar to the art of dance that focuses on the motion, not the story or other props (Charassri, 2005:10).

Fourteen performers were involved and suitable to this outdoor venue of marble tables described above. The group was closely monitored by the researcher to maintain the quality of the dance. All performers both men and women were

selected for their ability to perform Thai and Western dance creatively. Two of them, one man and one woman, possess a high level of Hatha Yoga ability and offered their talent to support and create a new show with an unique and blended combination of culture.

The Results

The dance created following Hatha Yoga concepts has four acts as follows:



Figure 9. Act 1: The Origination of Yoga.

The Origination of Yoga – via its founder, the hermit Pat Anjali is sitting quietly showing his powerful breath inside ones body. This is then followed by male and female dancers appearing behind him dancing with slow, deliberate movements depicting Parana power.



Figure 10. Act 2: Hot power.

Hot power is shown by male dancers in a variety of yoga positions: bending, flexing, standing on their heads and kneeling up ,which are the yoga positions to increase blood circulation and thereby heat the body per the practice of Hatha Yoga.



Figure 11. Act 3: Cold power.

Cold power is portrayed by female performers. They convey relaxation by breathing in and exhaling out showing their muscle's loosening through an expansive and wide open performance.



Figure 12. Act 4: Balance.

Balance – A Coupling dance between male and female dancers, as well as a group dance to express various types of styles and methods of combining hot and cold power that leads to a balance between body and mind. The balance is the key concept of Hatha Yoga.

Conclusion

Dance is one of the performing arts using movement of the body and graceful postures to express feelings and emotions. Nowadays, the methods of art creation needs also to be considered. This article on the creation of a dance following Hatha Yoga concepts shows the integration of the practice of yoga and the art of dance. The researcher sees the importance of dance which can be extended and utilized to create and develop together with other disciplines to create new knowledge and methods in three key aspects.

Historical: Two main issues are presented: The founding of yoga by the hermit Patanjali and the Hatha Yoga concept of human power through balancing the combination of hot power (sun) and cold power (moon). The historical story of Hatha Yoga is portrayed via dance and thereby expresses the concept transmitting a written history via a creative performance in the present.

Creative: It is the integration between the art of dance and yoga which was obtained by research, interviews with experts and collecting audience feedback data with analysis and synthesis that lead to this blended art form. The elements of dance are adapted and integrated creatively to result in a performance containing the following eight elements: 1) script 2) body movements 3) costumes 4) music 5) stage 6) lighting 7) equipment 8) performers. Together these eight facets formed a show with distinct artistic value.

Aesthetics: An appreciation for the gracefulness of yoga poses is reflected in the foundation of Hatha Yoga. The researcher brought together the experience and aesthetics of yoga to create a dance performance after analyzing the summarized information on Yoga's philosophy, substance, patterns, and processes to develop an unique artistically derived dance performance reflecting the main theme – the power of balance.

Additionally, this project is an example of a new pathway to develop an authentic aesthetic performance through the blend of the what one might originally have perceived as *functional* (the practice of the health supportive Hatha Yoga) applied through the lens of a dance professional.

This article conceptualizes the integration between yoga and the art of dance to establish a derivative method for the creation of new unique performance that furthers the understanding of how creative dance may be brought forth and revealed. A generalized approach utilizing this method may lead to the creation of a greater variety of dances in the future.

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