



Dance it all!

best practices
in conscious dance
teaching
during & after
the covid pandemic

CONTENTS

01	Introduction	2
02	Online Teaching	3
03	Outdoor Teaching	9
04	Communities & Teachers in special circumstances	16
05	Participating Organisations	22
06	Participating Facilitators	23
07	Resources	25
	Annex	
	Contact Info of Erasmus Project Participants	28

01 Introduction

A small group of organisations which are connected to the conscious dance field* decided in 2020 to start a project and apply for support from Erasmus+. We got approval and the project activities went mainly according to plans, with some minor changes. Our main objective was to find ways to share teaching related know-how and experiences which are relevant to the pandemic situation, and which would hopefully enrich our teaching practice in the long term as well. The pandemic might be over, but we learned some lessons, and developed some innovative practices, which help us better serve our communities and help conscious dance to develop and become more useful in supporting people's wellbeing.

In this document we gathered the essence of our knowledge sharing circles. It's not a textbook or an encyclopaedia, more like a collection of ideas, and personal sharings. Maybe you'll find some ideas which you could implement in your practice. Maybe some of it will make you think, and help you find your own answers. And maybe you become curious about the details which you can't find written here. Don't hesitate to reach out and write to any of us. It would be interesting to keep weaving the thread of sharing best practices!

Péter Fejér, initiator and project manager

** For those not familiar with the term: movement meditation or conscious dance is a collective name of methods to improve health and well-being. Through regular practice, nonverbal exercises and the emphasis on both self-expression and community collaboration these practices are offering one of the best and most simple ways for personal development and community building in its broadest sense. Movement meditation is a form of physical education whose mental, emotional and creative dimensions are particularly relevant to many people who are looking for ways to improve their health and well being and navigate modern life. Its origins reach back to the early 20th century, and it reached a widespread audience in the past decades thanks for Gabrielle Roth's visionary work and the steady work done globally by organisations such as 5Rhythms®, School of Movement Medicine™, Open Floor International, Azul Conscious Movement, Soul Motion, freedomDANCE.*

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02

02 Online Teaching



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03



Photo © Jenny Baer

*"It's so amazing - I have never met you in person and I have such a deep trust and connection to all of you...
I never thought this would be possible online."*

a dancer from Jenny's online classes

2.1 Reported benefits

2.1.1 Benefits During The Pandemic

- When we were all in lockdown, the primary benefit for us, as teachers, was that we could still teach
- Dancers were delighted to be able to connect with dancing friends
- Dancers loved being connected to their practice of dancing with others in a held space even when meeting in person was impossible/illegal

2.1.2 Ongoing Benefits Of Online For Dancers (And Teachers)

- No travelling!
- When the class is over, everyone is at home already. (Good for the nervous system and the planet.)
- It is possible to dance with teachers who live on the other side of the world, which is great for dancers.
- It is also possible for dancers who have moved to the other side of the world to connect with their old tribe and teacher.
- It makes it easy to have really short sessions, for example 20 minutes first thing in the morning before work.

- There is a more immediate connection with “ordinary life”. People are surrounded by their own things, the dishes, the mail, the beauty they create in their own lives. And they can dance with all of that.
- People can show up just as they are, in their pyjamas, with the dog and the baby
- Outdoor possibilities open up. Some dancers show up in the forest with headphones. Gorgeous!!
- Dancers who live in remote places can come to regular classes.
- People with injuries or limited mobility can attend classes without needing to leave their space.



(Photo © from Canva)

"The session was sooooo beautiful! Thank you, Lina for facilitating it. I particularly enjoyed the breakout session, which although was outside my comfort zone was viscerally real and nourishing."

Michael, a dancer after Lina's online session

2.2 Lessons Learned

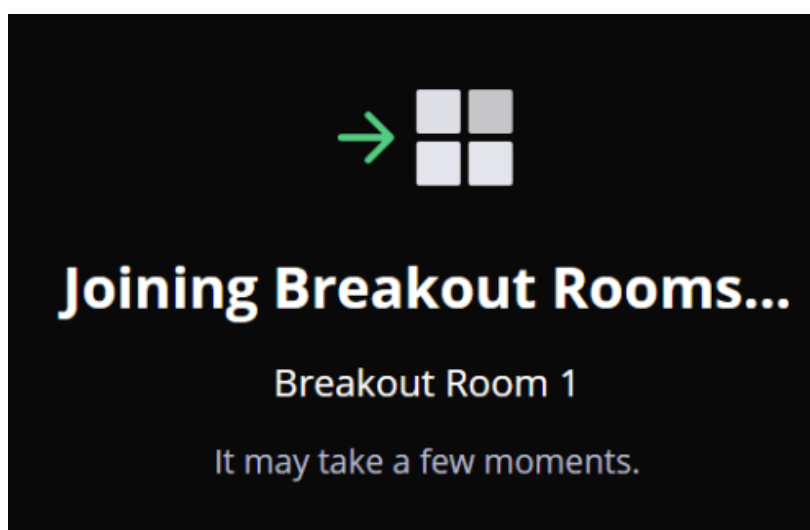
2.2.1 Consensus

All the teachers involved in the project agreed about some things:

- Teaching online is very different to teaching in person. You have to adapt your style.
- Make sure you are visible. (A daylight lamp behind the computer can help, for example)

- Take time before you teach, to connect to yourself, to what you want to offer, what energy you would like to bring, connect to the theme, so you can enter the space with a clear intention.
- Simplicity rocks!
- Connection is possible, but it has to be established. Some dancers report that the “magic” of conscious dance is missing online. It is important to making space for that magic. You have to be creative with the possibilities to find what works for your dancers and what works for you as a teacher. For example, guiding dancers to connect with each other through their imagination. Another example, taking some time to gather everyone into the shared ‘space’ as well as to help them settle in their own private space, by (for example) asking each person to bring one hand to the screen, so that there is a sense that everyone is ‘here’ as well as ‘there’ in their own home. It is important to really ‘get behind’ your imaginative suggestions.
- As teachers, online teaching offers us a great resource to develop.
- We can visit other teachers all over the world to get inspiration and ideas. We can find out what works for us, and maybe offer that to our own dancers.
- It’s great to have some technical assistance to make full use of the technology. An assistant can:
 - Field questions in the chat about technical issues, so that people who are new to the technology or are struggling to connect are seen and taken care of
 - Keep an eye on the ‘waiting room’ in case people drop out and have to reconnect
 - Set up and manage breakout rooms
 - Help people to ‘pin’
 - ‘Spotlight’ dancers, or groups of dancers
- When using the technical tools, it's helpful to keep things simple and clear with good explanations.
- Give some thought to supporting participants so that the technology feels safe and creative, rather than confusing or unpleasant.

- ‘Breakout rooms’ are a great tool. And they take a bit of managing. If participants are using breakout rooms to share or to do an exercise, give lots of clarity and explanation. Keep the timings of the breakout room sharing and exercises “in sync”. If there is a complex exercise, it works well if the teacher or an assistant moves participants from one stage to the next with short clear messages. Timings can get chaotic if the teacher gives a complex set of instructions that participants have to keep track of by themselves. It's good to name some of the downsides that may happen and give participants a way out if they are not comfortable. (For example, “If you find yourself stuck in a breakout room and you and your partner don't know what to do, or your partner disappears, you can call for help.”)
- ‘Pinning’ and ‘Spotlighting’ are also good tools. Beware that some participants might find them difficult. Good to keep an eye on whether people are “up for” what you are offering. Opting in is a stronger permission than not opting out. So if you want to use the “spotlighting” tool, show how it works with a couple of folk you know are up for it. And then ask people to indicate in the chat if they would like to be spotlighted. Or you might offer the possibility of turning off your camera if you really don't like being ‘pinned’.
- Communicate your preferences and ground-rules clearly. We realised that not all the “guidelines” feel true for all teachers. For example, some teachers ask that newcomers come 15 minutes early to sort out technical issues. Some teachers ask all participants to have their cameras on. The consensus was that as a teacher we have to be sure we feel comfortable and safe. And it is good to communicate the guidelines and ground-rules that are important for us.



2.2.2 A Diversity Of Teachers: Diversity Of Experience

There is enormous possibility and flexibility with online teaching. Different teachers have styles and different ideas. Here are a few things that worked for some of us, and a few snags that some of us encountered.

- You might take the first 15 minutes to do a guided meditation to get people from the place of “getting here” to entering into the energy of “being here” and start your warm-up music afterwards. You can also have slow meditation music in the background during the meditation phase.
- Give homework to the group beforehand so they can prepare and already connect to the theme and get them to participate in the class from that point, in speaking, singing, movement to the theme, song, poem, etc.
- You might ask the group to bring an object. If you do, good to plan and communicate clearly beforehand. Make it very clear how to choose the object, what to bring. Have a sense of how you will use this object as a thread to support the dancers during the class.
- You might like to use the tool Mentimeter to capture the mood of the group in a visual.
- As the teacher or facilitator, you can slow things down to increase connections between participants. For example... if someone talks... invite everyone to show their appreciation.
- Creating continuity is really good. It gives dancers a structure to lean into. Same time each week, for example. Or taking that a step further, it works well for some teachers to create a closed ongoing group, to develop trust and intimacy within the group. A model that worked well for one teacher was to have three ‘drop in’ classes, with an invitation after that to commit to a six- or eight-week block.
- Study buddies from the group with an invitation to meet in between sessions creates connection and continuity.
- Additional materials (like reading materials) can support dancers to feel connected in between sessions.
- Some of the complications can be that there might be a group of people in one room experiencing the class ‘together’; and that can feel weird for those who are on their own. (Good to name and hold what might arise.)

03 Outdoor Teaching



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09

3.1 Reported Benefits

3.1.1 Benefits During The Pandemic

- Dancers were really hungry for human connection. Outdoor dancing made dancing in person possible.
- What a joy to be dancing with our community around us. Many dancers said things like “This keeps me sane!”

3.1.2 Ongoing Benefits Of Outdoor Dancing For Dancers (And Teachers)

- Dancing out of doors is a wonderful resource for a Conscious Dance Teacher. Even when we teach indoors, conscious dance practices connect us with our physicality, with our place in creation, and with our ‘animal’ nature. So as a teacher, teaching out of doors with nature ‘right there’, opens a door into a whole range of possibilities.
- We dance with the elements, not only in our embodied imagination, but also in real life. We can invite dancing with the wind, sounds of the nature, etc. - rather than using the imagery of nature as we do indoors.
- Dancing out of doors is a wonderful way to dance with the turning of the wheel of the year. It is so different to dance outdoors in different seasons.
- The more you dance out of doors, the more you connect with nature. For an average city dweller, there are certain things that inevitably connect us with nature, the sky, the unevenness of the ground under our feet, bushes, trees, birds and animals. These things can all wake up our animal instincts and connect us with nature
- Some dancers for whom dancing outdoors was their first experience of dancing found it hard to believe that dance would work, with four walls and a ceiling, instead of the sky above and the earth below.
- Community is very important. Making our dance visible to the public is part of expanding the community. In some places dance teachers noticed that while in the beginning, outdoor dancing seemed like a really weird thing, as time went on, people became more accustomed. How nice that dancing becomes normalised.

- Dancing outdoors is particularly useful for developing a sense of the ‘personal bubble’ (the medio space). It’s important not to stay only internal.



Silent disco session during a project meeting in Rome, November 2022

3.2 Lessons Learned

3.2.1 Consensus

All the teachers involved in the project agreed about some things:

- Good to check with your insurer. Make sure you are covered for outdoor dancing.
- Make sure there is somewhere ‘safe’ for people’s stuff. People feel freer dancing if they are not worried about where their backpack is.

- In a public place, people passing by may stop and watch or even film or take photos. It is possible to have a written sign to give a ‘signal’ to passers-by: “This is a dance class. Alcohol and Drug Free Space. Etc.” This may encourage people to be respectful and walk on past. Or indeed to join in.



A descriptive board at an outdoor dance session in a Budapest city park, © Zoltan Kiss

- It's great to have an assistant who is willing to interact with passers-by, to explain.... And take contact details... friendly AND drawing a clear boundary . Maybe have a flier they can hand out. And it is important to recognise that it isn't possible to control this “public space”. It may be good to make the ‘visibility to the world’ clear in communication and flyers. Then a dancer who would find it intolerable can choose not to attend outdoor sessions.
- Dancing in this “public space” is also an opportunity. As a teacher we can help create safety. We create an energetic ‘bubble’. We might do that by encouraging people to be in their own space, and to relate to each other. It is also an opportunity to encourage awareness.... “ How do you feel when you are watched? How does your dance change?”



A tent for outdoor dancing in Scotland, © Catherine Wright

- There may be another “event” going on nearby! These things can test the ingenuity, flexibility, and creativity of the dance teacher! For example one group had a large public memorial event nearby! Another had a fishing competition. Another had a motorbiking event taking place around them!
- In terms of “safety” it is also important to think through how “safe” people would feel if you guide them into a deep process. There are no straightforward “rules” around this. But it is important that there is a clear contract, and enough support. Some teachers choose to keep things ‘lighter’ because they are in an open space. A good question to ask yourself is “What do I need in order to feel safe offering this work?”
- The “floor” is not a sprung dance floor! There are lumps and bumps, tree roots etc. It is good to remind people that they are responsible for their own safety. We can remind dancers in writing ahead of time, but also during the teaching. For example inviting people to be in their feet and notice the textures beneath them and of course if some people are in boots and some in bare feet, it is good to encourage mindfulness. And if there are definite ‘holes’ or other hazards, make sure people know about them.
- It's good to be familiar with the place where you are dancing! Make sure you check it out in the season you are going to be there!! You might otherwise turn up and find that the grass is as high as an elephant’s eye.

Technical Tips For Out Of Doors:

- If you are using batteries, make sure the battery is full!
- Turn off everything that you don't need that might drain the battery (eg wifi)
- Use low light on your computer
- If there is no cover, it is important to think about how you will protect your equipment if it starts raining. (A tiny tent, for example). We have attached a photo of Tamara teaching out of doors, with a tiny tent protecting the equipment from sand. It would work just as well for rain.

Seasonal Tips For Out Of Doors:

- Bring mosquito repellent and sunscreen
- Remind dancers to bring water
- If you are going to end in the dark, remember torches
- Remember that when it is cold, dancers may not be able to dance slowly for long.



A tent for outdoor dancing in Scotland
© Catherine Wright

3.2.2 A Diversity Of Teachers: Diversity Of Experience

There is enormous possibility and flexibility with outdoor teaching. Different teachers have different styles and different ideas. Here are a few things that worked for some of us, and a few snags that some of us encountered.

- Outdoor dancing can have an element of community and performance. It lends itself to Social Activism, for example movements such as Extinction Rebellion.
- But on the other hand, for some teachers it is important to be deeply respectful of the environment, and not have the dance impact on nature. Loud music can be noise pollution.
- One beauty of dancing in a completely new way is that it is a wonderful learning opportunity. For example, one teacher at first, recreated a container of a room in a secluded part of the park with boundaries clearly indicated. Then, experience taught them that some dancers started dancing outside of those boundaries. It totally worked and eventually those boundaries got dropped.

- For some, big numbers created safety. When there are more than 20 people, the group gets a special power of acting as a container. When there were 40-50 people, there would be 10 people in the middle having a deepest dance as if at a workshop indoors. For others tiny numbers created intimacy and deep connection with nature.

Honouring the diversity of offerings, there are many different ways to teach dance out of doors:

- Silent Disco
- A sound system, either battery or mains powered
- Dancing with no ‘canned’ music, using drum and voice and/or simply the sounds of nature itself
- In a covered space
- Out in the elements, embracing the weather that comes our way.

All of these ways of dancing have their advantages and disadvantages.

Our suggestion is that dance teachers enjoy the diversity of possibilities and adapt as their own dreams (and the dreams of their dancing community) take them.



Outdoor session during project meeting in Budapest, October 2022

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15

04 Communities & Teachers in Special Circumstances



The DIA! team in Budapest, October 2022

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4.1 What We Can Do As Teachers



- *Share playlists for self-practice*

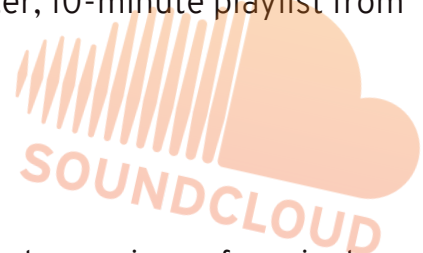
Mixcloud is a good platform to publish such playlists. It is easy for the dancers to play them. It is fully legal, and all artists featured receive royalties for their music. Teachers can also generate additional revenues by offering paid subscriptions to their playlists.

Shorter playlists work best for self-practice. The recommended duration is 18-25 minutes. There have also been requests for an even shorter, 10-minute playlist from dancers.



- *Share recorded lessons*

Spotify



Recording instructions over music facilitate a very different experience from just music. Such recorded classes can be particularly effective/moving if the dancer is already familiar with the teacher.

- *Offer One-To-One Sessions*

These could be done in person. However, following the outbreak of COVID pandemic, almost everyone is asking for online sessions. Prior to pandemic the main motivation for one-to-one work was 'preparing' for coming to a group session. Now, dancers ask specifically for one-to-one sessions, most often to explore issues that they face through dance.

- *Add other practices to conscious dancing*

Dealing with the stress and trauma is facilitated by finding expression for the internal process. Including activities like drawing, singing, clay work, writing, etc. adds additional channels for such expression. This may be particularly valuable for those for whom movement is not their primary or most accessible way of expression.

- *Promote conscious dance as a development and healing practice*

There is a standard view of dancing as a way of celebrating or entertainment. Some people actually disapprove of the idea of dancing during difficult times. It is important that we as teachers include information on the dance's potential to process difficult emotions and support healing from traumatic experiences. We can highlight examples from old healing traditions as well as current academic research findings. And find the right words for it. We can also highlight that it's important to practice regularly so the whole benefit of conscious dance can unfold. Even making a TED talk about the benefits of conscious dance might be good.



Dancing Shadows, © Lina Kriskova

*"Why are we dancing with the elements?
Today I know why. I could feel the air around me.
It was dense and it was good, I could feel it with
my fingers.
And I could feel myself in the circle with the men
chanting all around me.
And I felt the past, the ancient nature-culture. I
sensed the many, many sacrifices, each one
placed into the ether by The Creator as a star.
I felt the river, the water, and allowed myself to be
part of the waves of music, to just be, travelling on
it.
I know I don't always get to do that, and I've
missed it lately, but when you live it, it gives you
strength for the future and something to reach
back to.
Thank you for today."*

Patricia's dancer after an online session

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4.2 What Dancers Can Do Themselves

We found it important to look at teachers' work from the point of view of the dancers since they are the most important part of the story. Also because we became aware that after covid many dancers might find it difficult to go back into shared spaces especially when it is crowded.

So we gathered our thoughts and experiences around what we can offer as helpful tools for dancers. And also to encourage people in general to be back at normal and lessen the fears.

- We would encourage dancers to find ways to integrate the realizations of the dances into their daily life (in the morning or afternoon for 10-20 minutes) by speaking of these realizations with their friend, by shaping them into new habits, by inviting them to take buddies and check-in with each other regularly, by making short dance pauses in their day, even 3 minutes, when they can to remind the body of the good experiences.
- We don't have experience with flash mobs, but we are aware of the power of self-organized events and we would like to support initiatives coming from the dancers to dance in the street or dance where they can and just start their own circles if they have time and energy. Just aware of making clear that they are not holding space for anybody else.
- For more experienced dancers it also works to meet regularly online (even every weekday at the same time) for a short time, like 7 minutes, moving without music and sharing the space, using the same zoom link so it's a collective responsibility that this happens. This deepens the relationship and can bridge connection all through the world, providing resources to the dancers in hard times by offering a rhythm and a feeling of not being alone, but being witnessed by peers.
- Dancers might benefit from different styles and teaching scenarios so it is good to invite other teachers in the space.
- Asking is good. Dancers might surprisingly have more things to say than we would think.. "Anything else" is always a good question. Best initiatives often come from the actual dancers.

4.3 Other Professionals Involved

We would also offer to connect to the conscious movement practice with other supporting professionals, namely:

- psychotherapists,
- doctors (general practitioners),
- massage therapists,
- osteopaths,
- research groups,
- school teachers in physical education (to introduce practice to children) etc.

Such collaboration will help not only to deepen and broaden the range of covered issues with movement work, but also show the interdisciplinary connections with other “more common” for public fields.

For instance, cooperation with psychotherapists is, from my experience, very useful during the work with deep emotions, traumas, post-traumatic syndrome and other sensitive issues, that “pure” movement practice doesn’t cover being not a therapy by itself.

Moreover, making common work with other doctors (especially with general therapists) will help to introduce movement practice to the broader audience. The same story is with engaging massage therapists and osteopaths, while they may recommend movement classes to their patients to get rid of certain muscle clamps, strengthen their muscles, to invite more physicality to the patients’ day to day life. What is more important, that osteopaths due to their specialism already understand the benefits of regularly conscious movement practices and that’s why they are very much complementary to what we are offering on the dance floor.

Input of the research groups is also difficult to overestimate, because it’s the real support to explore and document the results of regular conscious movement practices to the broader public of different degrees of science.

Thinking about the growing generation, it's highly important to make school children familiar with the possibilities and joy of conscious movement, with the help of the school teachers in physical education. The main reason is that conscious movement practice is an easily accessible and intuitively understandable instrument of bringing into balance pupils' own physical perception, emotional feelings and cognitive aspirations. Of course, specific prerequisites of teaching in the school (if there are any in your country) must be also taken into account.

When it's possible to dance in community, it's good to have dancing spaces where children are allowed (and also where they are not), so that they are part of this dancing culture and inter-generational healing can happen. This way they'll later have easier entrance to go dancing and it might make it possible to work with them later also online if a situation happens again when it's not possible to dance in community.

4.4 After Covid - what stays with us

Re-think the actual instructions:

- giving instructions about touch (e.g. with hands) with the invitation to let people stay out of it if they don't feel comfortable with it
- more attention to being more inclusive - physical level as well as with ideas, concepts
- more teaching about the micro and medio spheres (about the personal body itself and its close surrounding areas)
- teaching outdoors, combining outdoors with indoors
- more permission in teaching differently
- outdoor teaching giving a new foundation for teaching (eg when we say "feel the ground beneath you") - dancing indoors became only a replacement of outdoor dance and not the other way round

How we as teachers take care of ourselves and our well-being, before we take care of others.

Helping circles formed in teacher communities mainly online. These can give a wider range of help than one-on-one support and they are much more frequent and available than the teacher refreshes we had earlier every couple of years.

05 Participating Organisations



- Tánccmeditáció Közhasznú Nonprofit Kft.
from Hungary
www.dancefejer.org



- ICMTA - International Conscious Movement
Teachers Association vzw. based in Belgium
www.icmta.com



- Ubuntu in movimento APS ASD from Italy



- Wild Iris from Northern Macedonia
www.facebook.com/WildIrisMacedonia

06 Participating Facilitators



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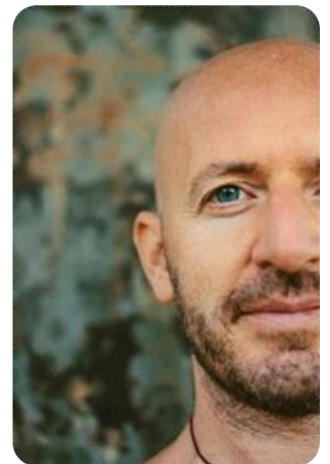
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07 Resources

PRINTED

- Maps to Ecstasy: A Healing Journey for the Untamed Spirit by Gabrielle Roth
- Sweat Your Prayers: The Five Rhythms of the Soul - Movement as Spiritual Practice by Gabrielle Roth
- In the Rays of Black: A freedomDANCE Book of Darkness Paperback by Alex Svoboda
- Pathways Home: Adam Barley
<https://adambarley.com/pathways-home/>
- The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van der Kolk
- Ritual: Power, Healing and Community by Malidoma Some
- Coming Back to Life by Joanna Macy
- My Grandmother's Hands by Resma Menakem
- The Myth of Normal: Trauma, Illness & Healing in a Toxic Culture by Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté
- Shaman by Ya'Acov Darling Khan
- Jaguar in the Body, Butterfly in the Heart by Ya'Acov Darling Khan
- Movement Medicine. How to Awaken, Dance and Live Your Dreams by Susannah and Ya'Acov Darling Khan
- Journal of Dance & Somatic Practices

AUDIO

- [What moves You? Podcast](#)
- [The Embodiment Podcast](#)
- [Dare to Lead, Brenè Brown Podcast](#)

VIDEO

- [Why is it important for a conscious dance teachers to belong to a professional organisation?](#) - ICMTA video
- [Sarah Davies' Zoom teaching tutorial from the beginning of the pandemics](#)
- [Why Dancing is Key to Our Humanity](#) - BBC video - five minutes wisdom about why we dance
- [Irene Lyon, YouTube channel](#)
- [Jens Wazel's video stories](#)

RESEARCH

- [Healing minds, moving bodies](#): measuring the mental health effects of online dance during the COVID-1 pandemic
- [Dancing with Coronaspheres](#): Expanded Breath Bodies and the Politics of Public Movement in the Age of COVID-19
- [Embodying Change: A Whole Systems Approach](#)
- [Virtual Relating](#) – How we can embody, deepen and make our video calls more alive and sustainable by Thomas Hübl
- [Teachers About Teaching Online](#) compiled by Michael Kuehn.
- [Let's dance! How dance classes can lift your mood and help boost your social life](#)

WEBSITES

- [ICMTA website resources section](#)
- [Zoom Audio guide by Jen Wazel](#)
- [5Rhythms®](#)
- [Movement Medicine™](#)
- [Open Floor](#)
- [freedomDANCE](#)

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<https://freedom-dance.com>

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- Catherine Wright

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- Imraan Ismail

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OpenFloorBrussels>

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- Jenny Bär

<https://jenniferbaer.de/>

<https://www.facebook.com/ZeitRaumfuerheilungundbewegung>

- Kata Máthé

<https://www.facebook.com/dancewithkata>

- Lina Krišková

<https://www.open-floor.fr/lina-kriskova>

<https://www.facebook.com/OpenFloorLina>

- Meredith Marks

<https://www.facebook.com/meredith.marks.58>

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- Patrícia Mihályi

<https://www.facebook.com/movementmedicinebudapest>

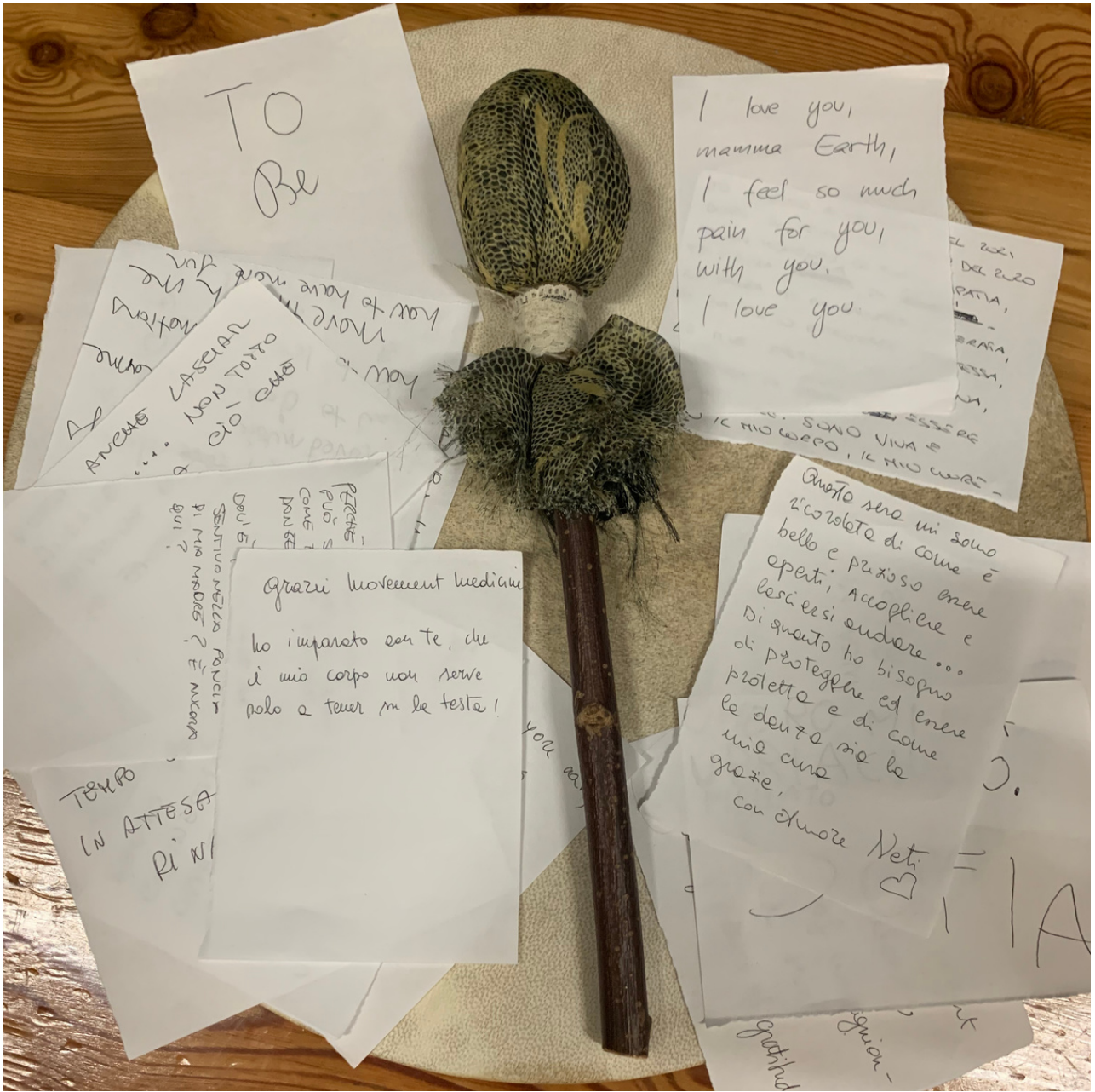
- Péter Fejér

<http://dancefejer.org/>

- Silvana Rigobon

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Quotes by participants of the community dance in Rome, November 2022.



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30