

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Portrait of an Artist as a Modern Dancer

Eric · Wednesday, May 19th, 2021

I'm working on a memoir called *Discovering the Fountain of Youth, Becoming a First-Time Father at 70*.

How do you like the title?

Here's a small excerpt.

It's 1970. I'm 22 years old. I've just randomly arrived in the Windy City of Chicago, climbed an old wooden staircase up into a rehearsal room on Wells Street in Old Town. A month later, my life will change forever...



“Somehow, miraculously, at least to me, I become a modern dancer. Soon a professional one. In the summer of 1970, I’m invited to take a hard-working, new piece-creating, summer workshop for six weeks in Chicago with Shirley Mordine’s Dance Troupe in residence at Columbia College.

To think of myself... to discover myself... a “modern dancer”... is absolutely unbelievable to me. It’s like going to sleep one day as a repressed adolescent and waking up... someone else—on another planet. Say like, going to sleep on the planet Earth, and waking up on the planet Mars. Or perhaps like going to sleep as Rip Van Winkle one day and waking up twenty years later and—not recognizing anything about yourself or the world about you.

In high school, to my friends and parents, I might have been thought of as “the boy most unlikely

to become a modern dancer.” Even more surprising to them, and myself, would be, “What the hell is a ‘modern dancer’?” Certainly, we would have had no idea. I was so self-conscious and repressed as a high schooler that I never took a dance step, never sang a note, never thought of trying out for a school play—of ever doing anything at all—artistic. Art? Creativity? Self-expression? Were definitely not for me.

Sure, my parents took me to Broadway shows “in the City.” I saw the original *My Fair Lady*, *Bye Bye Birdie*, *Oklahoma*. I went to museums—The Met, The Modern, The Guggenheim. We were “culture vultures.” But that was just something we did. Me? Myself? No. Nyet. Be footloose or fancy free? Never! Not for me. I was too afraid of what people would say. I was monumentally afraid of looking stupid and acting foolish.

So when the strictures of self-consciousness started to break, first with marijuana in college—at least mentally—it was just a matter of time, until this volcano of inexpression—both physically and emotionally—found an outlet through which it could erupt. First slowly, in yoga classes, then after college, in theater workshops in New York with Scott Kelman and at La Mama, then finally through modern dance with Shirley, I finally found a way to—circumvent my repressive, judgmental brain, and set myself free! And it was exactly that. Liberating. Physically. Emotionally. Sexually. The damns broke loose. My volcanic repression exploded. And I discovered a new self – below my neck. I didn’t open a book for the next seven years. I discovered my body. I discovered freedom and improvisation.

Shirley gave me this gift. By inviting me to take her summer workshop. And by inviting me to join her Dance Troupe. Sure, she must have been desperate to take a chance on me; she had just lost her one and only male dancer. And I’m sure, male modern dancers were very hard to find in 1970. But synchronicity—Shirley losing Mitch and my passing through Chicago at exactly that moment—are the exact moments that make for a life story. And also the moment in retrospect, for which, I will be forever grateful.”



Shirley Mordine

More about Trules on his [Website](#)

Listen to his travel podcast, “e-travels with e. trules” [HERE](#)

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