

David Manning Bio Statement

My professional life meandered along three different but interwoven paths: the Synergic Theater, non-profit marketing, and creative writing. In the context of this website, the first is the primary strand. That work is well documented on this website so there's no need of a resume of that track (whew).

Instead I'll take a flail at how I got involved in the first place, since that reflects some of the ineffable nature of Synergy.

Track One, Synergy:

I had always been creatively afflicted, but until I encountered Synergic Theater, I lacked a fine arts medium. (I did have a background in writing and media work, but that's not fine art ... unless it is.) However, when I saw the first "Project Synergy" performance in 1974 the door opened, the wind blew in, and I saw the light. This was "it."

But what was "it?"

After taking Project Synergy's workshop the summer of '75, I also heard the light and saw the sound and moved the image. I understood "it" but also understood that all attempts at definition disintegrated like powdery snow resisting shape.

I met Suzanne in that first workshop, where she was one of the founding instructors. On our subsequent first date (1976), she — always the Grand Instigator — suggested I might want to join the group (to the extent it was a group, another elusive definition). I demurred, saying my primary focus was my writing. I suggested, though, that perhaps I could try writing up some exercises for the workshop.

Wanting to work with rather than against Synergy's undefined nature, I came up with a series of non-rational problems to catalyze individual and collaborative solutions within and among various combinations of sound, image and movement media. Those problems formed the essence of a creative process technique that built on the initial Project Synergy workshop to form a flexible sequence of exercises and explorations that managed to be both unconfined and structured, allowing a continually fresh creative awareness to be explored, taught and applied without a preconceived form. Or definition. That multi dimensional perspective was then applied, fulfilled, in creating staged productions. (See the Workshop section of this website.)

So, eventually, I somehow wound up creating/directing/staging multimedia experimental dance theater works without ever so much as taking an acting or dance class, or learning music or seriously studying painting. Meanwhile, Suzanne remains the actual artist among the two of us.

Ultimately, synergy is a sensibility more than medium, neither constrained nor reinforced by boundaries. That lack of framework, however, formed its own kind of burden, a delusion that imagination was the only limit and reality could be locked in a closet. As a result, Synergy was more demanding for Suzanne and I than the child we decided not to have because of it, and in its own way more rewarding. There it is again: Synergy always "in its own way."

Track Two, Earning a Living:

One of my personal platitudes is that everyone works to earn a living except artists who earn a living in

order to work. Track two outlines that side of my career:

After graduating from Duke and dealing with the draft, I landed my first career job as Merchandising/Marketing/Creative Manger at *The Record*, a large, New Jersey suburban newspaper. (I grew up nearby in a town actually named Ho-Ho-Kus.) I think they hired me because I said I didn't care how much they paid me. This experience (plus a portfolio and some awards) provided me with a solid foundation in all aspects of multi media marketing, resulting in a lifelong trade I could turn to whenever I had to, say, pay off the credit cards, keep the landlord content or upgrade the cat's menu. I studiously avoided more lucrative opportunities in favor of richly rewarding experiences promoting some truly remarkable endeavors, such as the fabled WDBS/FM (progressive radio that was actually progressive in nature rather than genre), the first (1976 Bicentennial) Eno River NC Folklife Festival (the public response hailed as a miracle in the ensuing headlines), the preeminent American Dance Festival's first season (sold out) at Duke, Asian Traditions (the legendary Balasaraswati) in Berkeley and New York, and other freelance assignments editing, writing, audio-video production, marketing, media relations, public relations, communications, etc. for arts, education and media organizations. In addition to my separate Theater, Writing and Marketing resumes, the latter could be further focused on various sub-categories, such as arts, education, media, etc.

When the need to have a full time grown up job finally became imperative, I word-processed my resume into, first, a three-year re-entry stint working for Wave Hill — a stunning garden estate in the northwest Bronx (right, Bronx) — then had the great good fortune to spend fifteen years as Director

of Media Relations, Marketing and Membership at the City University of New York Graduate Center, a distinguished and internationally unique consortium focused primarily on doctoral studies, as well as presenting a wide range of public programs at its landmarked Fifth Avenue location.

I happened to retire right about the point my metaphorically analogue media skills became less relevant in the age of digital social media. But like most things in my life, that was both fortuitous and coincidental.

Track Three, Writing:

Meanwhile, remember that writing I claimed as my life's priority before being seduced into Synergy?

Writing is the neglected first love of my creative life. Neglected, that is, except for the fact that it's primary in every other activity here (including this bio). For me, Synergy productions began with a script — whether it was written in light cues or words — and I, for example, perfected the art of writing a press release (thanks to that first job); the spots I wrote for WDBS were seeds that eventually sprouted into larger creative visions. Everything from A-V scripts to brochures to the many dimensions of Synergy involved writing.

But what I mean here is primary like any other love that's motivated by desire not necessity. It's bad enough to have one non-paying creative obsession without writing novels, stories and essays all targeted at rejection like heat-seeking missiles.

Anyway, tangled with my other two career strands, I managed to squeeze out a number of books and a pile of short fiction, articles, creative non-fiction essays, plays and other indefinable ravings. I wrote

one of my unpublishable novels (though the only one to have an agent trying) while living in Barcelona, tapping away at a toy typewriter while Suzanne took her turn at breadwinning with a teaching stint at the Catalan government's conservatory.

Many of the short pieces were published, a radio play was professionally produced (and aired on some NPR stations) and I have enjoyed giving a number of readings of my works at a range of venues, mostly in New York, including the Stories on Stage series at the Here Theater in Soho, the Martin E. Segal Theatre, and Caroline Stoessinger's infamous pre-war salon overlooking Central Park. Meanwhile, the books can be found at lulu.com/dhmimpressions (the cheapest place for overpriced print versions) or at websites like Barnes and Noble, Amazon, and others (Kindle and epub versions are just \$2.99) by searching the titles below in quotes plus my name.

A Brief History of the Recent Future, a dystopian satiric fantasy turning more real by the day

Dead Letters, a humorous mystery set on the Carolina coast

Sylvia's Violin: The Amber Eye, the young violinist heroine is transported to an ancient Egyptian wonderland

Half Slave, Half Free, a one-act play set on the streets of New York in the 1870s.

Currently (as of spring 2017) I'm working on a collection of creative non-fiction called *How to Live Like an Artist Even If You're Not One*. Except at the moment I'm not working on it because I'm working on the Synergic Theater's website ...