

An account of my Dragon Dance Theatre experience
By Eve Rikkinen
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Translated from the Finnish

Last autumn my sister Salla went into a masktheatre project, along with her drama group. I listened to her stories with a sort of longing and when Salla asked me to join the project I was very excited.

It was lovely to notice that I was accepted as myself in the rehearsals. Sam Kerson's way to direct is somehow very human. There were also a lot of different- aged people in the project, and it was surprisingly easy to work with them. Later also my mother joined the project so it became as a connecting factor within family members as well. I really liked that the art was community art.

The story of the show was based on folklores and tradition, Nuuttipukkis, relationship with nature, the bible, animals and their elements, greed, hope, dark and light and something that Sam himself left a mark on which I can't quite identify. The performance started taking its shape through improvisation. During the project we became friends with Sam and Katah.

Towards the end of December the show started taking its form. I got the roles of a Mursu and a Nuuttipukki. I was very happy for both. Especially I felt like that I was a mursu at heart. My mursu mask had a funny expression: it smiled, smirked. And the masks were the biggest I had ever seen! They were made in separate workshops. I had time to be in the workshop only once but I was left with a really nice feeling of it. It was quite therapeutic to glue paper on the masks. And talk.

When I was a Nuuttipukki I didn't always know what to do. The challenge was to try to think and be like a nuuttipukki. Nuuttipukki's bodylanguage was big and rude. It was fun to do but also needed courage. I remember a specific time when we were trying to find bodylanguage for Nuuttipukki. We stood in two lines and tried to insult the other side by showing our butt or making fartnoises in our armpits, always trying to find new ways. What I found fun in the way to do theatre was that everyone participated in the making of roles, even if they wouldn't play the final role in the show. I enjoyed the physical theatre.

A lot of teamwork was needed also in the dressing of the masks. I liked to put the masks to other people and it felt good to know that I would be helped too. We had also a few rehearsals outside. It was interesting to act in cold.

Before the actual performance the ones who wanted got to go be part of a carnival walk. I was happy to be in the role of a Nuuttipukki on that walk. I love interactive theatre. It is challenging but fun and the character gets developed all the time. I kept asking people :’’Do you have sausages?’’ No one did, but I got a chocolate from a lady. Two girls scared me and with one little boy I argued if I really am a Nuuttipukki or not. The show was on ice. There was a huge bonfire in the shape of a house made of peoples Christmas trees. The show was intensive, there wasn’t time to feel cold. Finally we lit the bonfire on fire and it burned beautifully. The big bird got to fly, it circled the fire along with a bunch of very happy actors, dressers and other people.

On Friday we had an ending of the project party. There was a jazz band playing and the evening offered me a personal realization that had been growing through the project: ‘’I like dancing’’. Before, I had been a bit uncomfortable with dancing. During the evening an invitation to come to join a similar project in Mexico made me very happy. It was like a star had lighted in me. I had never thought of going to Mexico, but now it seemed a natural thing to do. When I got a more formal invitation a few months after that I decided to step into the adventure and I accepted the invitation right away. Now I am going to Mexico this christmas to meet new friends, and old. I don’t know yet into what adventures Dragon Dance is going to take me but I wait, excited. I have ended my diary entry about the ending of project party on Friday with the words: ‘’I am happy.’’

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