

Theatre training and performance workshop
Directed by Sam Kerson

Las Téoulères, France
June 26 to July 26, 2009

Dragon Dance Theatre
exploring visual and performing arts since 1976

A Brief History of Dragon Dance Theatre

Dragon Dance Theatre was founded in 1974, Sam Kerson is and has always been the artistic director. Sam received a BA in theatre from Goddard College in 1972, where he studied formally with Marc Estrin, Anna Halprin, the San Francisco dancer and with Sally Nash of Washington DC.

During this time Bread and Puppet was in residence at Goddard and Dragon Dance was based in Vermont. For many years we had regular dealings with B&P including participation in the Circus and Pageant from '72 until '98.

These were the years of the hippies, community gardens, pot luck suppers, food coops, the struggle against the Vietnam war and the Nuclear industry. "Collective", "community", "cooperative", "creation" were the concepts of our times.

Especially significant for us, was meeting Norman Briski the well known Argentine comedian. We first met him in Cuzco, Peru in 1973, just as he was going into exile. We worked and studied with Norman during his years in New York, till 1984 and then continued to invite him to work with us in Vermont until 1999.

In 1987 Dragon Dance started a series of projects in Nicaragua. These were cultural exchange projects, based on our theatre ideas, especially collective creation. The first year we created and performed, *Death and the General*, a stage play, based on the real historical events of the Nicaraguan revolution. These one month residencies, creating theatre works in Nicaragua, continued until 1992.

During this same period we made our first mytho dramas in Vermont, we focused on the Sumarian goddess Inanna. We studied the, *Inanna Cycle*, as described by, Diane Volkstien and Samuel Noah Kramer. These were giant pageants with great fires, and live music, performed at night, in an enormous outdoor space, made up of forest and field. These pieces were performed annually, at Halloween, for seven years. They were co-produced by the astrologer Kelley Hunter.

In 1994 Dragon Dance started a series of cultural exchange projects with *Comparsa* and *Tecom* in Oaxaca de Juarez, Oaxaca, Mexico. These projects were possible thanks to the cooperation and friendship of Roberto Villaseñor. A number of these spectacles were performed at the archeological site, Monte Alban. *Sol y Luna*, the Zapotec cosmology, became our principle theme, in Mexico and in Vermont until 1999.

This work used local mythologies and collective creation, giant masks, live music and spectacle. Our work in Oaxaca was especially rich in cultural exchange and included, besides the large group of local artists, people from Chile and Argentina, France, Canada and the US.

In 2000 Dragon Dance, shifted our base from Vermont to Montreal, Katah joined the company and we started an ongoing tour, taking us back and forth, between Mexico and Europe. We continue to work on collective creations with local people, changing themes as we change communities. Most recently, Persephone in the Underworld, in France, The Fire Fish, from the Kalevala, in Finland and Day of the Dead, in Mexico. Our approach is to go to the community and discuss their situation and dramatize the stories they tell us. Local people act in the pieces and we perform the work in their spaces and in their language.

This year, 2008, we shot a short movie based on a Day of the Dead, story by Maira Jimenez Desales, in San Blas Atempa near Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, Mexico. We built fifty large masks with Roberto Villasenor in Puebla, Puebla, Mexico, these masks are dramatic elements for a pièce about the Conquest and the Mixtecs which we are planning to produce next year. And we made and performed a theatre piece with the Museo Historico in Jalpan De Serra state of Queretaro.

We look forward to working with you in the near future,
Sam and Katah