

Reflections on Jump Rhythm from an Actor-Singer

by Kevin Fugaro © 2010

I have often said to people who ask me about Jump Rhythm that it is the most important dance technique I know for actors and singers to learn. In terms of my personal experience, the three quarters in this class have improved my efficiency, ease, clarity and grace in performance. And this improvement has not just been in my movement, but in my acting and singing as well.

My entire conception about how the human body moves has undergone a fundamental shift because of this technique. While other dance techniques have helped me dance in musicals, where specific movement styles are required, Jump Rhythm has given me a body to work with outside of dance – a body for life. Since Jump Rhythm deals with a vernacular body rather than one based in a certain technique, I have found that I can use the technique in my acting and singing more effectively than other dance techniques. This is not to say that other dance techniques are not worthwhile for actors and singers to learn – I simply believe that, from my own experience, Jump Rhythm is a unique technique in that it instructs a person on how to move with the most efficiency and ease.

Since Jump Rhythm values efficiency over shape, the movement is not restricted to what is pretty to look at – while beautiful shapes are a part of the technique, they are not the focus. On the contrary, Jump Rhythm deals with how the human skeleton functions performing its most primal, basic forms of movement and then elaborates from there. Since there is such a biologically sound basis for the technique, I left the class feeling that I knew more about the human skeleton than any biology class ever taught me. In fact, Jump Rhythm emphasizes the importance of knowing the biological terminology of the skeleton and the muscles, so my understanding of the biology of the human body also improved drastically. While it is one thing to know the Latin names of body parts, it is quite another to learn them while you are actually using them – in this way, Jump Rhythm creates a connection between a person's intellectual knowledge of the body and what they *feel* in their body.

In terms of my acting and singing, Jump Rhythm has dramatically helped both techniques. Specifically, Jump Rhythm has given me insight into the basic functioning of the instrument I use for both art forms. In my acting, I have learned how to portray characters that may have peculiar postures and muscular habits while not causing those same problems in my own body. I have also learned to relax my sternum – while this might sound trivial, the effects of this small physical shift (as with most things in Jump Rhythm) were incredibly significant. In acting, I had always been taught that the seat of power lay in the solar plexus. What affected me even more was that I had been told I slouched and that my arms fell too far in front of my body. I even remember one acting teacher saying, “Only apes have arms that don't rest directly at their sides”. Well, if I could go back in time, I would say “Like it or not, we share the same ancestor as those apes, and that's how we move best! Who cares if it's not pretty!” At the time, to counteract my “slouching”, I would thrust my sternum forward and hold my arms and shoulders back, so that my hands rested at my sides, as countless voice and acting teachers had advised me to do. From everything from Shakespeare to Mamet, I would walk around the stage with my sternum tensed, like a fist in front of my heart that was supposed to say, “I know what I'm doing – I'm in control.” Of course, this was not the case. Underneath that tension, I felt anxiety, discomfort, and in general a lack of ease in my acting. As Billy worked with me, he continued to remind me of my habit, until, day by day, I began to release the sternum until it finally relaxed into its natural place. Finally, I let go, and suddenly I discovered a well of both physical and emotional life that I never knew existed inside of me. I never knew that I had permission just to be myself, my actively relaxed physical self on stage. I always thought I had to alter my body into some form that was pleasing to look at or matched the ideal form I had in my head. Jump Rhythm has given me a great gift as a performer, in that it has validated my body as it is at its most relaxed, attentive and efficient. My voice no longer gets tired from straining my neck, my body feels better than ever, and my sense of ease on stage has progressed to places I never thought possible – and so much of this I owe to Jump Rhythm!