

Love Letter for Joah Lowe

Keith Hennessy, Nov 04

Dear listener, dear living dancer,
dear dead dancer, dear Joah Lowe:

To write a love letter is to willingly open memory's door. To invite the images and sensations of yesterday to obliterate the distractions of today. But once the door is open everyone comes rushing through. There are so many half-told stories, half-choreographed dances. I'm writing for Joah but I want to write for everyone. For Tracy Rhodes and Peter Kadyk, for Ed Mock and Jim Tyler, for Wayne Corbitt and Arnie Zane, and for all the guys whose names I can't remember: the one who came to all my sex healing rituals for queer men, the one who gently confronted our Body Electric retreat about our fear of dying, the bedridden one whose voice was barely a whisper yet requested that I come and sing with him at the Hartford St. Zen Hospice.

I'm afraid to write to you. Your presence has become a complicated pattern in a fabric I wear like skin. I hesitate to unravel you individually for fear of my own unraveling. Who am I without you, here, now?

I remember dance class with Joah Lowe, over 20 years ago, in a studio (in this building) at 8th & Folsom. Joah was my first teacher in San Francisco. All the basics that would become Release and Releasing, he shared with us a decade earlier under the names of Aston Patterning, developmental movement, improvisation and whether or not he ever studied with Halprin or Laban, he taught us their rituals as well. Every good dance teacher transcends technique, copywrite, and culture. I've been lucky to be in the zone of the one dance, the prayer dance, the now dance, and Joah took me there. He wasn't the first or the last but because

of it he's unforgettable, indivisible from my story, my dance.

Joah taught a weekly class, an introduction to contemporary dance that involved technique and improvisation. Open to beginners, his class gave me knowledge and confidence to graduate to Lucas Hoving's Mon-Wed-Fri technique classes, where I folded myself into dance history for the next three years following Lucas from Margie Jenkin's studio at 15th & Mission, to Footwork (aka Dancers' Group now Abada Capoeira), the Women's Building and Third Wave (now Dance Mission). I can't remember if Joah sent me to Lucas or Lucas sent me to Joah. I'm sure it's written in some journal that I'll never read again. I only remember that I refused to study technique with anyone that didn't also teach improvisation and that's how I chose them as teachers.

I remember Joah in Lucas' class and I remember Joah performing but these memories are cloudy, distant. I remember hanging off the ballet bar, learning to maximize the tilt in my pelvis. I remember Joah's hands on my hips and only later, years later, did I recognize this memory as sexual. Years later when I really learned to fuck, to release into being fucked, I knew what I had learned from Joah. I've thought about Joah and those pelvic rolls and tilts a million times, while warming up, studying Pilates or Klein technique, masturbating, fucking, even riding a bike or hanging below freeways, yelling to god (*Saliva 88-89, Spell 04*)

I remember asking Joah about his own history in dance. All I remember is an injury and some kind of betrayal, I think with Graham technique. I was a wannabe revolutionary pacifist anar-

chist feminist then and assumed that all orthodoxy caused pain so this out-of-context image became another brick for me to throw at the glass house of Dance. Now I'm one of those who occupy that house, only part-time. I show up to do repairs; to work on additions to the house so more folks can visit. There's always work to do.

I hope Joah is proud of me. He's the kind of ancestor from whom I want praise and recognition. I know it's supposed to go the other way, so I hope that this letter fulfills some of the debt I owe. Joah, thanks a lot. Thanks for welcoming me, for steering me into the future and away from the past. Thanks for paying just enough attention to me, which was not much, because I was not yet ready to be seen, to be revealed, even to myself. Maybe you knew that but probably you just sensed it. You were my first authentically intuitive man. The more I write this the more your body comes to mind, to body. I'm seeing your legs now. They're very strong. I could go on, but I'm getting nervous, now that your body has caught up to memory and all this presence, yours and mine, is alive, here, now. Thanks again. I bow to you.

With love, Keith

Ps.

Just before printing this letter, I had a twinge of insecurity. Do I really remember? So I googled you. Yes I googled an ancestor. And there you were, noted teacher of Lessons in the Art of Flying, releasing your signature bowling ball to the sky, in a piece called *Bowling Lesson #1 – Letting Go of the Ball*.

Dance. Lesson. Memory. Body. Letting Go. Love. Thanks.

Check out:
KEITH'S BLOG

<http://zeroperformance.blogspot.com/>