



Spring Awakening

Yoga Art Festival 2008

by Katie Clancy

It's the middle of March, and still the top of the volcano Iztaccíhuatl, which means in the nahuatl language "white woman" is blanketed by snow, a thin sheet covering the profile of her belly. Its the third tallest peak in Mexico surrounded by a magical ancient forest.

Over one hundred and fifty people gathered here for the second annual Yoga Art Festival. For one week, healers, yogis, and artists journeyed from all parts of the globe to Iztac Multiversidad--a Holistic Healing Center located on 34 hectares of a fertile river valley at the base of Iztaccíhuatl. Through Yoga and Meditation practice, Healing workshops, and cultural events, the festival explored how to awaken the vital creativity of the soul, nature, and collective consciousness.

The festival's visionaries - Angelika Baumbach, Markus Sieber, the founder's of the international traveling music project Mirabai Ceiba, and Dr. Siegfried Baumbach, the founder and guardian of Iztac Multiversidad - teach that Yoga, translated as "union", is a practice of transformation and transcendence. Apply this to art, and powerful healing qualities emerge. "Yoga reunites the interior with the exterior, heaven and earth, mind and body. Art is a vehicle to communicate with Divine and vital energy. The integration of both yoga and art will catalyst into a new dimension of health and consciousness," Dr. Baumbach, a native of Germany who has been training holistic therapists in Mexico for more than thirty years.

A resurgence of holistic healing and spirituality practices have given us the tools to confront our reality on many levels: how can we, as creative human beings, integrate our post-industrial culture with ancient wisdom to transform our present moment? The Yoga Art Festival investigated these deeper questions and encouraged solutions to find our paths.

Although it was not widely publicized, news of the festival traveled through family, friends, and Iztac Multiversidad's network of students. People from Germany, the United States and all over Mexico traveled to share in the event.

"I was invited by one of the founders of Iztac Multiversidad, Cristina San Pedro. With the Spring Equinox, I felt it was worth traveling all the way from the States to be a part of such an amazing experience," said Coleen Thomas, a resident of Durango, Colorado.

Graceful simplicity replaced luxurious sleeping accommodations: several adobe rooms with bunk beds and private bathrooms housed families and a few couples; most people set up tents in a larger field full of lupine bushes. The temperature dropped to near freezing after dark; distant water frogs sang and the moon kept vigil over the campers



throughout the nights. Every facility - from the outdoor dining area to the manmade adobe yurt, the “Banos secos” and outdoor showers - complemented the land’s natural beauty. Katrina Blair, a naturopath from Colorado who taught a workshop about edible wild plants, slept under a pine tree with no tent. “This mountain is very alive, so I wanted to open myself to the elements as much as possible,” she said.

The week’s daily routine also honored Mother Nature’s natural rhythms. The day began with a morning Sadhna meditation which incorporated Kundalini Yoga exercises and group chanting. “I feel so alive when my whole body and voice are welcoming the dawn,” Thomas said. “My chakras are opened and my spine is strong as a result.” On a broader level, there were many synchronicities in the festival’s timing - Spring Equinox, a full moon, International day of Peace, International day of Water, and Holy week in the Christian Religion. “Because of the timing, all of our actions and intentions are magnified,” Fuaod Donaldto Toledo.

Every guest at the festival was encouraged to volunteer their services in an act of Seva. In most religions, Seva refers to an act of selfless service that maintains the moral backbone of a community. Washing dishes, helping prepare meals, cleaning bathrooms, and tidying the common areas - all were generous contributions to keep the festival’s vital energy flowing.

After the short work period, the personal and group explorations began. Everyone participated in one or two of the following workshops: Hatha, Naad, or Kundalini Yoga, deep meditation, Butho Dance, Pranic Healing, Shamanic Voice, Quantic Sonosofia, Devotional Dance from India, Bach Flower Therapy, and Wild Edible Plants.

Groups met for two or three days in a row, allowing for bonding and a more in-depth exploration of the topic. Small groups ventured into the forest to scout for wild dandelions; others painted murals in a pine grove or experimented with Butho dance improvisations.

“Butoh Dance, like this festival, opens up energy channels and activates many archaic and ancient memories,” said Butoh teacher Kathy van Koerber.

The intensives explored ways to activate individual healing potential within a supportive network. New York based musician Tonya Ridgley (also known as TBird Luv) of Shamanic Voice spoke to the power of overcoming resistance. “The source is within you. Everyone can sing - it’s a matter of remembering, honoring, and overcoming the barriers that stand in your way.” She taught exercises that were meant to push people out of their comfort zones - laughing outrageously, expressing emotions without words, singing absurd songs. “I was very uncomfortable and unsure during the process, but I went through my self-consciousness and arrived at a place of acceptance and courage,” said Isaa Maravillas about the Shamanic Voice workshop.



Translation was provided in German, Spanish, and English. Work-study students like Denise Tk worked to clarify and translate each workshop. “I was unsure how it was going to work out,” Gabi Schuesselbaur, a social worker from Germany, said, “but being here has taught me that words are just one way to communicate and understand each other.”

As the festival aimed to integrate health into every aspect, the three daily organic vegetarian meals were true works of art. Oat breads, muesli, tortillas, oatmeal cookies, miso vegetable soup, fresh fruit juice and abundant salads - all made and prepared on premise and served with love by Silvia Roman.

“It is a special quality of life here. We cut out alcohol, caffeine, and sugar to nourish our bodies with living food. I feel more concentrated and inspired,” said Michael Kushe, a shamanic healer from Germany.

After a long day of hard work and reflection, the evenings were dedicated to cultural events for instance: Deva Hari Parksha, Dr. Baumbach’s daughter, danced a traditional Odissi Indian dance alongside Marien Luevano, who invoked a fierce duende in a Flamenco solo. Kathy van Koerber of Kiah/Keya premiered her documentary about a nomadic tribe in Mali and also performed a Butoh solo accompanied by T-Bird Luv. The Theatre “Sexto Sol” from Cuernavaca, Mexico, performed an amazing funny pantomime show and Mirabai Ceiba, usually known for their etheric melodic concerts created especially for the Festival a dance/theater performance remembering the urgency of the watery soul on the planet.

Celebrations sprouted in many areas throughout the week. On the Equinox, a group hiked into the forest with mountain trekking experts Roberto Morales and David Chamorro to scout for signs of spring. Angelika Baumbach led another group through a sacred Temazcale Inipi ceremony, also known as a sweat lodge. As rocks are said to hold all the ancient wisdom from the ancestors, group gathered in a small hut and sweated around a pit of steaming boulders. The ceremony purified and invoked guidance. “The Temazcale drains you completely, rejuvenating me with the most powerful energy straight from the earth,” Kushe said after his first experience.

The festival provided options for the whole family. While their parents meditated, a dozen children of all ages took part in the children’s camp. They finger painted, sang, swam, practiced acro-yoga, and played games. “Children are our teachers. We help open up their senses to the present moment,” Children’s Camp leader Saíd said.

Dr. Baumbach closed the week with a few tips to recharge the spirit. “Integrate the memories from this week into your daily life. Transform the place where you live, be it your home, town, or big city. Return your bodies frequently to nature. Create and maintain the networks you built here.”