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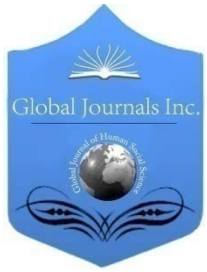

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The Dancer's APT Health Behaviour: A Panacea to Grace and Precision in Movement

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Abstract- The dancer's body is the first tool for implementation (or incapacitation), as it were, that is found in the active or inactive endeavours of every individual whether one is a performer of not. This study looks at the dancer's healthy behaviour to underscore beauty, grace and precision in body movement. It adopted the analytical approach to study the findings of some science scholars to arrive at our findings which is summarized thus "you are what you eat" and "your performance, your healthy behaviour". An actor or dancer must maintain good healthy life to stay longer as a performing artiste and to continue to attract good patronage.

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The Dancer's APT Health Behaviour: A Panacea to Grace and Precision in Movement

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Abstract- The dancer's body is the first tool for implementation (or incapacitation), as it were, that is found in the active or inactive endeavours of every individual whether one is a performer of not. This study looks at the dancer's healthy behaviour to underscore beauty, grace and precision in body movement. It adopted the analytical approach to study the findings of some science scholars to arrive at our findings which is summarized thus "you are what you eat" and "your performance, your healthy behaviour". An actor or dancer must maintain good healthy life to stay longer as a performing artiste and to continue to attract good patronage.

I. Introduction

The dancer has only his/her body as the primary source or tool of articulation. In fact, the dancer's body is the prime factor for expression and it is on it that other elements of dance are tied. It therefore means that that instrument of dance expression, the dancer's body, should be adequately taken care of if it must continue to serve the society. The relevance of dance to the society cannot be quantified. This significance has been stressed severally by scholars. In summary however, Alnold Udoka reiterates that:

> However, we now understand that humankind had long ago understood the value of the dance as the tongue of the soul molding the symbols of value, goals, communication and homogeneity, and providing the interface between imagination and reality, then profane and the divine, the intangible and concrete, the very essence of existence nurtured through the secrets of breath, the nervous system and the physical body. Dance provides a natural, perfect and holistic strategy in relating to self and others... (Udoka, 2009)

Therefore, our concern here is the dancer and health behaviour in relation to apt performance, useful and suitable for passing information, entertainment, education and aesthetics. The analytical approach to research is therefore employed here to draw the attention of dancers and dance practitioners in general to the necessity of good health behaviour if they must stay longer on stage to continue to render useful and purposeful services to the society.

Dance, movement, grace and precision begin with attitude to life and good healthiness of the dancer. The aphorism "everybody can dance, only a dancer can perform", simply explains both the naturalness of dance and professionalism in the art. The first is sourced in the fact that dance is a natural thing to do because of the biological and natural disposition of movement from the day a child is conceived and born through to the processes of rite-of-passages to adulthood and, even after death. The second relates dance to professional thoughts in which the dancer goes through dance art and entertainment education (EE) to enable him/her meet with the requirements for daily living, life provisions and social sustenance. The stated EE requires the dancer to be trained to be a trainer of trainee(s) and an intelligent and skillful performer. For example a dancer and choreographer, Mariam Iyeh analyses her choice of movement in a libretto and in relation to the choice of movement by a dancer thus, "the choice of movement composition was influenced by my production style and other factors, such as theme, subject matter for each sequence, mood, music and songs, time limitation and the level of training of the dancer" (Iyeh, 2011) Here, the health of the trainer-dancer is looked into as key to professionalism and proper output of performance since, it is expected that a theatre artiste should be creative to sustain the audience attention and attract applause and commendation as it were. Lawal (2011) observes that "it is the hallmark of good acting to be creative in movement and gesture, to improvise within meaning and context, and thus make every performance of even the same production a uniquely memorable experience…mime is action without words while movement in an expressive gesture to complement the spoken word" and movement is the principal element in dance. The functions of dance in relation to the other genres in theatre are education, entertainment, information and aesthetics suitable to social requirements and advancement.

Dance as an art capable of the aforementioned functions turns towards abstraction from its consideration as a vital tool for the resuscitation of the society, particularly when such a society is bedeviled by quagmire of vices and corruption. Dance is considered as a time and space art. (Akinseye, 1997) defines dance simply as that which:

> involves the movement of the body which is a means to achieve physical fitness through the five fundamental movements of walking, running, jumping, leaping and hopping…is expressive movement of turning, twisting and rolling of the body (parts) to

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conform with the rhythm of a sound, beat or music (95).

In essence it involves the elements of movement, time, space, rhythm, dynamics, and weight and so on in their consequence form, styles and utility. For a dance to be adjudged aesthetical and performative, precision to time and bars given to music in movements and steps suitable to a given rhythm, context and content is germane. For a professional dancer, there is no dance for dance sake. In other words, dance movements are not created in a vacuum. Every movement in a dance is geared towards a reflection of the purpose of its phenomenal and contextual significance. (Sandle, 1972)'s observation is apt here as he states that:

> There is however, a fundamental difference between movement perceived expressively and movement experienced as communicatory of another person. In communication, awareness of movement and its phenomenal qualities will relate to the whole social context of the movement. Thus the qualitative significance of the movement will be partly determined by the nature of the perceiver's relationship to the other person and the actions and intended actions of each (133).

II. Dance as a Physical/Emotional Health

The human body, particularly, for the dancer, calls for good and healthy living. Dance is considered here as capable of providing good health to the dancer physically and emotionally. The idea of health transcends not being infested with diseases. It encompasses, according to (Oliver, 1972) "…something more than freedom from disease and to regard it as a condition of efficiency both physically, emotionally and socially so that life can be lived to the full" (187). Through dance, the human body is made physically and manipulatively a contrivance of movement for and by the dancer to accomplish a massive amount of things or actions simultaneously. Dance facilitates individual's anabolism. When we talk of movement it is the arrangement or distribution or coordination of body parts through the elements of line - shapes that the body assumed; colour, rhythm, dynamics etc in space. This is because the human body is made up of nerves, muscles, bones etc. The human body has the capacity to express a great deal of emotional tenderness, grandeur and suffering in whatever form. Dance as a physical/emotional act facilitates good healthy physique with good emotional state.

The physical structure of a dancer is a great asset to him/her in a performance. Thus Ojuade Jeleel in an undergraduate kinesiology lecture class submits that "the physical form of a dancer is a physical attraction in dance provided it is well coordinated or executed". However, the dancer's training and movement execution must adhere to the shape, size and type of his/her body. (Odeyale and Amuchie, 2004) affirm that:

> Body types or somatotypes are the grouping of the human body according to inherited qualities or characteristics…and these form the yardstick for differentiating among individuals. Body types influence performance and in some cases may be used as an indication of athletic ability.

The human body type, better put, body dominance according to (Kane, 1972) are three and they are endomorphy (fat), mesomorphy (muscle), and ectomorphy (linearity). The explanation is that naturally the endomorph is fat, the mesomoph is muscular and energetic and the ectomorph is slim. The above classification presupposes that an understanding of one's body type serves to caution the dancer on the execution of possible movement, type of exercise, nutritional habit and so on. It is consequently essential that the dancer takes good care of the body irrespective of the type. Some movements are beautifully executed in some dancers' body than is some. For example, a fat (endomorphic) dancer with accentuated buttocks and other body parts will most likely move them better and beautifully than a slim (ectomorphic) dancer. It is the same for others provided care and caution is taken to perfect the body to be flexible and malleable to externalize inner intention or thought in movements. This leads us to emotional health.

Human emotion is conceived out in an external manner in the execution of dance movement. This is carried out through bodily articulation experience in gesture and pantomime. What is conceived in the mind of the dancer as a thought, idea, feeling and so on is expressed in dance performative movements aesthetically. This relates to the mental/physical. It implies that the body has to be fit mentally, emotionally and spiritually at all time especially as a dancer. This is because all these are needed to be able to execute a well coordinated dance movement. For example in dance, it is indeed difficult to separate body and soul of man since they are all actively involved in the dance movement. An emotionally circumscribed dancer is most likely a bad dancer because of the poor state of mind. The fact is that he/she will be hindered by lack of creative muse leading to inaccurate body expression and lack of kinesthetic sense. Dance is needed in the improvement of health when is serves as therapy to the individual dancer. The human body in dance action digs deep into the mind to relate with the happenings in and around the environment. Dance is used to improve emotional health and this is characterized in the words of (Layman, 1972) as we conclude:

> …peace of mind, relative freedom from tension and anxiety, the ability to direct hostile feelings into creative and constructive channels, sensitivity and

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responsiveness to the feelings of others, the ability to give and received love, spontaneity of emotional expression in a form appropriate to the individual's developmental level, the ability to deal constructively with reality and adjust to change, a feeling of security, a sense of self-worth, enjoyment of human contacts, … flexibility, an appropriate balance between self-sufficiency and willingness to accept help, … and the capacity to enjoy life (164).

III. Kinesthetic Sense in Dance

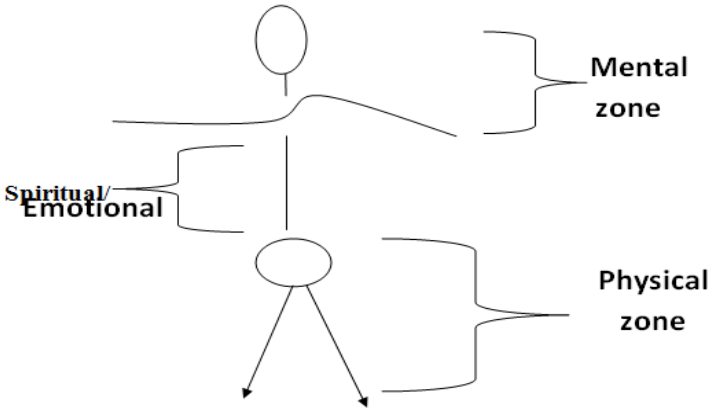
Kinesthetic sense as aspect of dance kinesiology is here considered a rightful requirement in the performance of dance. The dancer's health behaviour requires proper attention to achieve the kinesthetic sense. Ojuade Jeleel again, in an undergraduate class note, states that kinesthetic sense is that which makes it possible for emotions, thought or views as conceived in form of ideas by the dancer to be expressed accurately through dance movement. Hence, it can also be called "movement sense". (Cratty,1972) considers the movement sense as that:

> … including threshold of movement; position judgment, and repositioning judgments; threshold of direction of passively moved limbs; accuracy of direction of passively moved body part of movement of amplitude of passive movements; judgment of speed of movements controlled by experimenter; steadiness of movement; accuracy of the reproduction of muscular tension; accuracy of direction of movements initiated by the subject; and accuracy of speed of movement controlled by the subject (54-56).

Kinesthetic sense is very important to any dancer because it is the source of the dancer's movement, and the articulation of the points listed by Carry above. Thus a dancer's awareness of his or her body anatomy is highly essential.

The dancer's brain and nerves have to be at alert at every point in time, kinesthetic sense (movement sense) sends or transmits signals or impulse (message) to the muscular articulation, body joint, visual and auditory message to the brain that interprets them and put them to work in motion. The message sent informs the dancer of the muscle been used. For example, when a sound is heard, from an instrument, it is the brain that interprets and sends the signal to the part of the body of the dancer that should react or respond using the appropriate gestures, steps and movement. This occurs when tension, balance, sight and sound are interpreted and transformed into movement pattern in space. The entire framework of the dancer's body must be capable of executing various functions as an intricate instrument. The legs and feet and the rest of the body must be able to express the dramatic content of dance in a clear manner. This establishes that the face, neck, arm, shoulders, back truck, hand etc must contribute to the whole and will not only serve as subsidiary component that merely support the movements of the leg and feet e.g. a dancer's expressive face is equally as important as other aspect of his or her body while making efforts to negotiate difficult steps. This is because a dancer has to convey diverse mood to suit particular role hence no part of the body is less important. It also informs the dancer on which part of the body that is not functioning properly and what manner are they functioning for instance in kinesthetic the dancer is solely responsible for his /her mistake(s). A professional dancer must train well to develop the kinesthetic sense. Kinesthetic sense assists to allocate movements to the zones in the body. The human body in kinesthetic understanding is divided into three zones with unique task to perform. In order word, the kinesthetic sense advocates all the three body zones in dance. The movement sense is meant therefore to transmit exactly the engagement of the components of the body being used at the particular moment.

The human body can be divided into 3 body zones in dance, these are; (1) Physical zone - this involves the lower truck and the legs. (2) Spiritual and Emotional zones - involve the torso and the arms. (3) Mental zone- consists of the head and neck.



A graphic illustration of the three body zones

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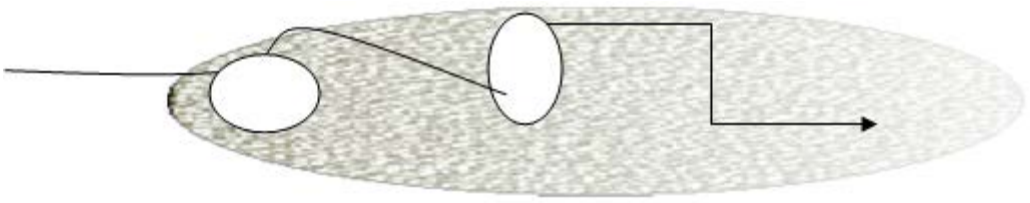
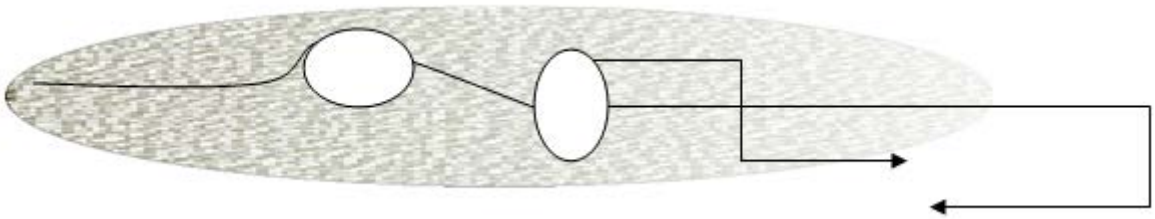
The three body zones work in harmony to generate movement in dance. It suffixes to say that for a single movement to emanate from the dancer, the mental; dealing with the brain and other sensory organs around the head, the spiritual/emotional; with relations to the organs around the torso and, the physical; derivable from the actions around the legs, must unite to transmit expressions as intended by the dancer to the audience. The mental zone aids concentration, and creativity. The spiritual/emotional zone helps the dancer to be dedicated and determined to perform to the satisfaction of, not him/herself alone, but the audience as well. And, the physical zone takes care of stamina, dexterity and space utility.

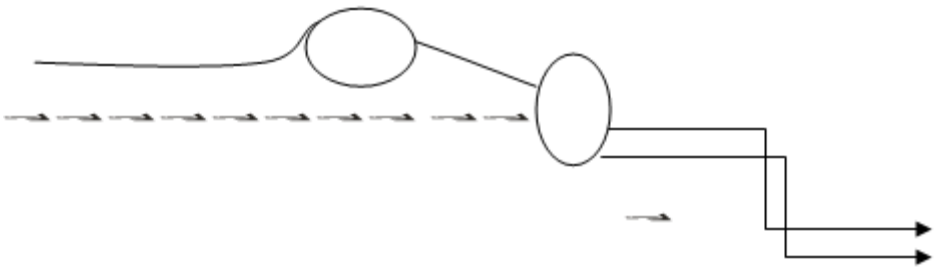
Similarly movement can be divided into 3 great order which are (1) Opposition - in dance it denotes the physical strength and brute force in space. (2) Parallelism- it denotes the physical plane and mental plane for decorative and stylized movement in space. (3) Succession – highest order of movement passing through the body in space. It moves every muscle and joint as it comes in contact with them.



A Graphic Illustration of Body Opposition in Dance



A Graphic Illustration of Body Succession in Dance



A Graphic Illustration of Body Parallelism in Dance

It is observed that no sincere emotion can be express through movement of the body without some forms of succession. To actualize these successfully, the dancer needs to maintain a good and healthy behaviour. Ojuade Jeleel further points out, "when viewing a dance performance we do not actually thinks in terms of bodily zones but they are all part of the secret on why some dancers employ their bodies better than others in dance performances". It is therefore imperative that the dancer takes very good care of the body to maintain a proper physical and emotional health which is desiderata for optimum performance.

IV. The Dancer's apt Health Behaviour

In an attempt to attain skills, perfection and good techniques in dance, the dancer must practice very hard to attain a very high level of communicative body, mental alertness, good musical sense, visual and emotion perception and kinesthetic sense. Dance encourages strength, beauty, healthy living, body carriage and gracefully look and so on. It is beneficial to the dancers body in that it makes room for a wide variety of muscular activities to be achieved thus it strengthened the limbs and helps to beautify the human frame but this cannot be achieved without an extended muscular mobility, which can best be gained through the following enumerated points:

a) Exercise/Gymnastics

Dance exercises or gymnastics are both physically and mentally demanding in other words, ordinary movements are not sufficient. This process begins with warm-up activities which are designed to

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condition the body and mind for the main exercise. They include activities such as simple walking, bending and turning the body in various directions and so on. Exercise is a conscious manipulation of the body to achieve some desirable results as regards to body fitness. Daily perseverance exercise and great deal of physical hard work helps to stimulate the muscle, nerves, heart, joints and all other body organs to more active and yielding to proper body expressions in dance.

Furthermore, the purpose of exercise to dance is to stimulate action of the body cells that are dormant and not regularly brought into action in daily activities. Lack of exercise could lead to the exhibition of weak, jerky and uncoordinated movements which spoils the grace, beauty and aesthetics of a dance. The advantages of exercise, particularly to the muscles, are further enumerated by (Ajiboye, 2004):

a) It increases the strength, endurance, speed and flexibility of the muscles.
b) It increases the amount of connective tissues in the body.
c) It increases the covering of the muscles.
d) It brings about the formation of more capillaries in the body.
e) Exercise increases the thickness of the muscles.
f) Exercises enable muscles have greater endurance.
g) Exercises help the muscles develop more heamoglobin (Red blood cells).
h) Exercises help the muscles of the heart to beat faster and thus help more rapid circulation of the blood (72).

Other gains of exercises on the dancer are; flexibility, stamina, balance, youthful look, agility, better kinesthetic sense and so on.

b) Nutrition

This has to do with food quality. Good nutrition is necessary for good health. Nutrition is a science that links food, medicine and habit with public health. (Uti and Ojeme, 2007) define state that "nutrition is concerned with the study of food and nutrients and an analysis of their qualities and usefulness to the human body" (184). Correct feeding habit is very important in the maintenance of human body in other to maintain fitness. The performance of dance activities like every other athletic activity requires energy (which is the ability to do work) and it is food that is the primary supplier of it. (Uti and Ojeme, 2007) advise that "every human being, particularly sportsmen and women, must obtain the appropriate quantity and quality of food in order to excel in athletic performances" (184) and this applies to the dancer as well. The body is the physical instrument of the dancer; therefore, it must be adequately cared for. There is the need to keep the body in good physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual state in order to facilitate its proper functioning. This the dancer obtains from proper food intake.

Food supply is needed for body growth and metabolism. Human beings need food or regular supply of food, water and air for survival. Energy is also supplied through food. It is the fuel for a dancer's performance in space. They further list out the different kinds of food thus:

1. Carbohydrate – Yam, Cassava, Bread, Rice, Potato, and cereals such as maize, wheat, and millet etc.
2. Proteins – eat, Fish, Egg, Beans, Plantains, and Milk etc.
3. Fats – Egg, Milk, Ice-cream, Butter, Margarine etc.
4. Minerals – Calcium, Bone etc.
5. Vitamins – Oranges, Grapes, Lime, Green vegetable, and Tomato, (Vitamin D from Sun Light) etc.
6. Water

Healthy feeding habit builds a healthy and energetic dancer. Experts however advice that the energy value of food intake by a dancer is very paramount. The suggestion is that those foods with high concentration of carbohydrate that are converted, as it were, through digestion to produce glucose that is aptly needed for energy in dance should be considered. However, care should be taking not to over eat before embarking on a vigorous dance as this may affect the solar-plexus (the source of dance) causing sharp pains around the abdomen.

c) Rest

Rest is a state of quietness and meditation. A dancer needs a large amount of rest to function well as a performance. It is extremely crucial to the dancer and must not be miscomprehended with enjoyment because; as (Ajiboye, 2004) explains "rest helps the muscles and the organs of the body to build up their lost substances." He states further that "the building up of muscles takes place during rest." It is also imperative that the dancer takes a shower to refreshing the muscle, body and the entire system. With this he/she will bounce back fully and ready to perform even better. It is necessary when one is tired, particularly after a long or hot and fast tempo dance is done.

d) Sleep

Sleep is a natural state of life in which the body is put is a very quiet situation and temporarily separated from the happenings in and around but with the body organs functioning though at a slow rhythmic tempo. That explains the reason why it is regarded as the "sister" of death. Just like dance, sleep can take place at any time of the day. It should be regular and adequate enough to refreshing the mind, soul and body. Sleep is the ultimate of rest and relaxation. In the description of (Ajiboye, 2004), "sleep is the only perfect

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system of resting." The effect of sleep on the mental and spiritual well-being of a dancer cannot be quantified. It must be observed to keep the body in balance. Concerted effort should be taking to observe day-time sleep, otherwise known as siestas and also to sleep well and enough at night. Other benefits of sleep according to him are; it prevents fatigue, helps the system to work efficiently, reduces tension, enables the bones to regain their correct length after they have been shortened, it helps to replace worn out cells and so on.

V. Conclusion

Maintaining good health behaviour is a propensity for professionalism. As a result, dancers should eat well and appropriately too. Also the inviolability of strict and dogged compliance to the points enumerated above will facilitate a lengthen life for the dancer and the dance profession. Further still, "You are what you eat" is a regular saying in health circle. Your eating habit, living and work approach, combine to model you a fitted and skillful individual and help to beautify your body frame. It is important that a dancer exercises regularly, maintains good nutrition, rests or relaxes inevitably and sleeps on a regular basis for a prolonged life.

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