



Teens of diverse abilities release into the 5Rhythms in a dance studio in Cambodia.

Crossing Borders

Lucie Nérot shares her gift for dance across cultures.

BY GRIER COOPER

A cluster of teens dance on hard clay soil under mango trees, moving to the beat of Western music and the hum of a generator. Their 5Rhythms® teacher Lucie Nérot has no other teaching tools aside from her two hands, the few words of their language she has managed to learn, and the dance. She has traveled all the way from Paris to the poorest district of the poorest province in Cambodia to share Gabrielle Roth's 5Rhythms practice with this group. Hours tick by, then a miracle happens: "I am held by something that is way bigger than me," says Nérot. "I see their beauty, their unique dance... I realize that the universal quality of 5Rhythms has crossed the many borders between my world and theirs."

Just after completing her 5Rhythms training, Nérot, who is both English and French by birth, chose to live the dance of chaos. She left her high school teaching job and sold her furniture to "join the big, wild dance of life." For her, sharing the 5Rhythms practice meant looking at a wider range of possibilities, venturing further off the beaten path to communities with stressed and distressed children, teens, and adults. She began the French nonprofit Dancing Across Borders to share 5Rhythms worldwide.

"I have a preference for remote locations in the countryside, because of the innocence and enthusiasm that I find there," she says, although she has also brought the work to major cities such as Bangkok and Rangoon. She returns to locations for several years in a row, to witness to the evolution within her dancers and their communities.

Music may or may not be a part of each three-hour class. "I have to make do with what I find," she says, which might mean silence.

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Although Nérot usually works with an interpreter, she has learned to embrace simplicity when teaching. Two-word phrases—up/down, inside/outside, opening/closing—leave ample room for the students' individual interpretations. There are challenges at times, such as finding venues that offer privacy in

a place where everything is open. Food is scarce, so she provides lunch during each session, which adds to budgetary concerns. And sometimes the teens are just... well, teens, as illustrated in her February 19, 2009 journal entry:

"Yesterday I tried to bring them staccato and they brought me hell—a rebellious chaotic bunch. The girls were chatting, giggling...the boys seized any opportunity to fight."

Witnessing moments of deep happiness and release is an incredible reward. Sometimes there are tears, a rare thing for children who have survived such turmoil and unrest. "I tell them what beautiful souls they are," says Nérot. "Chaos has done its work."

Dancing Across Borders has traversed new boundaries in recent years. For the past four years Nérot has worked with a group of disabled teens in Kampot, Cambodia. Nine are deaf, two use wheelchairs, one has Down syndrome, and another has cerebral palsy. According to Nérot, "5Rhythms is, in essence, accessible to anyone, encouraging each person to develop what works."

Many of her 5Rhythms and other dance colleagues have helped raise funds for Dancing Across Borders. "They know in their bodies and hearts the value of the work," says Nérot. The cross-cultural connections we forge through dance offer a powerful new hope for our future."