

An Open Session with Marcia Karp for the London Psychodrama Network

Maxine Daniels writes from London

It's Friday 27th February 2008 around 6.45 pm and I'm in the Lancaster Hall Hotel in central London waiting for another open evening of psychodrama. The room is very atmospheric with low lights, a stage at one end, people are sitting and standing with a buzz in the air as we wait for the session to begin.

I'm feeling excited about the event because I'm one of the members of London Psychodrama Network who is trying to promote psychodrama and make it more visible in London. We're doing a good job to date and this evening we have 30 paying guests, who pay £10 for a 2 and half hour session, plus 8 psychodramatists who come along to support. Marcia Karp is the guest director and people are always keen to see her work, including myself.

She looks great. So confident, calm and warm to the process, she begins by asking one of the audience members if she has ever had a standing ovation in her life. The woman slightly bemused answers 'No' with this Marcia asks the room to stand up and give this woman a standing ovation. It feels quite magical, and this continues with 2 other audience members. I can see the delight on their faces and all the while Marcia is aware of the audience by asking names, professions and making connections with the individuals who have attended. It really is watching a Master at work and very impressive as it looks so easy and fluid. She tells us stories about Moreno and his theories whilst asking questions and relating to the audience. She talks about Moreno's theory of 'Compulsive Conformity', a term he used, meaning that people grow up afraid to be different; this is in response to audience members not knowing how to be different.

I love hearing all the stories about her time in New York and training with Moreno, especially when she tells us that Dustin Hoffman and Woody Allen used to attend the open sessions in New York. Marcia also shares the 'inside information' that Woody Allen changed his name and was just starting out as a stand up comedian in the 60's. The evening is interspersed with wonderful delights and stories about Moreno, Zerka, and psychodrama terms.

Marcia asks where people originate from and we hear Barbados, India, Canada, Toronto, Vancouver, Turkey, Jamaica and I'm reminded how multicultural London is. One participant wonders if it's necessary to engage in the work and Marcia talks about 'Spectator Carthasis', whereby a person can gain much through other people doing the work.

People are now up on their feet sharing stories with each other about successful relationships and there is a genuine feeling of connection. Marcia has decided to 'teach' some techniques as she believes the health professionals would benefit and she knows a lot of audience members are from the health service. She decides to teach doubling and regales a story about learning how to double in New York with Moreno. "We had to double for hours", she says. "I remember going out to buy a wedding dress and my double followed me". The audience laugh at this. "I go into the dressing room to try on the dress, when on the other side of the curtain, my double says, 'God! I need to lose weight' and do you know, that is exactly what I was thinking."

Marcia brings the group together and during the course of the evening finds 2 protagonists who work in vignettes. Meanwhile, audience members volunteer to play auxiliary roles and make doubling statements. It works, and we are all committed to the protagonists succeeding in their new outcomes.

The last statement made by the protagonist is: "I feel like coming home, it's such a relief". This sums up the evening for me and hope we continue to find the energy, support and love of psychodrama to keep getting it out there.

Maxine Daniels