



Taira Restar (right) and her mentor, Anna Halprin, Sea Ranch, California

Right:
Earth Run at Planetary Dance
workshop. Photo: Taira Restar

Bottom right:
Bill Cauley, Planetary Dance
workshop. Photo: Taira Restar

Far right:
30th anniversary Planetary Dance,
Mount Tamalpais, California.
Top photo: Taira Restar
Bottom photo: John Kokoska

Dancing the planet

Dance pioneer Anna Halprin now in her 90's is renowned worldwide for her groundbreaking engagement with community participants and important issues, here **Taira Restar**, artist and arts educator reveals Halprin's work and ambitions

The Planetary Dance, a community dance ritual, was held 6 June 2010 in a meadow at the base of Mount Tamalpais, north of San Francisco.

It was a glorious day with blue skies and warm weather. This particular Planetary Dance was unique, as it was in celebration of the 30th anniversary of Planetary Dance and the 90th birthday of dance innovator, Anna Halprin.

The main component of the Planetary Dance is the Earth Run, a dance that consists of the participants' individual dedications as well as their 'intentional' running in one or more concentric circles. The fastest runners create an outer circle, which moves counter clockwise. Those moderately paced run clockwise in a middle circle and the walkers form an inner circle moving counter clockwise. Typically, there is a drummer in the centre to provide a pulse for the runners. Each runner dedicates her run to both individual healing for someone or something other than herself and to global healing. Anna Halprin says, "The Planetary Dance is a call for healing the economic turmoil, ongoing wars, climate change and many other problems that are threatening our planet. (1)

In terms of design, the Earth Run is a

dance of simplicity. The floor pattern is a circle. The music is a steady pulse. The dance movement is a run. Those that cannot run, walk. Those that can't walk, stand in one of the four directions - east, south, west, north. Dance historian Janice Ross states in Anna Halprin: Experience As Dance, "...Anna has evolved toward a way of bringing the sacred back into the everyday. With... the Planetary Dance, using a deliberately accessible movement vocabulary, often as simple as walking or running, she invited anyone to enter into what she has called 'the... transforming power' of dance". (2)

That June morning, surrounded by tall wild flowers and grasses, 400 participants ran in an enormous circle. As I entered the circle of runners, I called out my dedication. I heard others calling out their own dedications. I heard a poet riff on Chief Seattle's speech. "All things are connected," he chanted. "Every step is a prayer." I concentrated on my own steps one after another after another. Running feet touched the earth. My feet and all the feet ahead of me, behind me, along side of me touched the earth. Circles of runners, young and old, ran with the pulse of the drum. "We all breathe the same air." Inhaling, I breathed in the mountain air. I breathed in the poet's

chant. My breath circled into an exhalation. I let go into the concentration of the moment. The circle of runners supported me and I supported them. As my breath paused, I remembered my dedication for the run. Inhaling again, I breathed deeply and felt a surge of renewed energy. Exhaling again, my dedication travelled outward as a prayer. A red-tailed hawk circled above. Utterly focused, I concentrated on my running body - the circling spiral of my body in motion. My right foot and leg moved forward accompanied by my left shoulder, arm, hand. My spine spiralled, rotating in its inner dance. For one blissful moment both feet were off the ground. I was suspended in the clean mountain air. For one moment I was flying. Then I hit the ground running. The ancient dance of sky meets earth was my body. It was all of our bodies. We all were the dance: all 400 runners, 800 feet, the heartbeat of the drums, and the musicians, the poet, the hawk, the sun, the air, and Anna.

This exquisite experience embodied all that Anna Halprin has devoted her life to creating: art that reflects life, art that ignites creativity, art that offers resources for living life more fully, art that empowers both individuals and communities.



The roots of the Planetary Dance go back to a community crisis. Between 1979-1981, six women were killed on the trails of Mount Tamalpais. The murderer became known as the Trailside Killer and remained at large. The mountain was unsafe and off limits. At that time, Anna and Lawrence Halprin facilitated a community project entitled Search for Living Myths and Rituals through Dance and the Environment. During this, fear of the killer and loss of the mountain as a community resource arose as significant themes.

The project culminated in a performance ritual called In and On the Mountain. Enacting this ritual served to address the community crisis and empowered the community to reclaim the mountain as an important symbol and place. The fact that the killer was caught shortly thereafter served to reinforce the power of community ritual. A Huichol shaman, Don José Mitsuwa, advised Anna Halprin to repeat the ritual for five years, which she did.

During the following years, a series of performance rituals were created. These included Thanksgiving Offerings (1982), Return to the Mountain (1983), Run to the Mountain (1984), Circle the Mountain (1985) and Circle the Earth (1986).

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After Earth Run at Planetary Dance workshop, Mountain Home Studio. Photo: Taira Restar

'We must return to the resources that are really our own - our bodies and our experiences - to forge a new way of honouring peace and human dignity.'

When I came to Tamalpa Institute to train with Anna in 1983, part of my studies included these community rituals. As a Tamalpa student and then graduate, I was able to witness, participate and perform, and to gain an 'embodied' understanding of Anna Halprin's approach. In terms of Anna's community dance rituals, it was an exciting chapter to enter into. The tradition that began in response to a community crisis was evolving. The intention expanded from peace on the mountain to peace worldwide. This series of community events would develop over the years into a major facet of Anna Halprin's work.

After the completion of the five-year cycle, Circle the Earth continued on and evolved as well. As Tamalpa graduates took the Earth Run back home to their international communities, the ritual shifted into what is now the Planetary Dance, a community dance ritual. Anna Halprin still offers it each spring on Mount Tamalpais. Yet, it has expanded well beyond California. Each year it is held in more countries around the world.

On 26-28 March 2010, Anna Halprin, with support from the Planetary Dance Committee, offered the first Planetary Dance workshop held at Anna's studio on the flanks of Mount Tamalpais. This workshop was significant because it was the first time that Anna extended an invitation to people beyond Tamalpa graduates to become facilitators of the Planetary Dance. On the first evening, Anna said, "This is a highlight of my life. To see all of you here and to celebrate a particular moment, I would call it, a moment of history." The Planetary Dance workshop was designed for people who were committed to presenting the Planetary

Dance in their own communities to create a circle of Planetary Dance events around the world. The intention was for participants to acquire skills to address significant community issues and to use the Halprin Life/Art Process to create a community ritual. Nearly 30 women and men gathered from across the United States and from as far as Canada, Brazil, Europe and Israel. Participants attended for a variety of reasons. A social worker considered the Planetary Dance a way to unite people. A young mother intended to use it to bridge communities within her hometown. A French dancer planned to offer the Planetary Dance as a way to comment on the current political situation in France. It was particularly meaningful to witness participants as they anchored their workshop experiences through dancing the Earth Run. This workshop exemplified Anna's commitment to empowering others to lead their own communities in dance that has meaning and purpose.

Recently, Planetary Dance events have been offered at the Eiffel tower, on the rooftop of a New York preschool, in a downtown Phoenix, Arizona civic park, at a WWII rocket base that is now a peace memorial in Neuss, Germany, and in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem, as part of a peace education workshop sponsored by the Israel Palestine Centre for Research and Information.

Since the 1980's, I have participated in many Circle the Earth and Planetary Dance events with people of all ages. Whether there are a handful of participants or hundreds, whether we are in a schoolroom or overlooking the Pacific Ocean, each time I am reminded of the power of intention setting and the importance of

community dance ritual. We dance as individuals together. We dance as peace in action. "Every step is a prayer." Our dances join the dances of others - those dances known and unknown to us. "All things are connected."

In Libby Worth and Helen Poyner's 2004 book Anna is quoted, "We must return to the resources that are really our own - our bodies and our experiences - to forge a new way of honouring peace and human dignity". (3) As we dance the Planetary Dance across the planet, we, as individuals and as communities, forge this new way.

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Taira Restar is an artist and arts educator, serving on the faculty at Tamalpa Institute. She performs and teaches with her mentor, Anna Halprin. She facilitates events and workshops using the Halprin approach and the Tamalpa Life/Art Process.

For information on Planetary Dance
visit www.planetarydance.org,
for the Planetary Dance film
visit www.earthalive.com,
and for Tamalpa Institute
visit www.tamalpa.org

(1) EARTHALIVE, Planetary Dance, (2010). Retrieved June 1, 2010 from, www.earthalive.com/Planetary_Dance.html
(2) (p.322) Ross, Janice. (2007). Anna Halprin: Experience As Dance. University of California Press: Berkeley.
(3) (p.109) Worth, Libby and Poyner, Helen. (2004). Anna Halprin. Routledge: New York, NY.