

CRITICISM: THE CLOAKED COMPLIMENT

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I have always valued constructive criticism as a potent tool towards self-improvement. There is another type of criticism that is not meant to be constructive. This is the type that is meant to hurt, discourage or destroy another performer. As painful as this may be, what the injured party usually fails to realize is that the injurer is paying them a compliment. It is the desire to have a person do poorly or even pack up and go home that motivates the insulter. Giving in to insult is exactly what they want.

This is how it works. Let's call our dancers X, Y and Z. Dancers X and Y are threatened by dancer Z because she is talented, attractive more accomplished etc. They are under the misconception that adoration is a finite commodity, that there is not enough to go around. They try to eliminate Z by making her feel bad about herself. X and Y do not realize that adoration are unlimited when they are deserved. It does not run out. Love is not like that. Limitation and anger are not the nature of love.

I remember many years ago, I was working in one of my first Greek clubs. The singer disliked me although I had never done anything to make her feel that way. From the moment I walked into the club, she started trying to make me feel awkward. I quickly learned that when she complimented me (which was rare), it was because I was not at my best. When she told me that I did not look attractive, it was because I was sensational. In a convoluted way, she helped me become a better dancer because I learned all her remarks – once I learned the logic. I used her criticisms to work for me.

Another example may make the point more clear. I have a very dear friend who had the most beautiful hair I have ever feasted my eyes upon. She had gorgeous flaming red hair that reached the floor. Her dance performance began with her hair up. Then she discreetly pulled one hairpin out and her hair cascaded down magnificent profusion. The audience would inevitable gasp and applaud. What a show stopper! We were in the same troupe and some of the other dancer got together and decided she should keep her hair pinned up because it whipped around when she made her spins. They even went so far as to duck in an exaggerated manner when she spun. None of us was ever hit by her hair.

The demand that she keep her hair pinned up were criticisms. They were also a veiled compliment. I am sure those dancers would have preferred it if she had shaved her head bald. It did not take a rocket scientist to see that their jealousy was motivating them to try to limit her. Eventually she did not allow herself to be influenced by them, so she let her hair down AS SHE dictated, not as THEY dictated. On one such occasion, a newspaper photographer was I the audience. Her hair and her beautiful dancing go her on the cover of a magazine.

I recently talked with a very gifted dancer who was crushed because she approached a well known teacher for lessons. The teacher refused to teacher her. The excuse given was anaemic and the attitude she projected was condescending and critical. This beautiful young dancer was astonished and bewildered. I explained to her that her beauty and promise were threatening to the teacher. This teacher X did not want to give Z the tools which Z could later use to surpass X. I also described how each time we are "challenged" by such situations, we should use the experience to make us stronger. It is like tempered steel that becomes strengthened every time it does through the flame. After seeing the pain in this young dancer's face, I decided to write this article.

Many dancers who play the destructive game of criticizing others, do not even know (on a conscious level) that they are doing this. They know they dislike someone but may not be able to put their fingers on what is behind these feelings. Their caustic remarks are simply springing forth from an angry source. The end result is still painful for the Zs of our community, unless they know that **INSULTS CAN BE THE HIGHEST FORMS OF COMPLIMENTS!**

I was thinking about this several years ago when a friend of mine described the backbiting that she was encountered in the dance community. She was even thinking of leaving her dance career behind. She is a famous international star who I will conveniently call Z. I talked to her about my theories on the subject of insults. I then wrote her a letter because I always think best on computer paper. She has found my letter to be a comfort and occasionally rereads it. It is my hope that by reproducing a small part of it, other dancers who are allowing themselves to be hurt will be helped. Note that I say "allowing" because it is Zs choice to take the insult, to give it back, to quit all together or to use it to make herself better. Self improvement is always a superior solution.

"I know about the campaign that is being launched against you. I know nothing about it and I know everything about it. I have seen it too many times before. The story is ALWAYS the same – only the names changes. You know more than they do. You dance better than they ever will. You work harder than they. They know deep down in their hearts and they don't like you because of it. It is that simple. It is that complex. They hate you for demonstrating their inabilities and you do so by your very presence, your knowledge and your skills. They will attack you on every front (your dance, your personality, your appearance, your beliefs) and if that does not do the trick, they will loudly declare that what you do 'is not the REAL thing anyway.' Sometimes their attacks will be verbal (rarely to you face as such people are inherent cowards). It is more likely that they will be 'well poisoners' and will discredit you to others.

So what are you supposed to do? Become less than who you are? Of course not – although they would LOVE that. In fact, that is the motivation behind their campaign. Quitting is not part of your nature, dear friend. If it were you would have not come as far as you have. You are the type of woman who will become MORE because of this – not less..."

Incidentally, Z is still going strong. In fact, she has surpassed her criticsers by far.

It is tough lesson when we all want to believe that the dance community is an endless sea of sisterly love. There are thousands of supportive, loving dancers. There are handfuls of angry ones. They good will always outweigh the bad. So, the next time you are too overweight, thin, old, young, Anglo, dark etc..etc.; you just smile quietly. Then happily dance your heart out.

You have just been complimented.