

Dancing with the Flowers by Claire Dixon

When I first heard about Bach Flower Dances I was rather sceptical. A friend who knew of my love of dance and my love of flower essences enthused about her experience of these dances and how they encapsulated the qualities of the Bach flowers. It wasn't until I saw and then experienced first hand Martine Winnington teaching the dances on the Pier at Cromer in September 2006 during the International Bach Conference, that I began to connect to the joy and harmony these dances bring to those who dance them.



I was fortunate last September to attend a workshop with Martine in Brook, Surrey where she spent a weekend sharing her knowledge and love of the dances with 25 participants. We were a mix of ages and background, some being familiar with only the Bach Remedies and not sacred dance and vice versa. Some had come with no previous experience of either but within a short space of time that first morning the circle was filled with smiles, laughter and enthusiasm as we learnt to dance the healing qualities of the flowers into form.

Anastasia Geng, the originator of these dances, was born in Berlin in 1922 to Latvian parents. She grew up in Latvia and had a varied and challenging life coming to sacred dance at the end of the 1970's. She began, through her love of nature, to choreograph dances that reflected the qualities of Nature that surrounded her. When she discovered the Bach Remedies in 1985 she realised how many of her dances related to the Bach Flowers. Mechthild Scheffer encouraged her to write down the dances she had created after attending one of her workshops in 1992 in Germany. In 1996 *Bach-Bluten Tanze*, Anastasia's book, was published and is now in its third edition.

Each of Anastasia's dances is unique and is danced by the whole group usually in an anti-clockwise direction, in one or more circles but sometimes in free-form, or with partners. My understanding of the dances is that they embody a representation of the energy of the essence, sometimes both of its aspects - the challenge and its healing potential - or sometimes with more of an emphasis on one of these aspects.

Oak is a wonderful example of a dance that shares both aspects of the essence, with the group forming a circle, holding hands with a handful of volunteers in the middle who slowly wander, heads and upper bodies bent down with weariness and responsibility, worn down but still moving slowly to sombre, serious music. Suddenly the music changes pace and the outer circle raise their hands, forming arches for the inner circle to run and dance freely in and out of until the music changes back to the sombre tone. New dancers for the inner circle are chosen by the healed dancers as they are refreshed and released from their burdens, after experiencing the refreshment and revitalisation that

Oak remedy can bring to those worn down by the burdens of their life. The *Oak* dance embodies both aspects of the remedy which all the dancers experience, through the music, the moods it evokes and the feelings the movements generate in the dancers. Feedback from the group after the dance brought out some of the emotions that had been released, with comments such as, "I realised how tired I felt from not saying 'no' in my life and that I could say 'no' and feel a lot better for it". Nods of agreement often followed the voicing of the inner energy the dance connected with.

Vervain is another wonderful dance, also known as the Organiser's Dance, as it communicates the enthusiasm and fervour that *Vervain* is renowned for. The dance expresses how the transformation of *Vervain* energy can become positive appreciation of ourselves and others' points of view and a tempering of the fanatical approach to life that *Vervain* can become enraptured with. Part of the dance involves a humorous patting of ourselves and then the person in front of us in the circle. The balanced energy of *Vervain* is deeply felt by the end of the dance.

The *Scleranthus* dance is an eloquent expression of the chaos of indecisiveness that starts the dance by the whole group going into a huge free-flowing ripple effect as the circle undulates itself freely. Then, as the expansive music changes to a closely rhythmic mood, the group shuffles itself together closely into a circle as decision overrides chaos to create a structured form with focus and a clear direction.

The dances vary, as do the remedies, in character. Some are gentle and reflective like *Wild Oat*, some are lively and fast-paced like *Mimulus*, some just make you smile and laugh like *Walnut*. The deeply cleansing effects of *Crab Apple* could be felt almost instantaneously with the group movements. To look around the circle at the end of each dance is a powerful reflection of the transformational energy that is created. Faces not only reflect joy, happiness, laughter and enjoyment, but also profound insights, understanding and a deeper awareness of ourselves or a situation would surface. For myself I had come to the dances at a time of deep transition in my life and I found the whole workshop deeply supportive bringing clarity concerning my way forward in life. This was a totally unexpected benefit, in addition to the more obvious benefits of getting some exercise in a delightful and inspiring way in wonderful company.



A few dances were more complex, such as *Rock Rose*, that required us to dance out the shape of a five pointed star. Through repetition and gentle corrections from Martine we gradually mastered and finally harmoniously danced to perfection many five pointed stars through our circle. The harmony and sense of oneness when moving in unison with 25 others focusing on a flower is quite a unique and uplifting experience as we danced around our little flower-filled shrine at the centre of our circle, surrounded by walls with photos of the flowers and plants Dr Bach worked with.

The energy over the weekend built in a very palpable way, as is often the case when working in a group with essences. The group energy became very united very swiftly. I experienced a profound depth of emotion with certain dances and I felt that other dancers were going through similar experiences within themselves according to the dance and the remedy that was most relevant to them. At times quite intense emotions seemed to be surfacing to be cleared but on the whole the most common response was one of deep, meditative peace and harmony with joy. Most of the weekend I danced with a huge smile on my face as the movement of the energy of the essence, together with the group sharing the exquisiteness of the movements formed a unity that seemed like the perfection of the flowers themselves.

Martine's depth of experience of both sacred dance and of Bach Remedies brought a profound richness to the whole weekend. Her gentle, grace-filled presence communicated the spirit of each essence and the dance as she clearly and sensitively taught us the steps, movements and symbolism of each dance. A natural teacher, Martine inspires and encourages her students through her own natural joy and appreciation of the healing energy of both flower essences and dance.

We were lucky enough to be able to dance some of the dances outside on the cricket green, although sadly none of the cricketers had felt moved to join us on the first day - I suspect we may have formed part of their tea break conversations. Dancing outside added the dimension of the direct involvement of the four elements of earth, air, fire and water, which at times felt as though they were dancing through us.



Despite my enthusiasm for each dance I did have to sit out several dances, but watching and feeling the dance as an observer was almost as enjoyable as being part of the dance. I am now completely won over by sacred dance. It provided a new and revelatory path into the energy of the Bach Remedies and of sacred movement. Martine provided a perfect learning environment over the weekend with her gentle and kind presence. I left with a feeling of delight, harmony and a deep inner peace and definitely a lot fitter!

Reference: Anastasia Geng's Biography notes by Marianne von Schwichow from "*Bach Flower Dances 21-38*" by Martine Winnington. See www.martinewinnington.com *