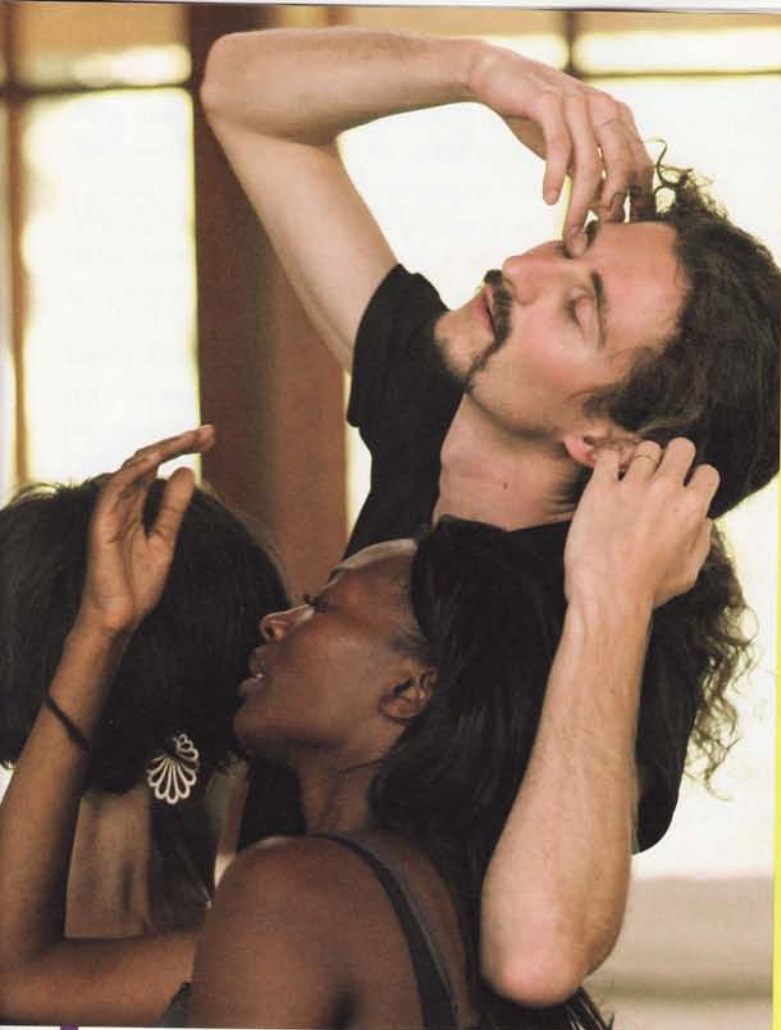




Meet the poet of human encounter. The beloved legend **ROLANDO TORO** on his signature practice, his hope for humanity, and the meaning of life.

bio danza!





bio dynamic

BIODANZA, OR “DANCE OF LIFE,” EMBRACES OVER 100,000 ENTHUSIASTIC followers, but it is more than just an uplifting dance modality. Created by clinical psychologist, poet, and painter Rolando Toro Areneda, this visionary system integrates music, movement, and authentic human connection. Over the past 50 years, Biodanza has blossomed, and now boasts 150 schools in 54 countries with over 2500 certified facilitators.

Why all the buzz? “The essence of Biodanza is universal,” says certified practitioner and facilitator Michelle Macek, who has firsthand experience of the cross-cultural appeal of Biodanza. Macek first experienced Biodanza in South Africa, later training with Rolando Toro in Brazil and Italy. “[Biodanza] provides a safe space for people to journey to a more joyful self through dance,” says Macek. “Your whole life is fused with peace and joy.” She began as a facilitator with hospice patients in Zambia and is now a certified practitioner and facilitator in the Washington, D.C., and New York City areas.

Biodanza teaches people to live by putting life in the center and communicating this through the experience of what Toro called the *vivencias*. By integrating five core aspects of human potential—vitality, sensuality, affectivity, creativity, and transcendence—Biodanza allows the whole body to be restored to a state of unity. It is a healing method that connects us deeply and profoundly to life and its power.

The concept behind Biodanza arose while Toro was chair of expressive arts at the Pontifical University of Chile in the 1960s. He then developed his methodology and a theoretical model while studying psychiatric patients at the University of Chile and the Psychiatric Hospital of Santiago. The

ARTICLE BY
KAREN MIREAU

INTERVIEW BY
BELISA AMARO

Opposite: Belisa Amaro with her mentor; a teachers training workshop in Oakland, CA.

Above: Grandson Alejandro Balbi Toro makes contact at the South Africa Encounter, 2008; scenes from the San Francisco School of Biodanza.

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model grew with the introduction of new exercises and the description and measurement of the neuropsychological effects of the exercises on different clinical conditions. Toro found that by combining the mythological power of music and dance, he could awaken a consciousness for universal solidarity and help participants recover their joy and vitality.

Belisa Amaro, executive director of the San Francisco School of Biodanza elaborates: "The beauty of this is that no dance experience is necessary," she says. "Biodanza classes have a lot of rhythm in the beginning to ground you. They then evolve to trance-like states that allow deep connection with self, others, and the universe."

Although Toro based the structure of Biodanza in the life sciences, and particularly biology, it is much more than a science-based dance modality. Biodanza is an expressive arts system whose schools follow a rich curriculum. Facilitators undergo an intensive three-year training program. Students attend workshops for 26 weekends, read scientific papers, write a thesis and, after that, complete six months as a practitioner under the supervision of another teacher.

Today, Biodanza is taught for adults, children, teenagers, and elders. The practice offers benefits for executives as well as populations at risk. Biodanza also has many clinical applications and is a valuable tool for stress management, and caring for those with Parkinson's Disease, cardiac problems, and high blood pressure.

The practice of Biodanza encompasses two-hour weekly classes as well as weekend workshops. The experience is primarily nonverbal, which fosters participants' connection regardless of their socio-cultural background. Advanced classes can be intense; experienced facilitation is essential. But at the core of Biodanza is a profound respect for all life.

"He was a human being in constant evolution," says Amaro, speaking affectionately of Toro. Until his passing at age 85, Toro continued to paint, write, play piano and lute, and travel extensively, serving as a vibrant embodiment of the life-boosting benefits of Biodanza.

ONE ON ONE with Chile's poet of Insights and inspiration from the eternal optimist whose mission was to show us how to fall in love with life.

What is the essence of Biodanza?

TORO: Biodanza is the poetry of human encounter. Biodanza is a system of integration of the human potential. At the core of Biodanza is a profound respect for all life. We are light, love, courage, beauty. When we are with other people we don't generally look into their hearts. We don't perceive the happiness, the sadness, the suffering—we seldom really look. When we do, we realize the most precious thing—that each of us is part of a totality. That realization changes the way we live our lives.

What inspired you to create Biodanza?

TORO: It was through the profound darkness that I witnessed during the Second World War. At the time, I was a professor of medicine at the Centre of Medical Anthropology in Chile, looking for educational ways by which the

human race could be helped to move forward. But I was also very aware that education was actually part of the problem and that schools and universities were in league with our individualistic, ego-based society. The film *The Wall*, with the Pink Floyd song "Another Brick in the Wall," portrays this so well.

Biodanza arose in my personal experience, and soon I discovered that its structure could be based in the life sciences and most particularly in biology. I believe that there were many forces manifested within me to finally create this coming together of art, science, and love. Everyone, for centuries, had heard about "love for our fellow man" as the purest truth of Christianity. The manifestation of human behavior, however, had become increasingly dissociated and violent.

Music was the universal language, the only thing everyone could understand in the Tower of Babel of the world. Dance was the ideal form capable of integrating body and soul. The dance experience offered all participants

5 WAYS we are alive

"What do you desire from life?" Rolando Toro asked this question to hundreds of Chilean university students and Biodanza groups in his extensive research to develop the vivencias.

Here are his definitions of each of the aspects that provide experiences of the intense perception of being alive in the present moment.

"I want to feel healthy."

VITALITY First is vitality or the energy available to live. We are the result of our fragmented civilization, which obliges us to be hypocrites and live in a false way. We lose sight of our real identity. Biodanza provides a group of exercises geared to restoring our integration, which restores our vitality. This is pure health.

"I want to enjoy pleasure."

SENSUALITY The second mode is sensuality, or our access to pleasure and our capacity for enjoyment. Generally speaking, we place an embargo on our erotic feelings and hide behind a code of "proper" behavior. This gives rise to serious conflict. Biodanza exercises awaken our sensuality.

"I want to create."

CREATIVITY The third group is creativity, the expression of our identity in art, to communicate with the language of the soul. Not just in the aesthetic

sense, but a deep creativity that transforms our lives. We need to place our creativity at the service of life! That's when it really flows and you become the true protagonist of your life.

"I want to love and be loved."

AFFECTIVITY The fourth mode I call affectivity, which is the capacity for love. Most of us find love so dangerous! Affectivity, though, is not only personal love. It is the ability to love all living things: plants, animals—even the universe.

"I want to connect with the essence of life."

TRANSCENDENCE The fifth mode is transcendence, which is the ability to see and feel further than the immediate, to experience our personal relationship with the totality. It is the acknowledgment of our own sacredness. The set of exercises that relate to this mode result in ecstasy and an expansion of consciousness.

human encounter: **ROLANDO TORO**

happiness, tenderness, and strength.

I also wanted to communicate this experience to a large number of people. From both these experiences and sensations, my desire to form small groups of people to dance, sing, and meet within the music arose. Biodanza became a way to share what was marvelous, together with others.

What happens during a Biodanza class that is different from other modalities?

TORO: Biodanza has about 250 exercises and dances whose purpose is to activate human movements in a harmonic and integrative way. In Biodanza, we integrate our motor dissociation, produced by a dissociated culture, to return the body to a state of unity. We integrate the three subsystems that operate our large system: nervous, endocrine, and immune.

We start by listening to a song, responding with movement, awakening our perception, dancing with emotion. The movement gets organized and the neurologic pathways of our brains also become organized.



FOND FAREWELL

to our dear friend and mentor Rolando Toro, who passed away as we finalized this issue, on the evening of February 16, 2010. We are honored and grateful that we were able to speak with him one last time.

"It is the ability to love all living things: plants, animals, even the universe."

— ROLANDO TORO
(1924–2010)



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I created a methodology that is being used in many schools in Europe. It's Biocentric Education. The goal in these schools is "to prepare students for the challenges of the third millennium." Biocentric Education is to teach to live. To put life in the center and teach this through experience, what we call vivencias. Biocentric education puts life in the center, gives it priority. We now know that environments can suppress or stimulate the expression of our natural genetic potentials. This is the epigenetic science that we teach in Biocentric Education.

During a class an acceleration of integrative processes happens through vivencias with music and dance in a group context.

Tell us more about your concept of vivencias.

TORO: When one receives external stimuli that can mobilize his body and his action, a "vivencial" integrative process is produced. Many of the body's illnesses come from the toxic aspects of our existence, our lifestyles. What Biodanza does with its exercises and dances is stimulate vivencias.

You are a very optimistic person, but is humanity really waking up for ecological consciousness?

TORO: Our civilization acts miserably. We humans have a lot to evolve still. We kill for "spiritual" reasons. We value intelligence over affectivity... The world known only by intelligence is limited. Decartes says, "I think, therefore I am." We need to say: "I love, therefore I am." I know I exist

when I love. We need an intelligence that is affective.

Affectivity is a state of deep affinity toward other beings, capable of originating feelings of love, friendship, altruism, maternity, paternity, and companionship. However, opposing feelings such as anger, jealousy, insecurity, and envy can also be considered components of the complex phenomenon of affectivity.

Tell us about the slogan "Biodanza, the pedagogy of love."

TORO: Biodanza is about feeling the intensity of the moment. If we are in the here and now, then life becomes fantastic and every moment is full of enchantment. I believe each embrace, each genuine dance with the other, is capable of eliminating a gun, perhaps even a bomb. The only bomb we need is the atomic bomb of love. We are an organ of our planet; we are not to dispose of it, to give priority to our economic interests.

Is practicing Biodanza a political act?

TORO: Not traditionally, but in the humanist sense. A political act for me is to walk holding hands with a friend in the streets, to embrace other fellow human beings, to exchange gazes with people in the streets. The generosity is a political act.

The wars are the expression of an affective imbecility of our times. The only way to stop them is to teach people to feel, to love.

It is essential to develop humanity's affectivity. That is the action. To feel and dance.

THE 7 POWERS OF BIODANZA REVEALED

- The Musical Power
- The Integrating Dance Power
- The Vivencial Methodology Power
- The Caress Power
- The Trance Power
- The Consciousness Expansion Power
- The Group Power

The pedagogical and therapeutic success of Biodanza is given by its effects on the organism as a whole and by its existential rehabilitative power. Each one has a transformative effect, and if linked to each other, following a scientific theoretical model, they constitute eco-factors with extraordinary effects, able to influence our genetic programming lines.

You often refer to Biodanza as “the poetry of human encounter.” How so?

TORO: The poetic interpretation is that Biodanza is a radical worldwide system that awakens our potential to live life fully. It is about falling in love with life. This means deepening our love for ourselves, our connections to others and to nature, and all that is through movement and music!

Can you explain the music?

TORO: In Biodanza we select in accordance with a system we call musical semantics. We look at the “theme,” the qualities of each song, if the song is sad, joyful, melancholic, enthusiast, if it awakens self-confidence. The musical semantics is a study of the emotional content of the music. It costs us a lot of technical work to select the songs that are appreciated for the dances we propose.

How many people practice Biodanza today?

TORO: Biodanza is now in 54 countries. We have about 150 schools teaching this system, more than 2,500 certified teachers, and an incredible number of teachers in [the process] of certification. I would say that currently more than 100,000 people practice Biodanza with regularity in the world.

To what do you attribute Biodanza’s growth?

TORO: Biodanza offers people what they most want and need: to love and feel loved, to create, to perceive the sacred in nature, to enjoy the pleasure of life, experiencing it as a wonderful miracle.

Biodanza awakens our generosity, our empathy for others, our interest in social justice. The lack of social justice is an illness. Yet, social justice cannot be obtained through ideologies or through institutions. What we need is to develop deep feelings of love for others, feel them as equals (*semellantes* in Spanish), so we do not hurt them. Ethics can only be reached with love.

What else do you do these days besides Biodanza?

TORO: I have my atelier where I paint. I am taking photography classes as well as piano classes. And I love to play the lute. I have written six books of poetry and books about Biodanza. At 85 years old, I am busy. Biodanza continues to evolve and there is still much work to do! ●



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