

FEATURE ARTICLE

CREATIVE LEAPS INTERNATIONAL CONCERTS OF IDEAS



...o, Jr. is president of Associated Solo Artists, Inc. and Director of Creative Leaps International, the company's corporate services division. Associated Solo Artists is a company of performers, creative artists and educators who collaborate in the musical concerts, *Concerts of Ideas* and interdisciplinary programs in the arts and humanities designed to spark youthful, professional and lifelong learning. The seed idea is the belief that music, learning and creative thinking are deeply similar in their underlying processes and hence can be experienced in mutually enriching and uplifting ways. Whether among school children or government executives, teachers or research scientists, ASA's performing and teaching artists have learned to harness the transformative power of music as a catalyst for invigorating learning, for nurturing personal and professional inter-related activities.

For Creative Leaps International, "Concerts of Ideas" are the key to breakthrough thinking in business and leadership education.

Washington D.C.

On July 15th, Creative Leaps International, made history as the group performed its Concert of Ideas "*Unless The Mind Catch Fire...*" at the nation's Excellence in Government Conference in Washington, D.C. with representatives of NASA, the US Treasury and other agencies. Right from the start, the Creative Leaps team drew participants into a warm, energized, celebratory experience where serious inquiry and reflection became synonymous with playful exploration and unfettered imagination. Midway through the Concert of Ideas, attendees were invited to "turn to one another" to discuss the leadership issues illuminated by the concert. Sampled responses pointed to concerns over workplace creativity and innovation, personal motivation and commitment to excellence and integrity

Castle Borl, Slovenia

July 1-4 brought the Creative Leaps team to historic Castle Borl in Slovenia for the European Arts and Business Conference. The conference convened 40 of the top performing and consulting arts groups from around the globe to share best practices and catalyze further development of the arts-business interface. Creative Leaps International offered a culminating keynote Concert of Ideas and several workshops on its unique program approaches. Acclaimed author and consultant, **Meg Wheatley**, chaired a dialogue on emerging issues and trends. Other leading practitioners included **Richard Olivier** (on Shakespeare), **Judy Brown and Michael Jones** (poetry and music), **Carol Pearson** (mythology) and **Claus Otto Scharmer** of MIT (the aesthetics of organizational development).

A Closer Look

Igniting the fire of the mind is a task for which the arts are ideally suited – as spark, catalyst and life-giving breath. “**The arts have the power to transform learning**” – and an interdisciplinary approach, powered by imaginative thinking across subject area boundaries, multiplies the effect adding “arts fire” and “arts perspective” to the whole panorama of academic studies. Through decades of educational programs, my colleagues and I at Creative Leaps and our sister division, The Learning Arts, have seen complex concepts in science and math open up their mysteries to imaginative thinking rooted in the arts. Tough issues in history and human behavior have likewise been coaxed to greater illumination by what Professor Elliott Eisner of Stamford University calls “**the mind processes of the arts**”, i.e., our mental skills in dealing with shifting perspectives, multiple layers of meaning and the ebb and flow of changing patterns. These mental happenings are none other than the everyday workings of poetry, painting and music! This kind of thinking is at the heart of everything Creative Leaps does and is what I believe Einstein was getting at when he said famously,

“Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

In the last eleven years, Creative Leaps International has pioneered a comprehensive arts-based methodology for energizing and deepening *thinking, learning and renewal* among leaders in business, government, science and education. Companies including Pfizer, G.E., McDonnell Douglas, The Bank of Montreal, Citibank, Fannie Mae and Starbucks Coffee Company have called on Creative Leaps to keynote their corporate conferences and catalyze “out of the box” thinking around issues of growth, innovation and cultural change. Executive training institutions including the Center for Creative Leadership, Wharton’s Aresty Institute for Executive Education, the George Washington University School of Business and Public Policy and MIT’s Sloan School of Management have likewise forged impromptu partnerships with Creative Leaps for special projects and enhancements of the own leadership development offerings. What’s the Creative Leaps secret? What is a *Concert of Ideas*? What’s behind the Concerts of Ideas that gets people thinking and feeling at transformative levels?

“The purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers.”
James Baldwin

The Concert of Ideas is music, poetry, theater, storytelling, virtuosic performance and imaginative dialogue across the footlights. It is Aaron Copland’s *Fanfare for the Common Man*, Bernstein’s Finale to *Candide*, Broadway classics and original compositions lined up and weaving through quotes and stories from Einstein, Picasso, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Margaret Mead, James Baldwin, Richard Feynman and Langston Hughes -- all blended and sequenced *to set the mind in motion* and help participants re-connect with the ideals and ideas they value most. Our award-winning performers use the arts as a bridge to new thinking and a bold challenge to our sense of what is possible. Every Concert of Ideas is tailored to the thematic focus of a particular event: leadership, creativity and innovation, character and integrity, the interrelation of the arts and sciences, the challenges of teaching and learning. Equally important, every performance is a celebration, wonderfully serious and great fun.

Our methodology capitalizes on basic characteristics of great art and great teaching. First of all, neither is in a hurry to formulate a bottom line “answer” to life’s most challenging

questions. Borrowing Buckminster Fuller's image, we enjoy a better ride if we go into orbit *around* our topic and sweep through all the space *surrounding* it, picking up inferences and curiosities as we go. This is especially true of the adult mind which is less hungry for more information but pretty much starved for deeper meaning.

Here at Creative Leaps International, we are particularly keen on a technique we call "creative juxtaposition". You may remember the name Gregory Bateson, a seminal thinker in psychiatry, anthropology and systems theory. He said, if you juxtapose two forms of description -- such as *art and science* or *art and business* -- that "double description" affords you an unexpected bonus of insight akin to the perception of "depth" in binocular vision -- a surprise effect not predictable from working with either of the "descriptions" alone. We all know that when we focus on something with just one eye, we see merely a monocular view -- we are unable to perceive depth. Depth "appears" when we use both our eyes at once. It is the same with our disciplines of knowledge. Each affords a discipline-based monocular view. For a more fully dimensional view, we need to juxtapose, and then integrate, the insights of several disciplines.

The arts are, for us, an ideal second descriptor, an ideal second lens for seeing into the depths of things. Our Concerts of Ideas, therefore, seek to *creatively juxtapose* ideas, insights and sensory experiences from a range of disciplines and sense modalities: music, the spoken word, pictorial imagery, movement -- always inviting that *creative leap* connecting one experience with the next and the next. Of course, we are merely prompting a basic human reflex to draw inferences between two immediate experiences. It's how we make sense of things, *mapping* one experience upon another and another as we do in metaphoric thinking. "But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks? / It is the east, and Juliet is the sun!" Juliet and the sun! What a fabulous juxtaposition! Do this sort of thing enough times and you develop "thought path legacies", habits of mind which favor creative thinking, not to mention knowledge integration. This is the prize we aim ourselves at in the design of our Concerts of Ideas and every other arts-based intervention we do, whether with NASA scientists, Federal executives or eighth graders at the neighborhood middle school. It's what the arts *can* do, and do very well.

In closing, perhaps, one more thought, this from Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers via a recent public television program. The word is *apericolia*, a Greek word referring to "a lack of experience of things beautiful". Too many of our youth, our leaders and our communities suffer from *apericolia*. Beauty isn't cool, commercial or controversial, or so some would have us believe. Our lives and work here at Creative Leaps International are a fervent stand against that darkness, a prayer and a song that would remedy this sad, sorry condition. We favor beauty!

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