

CHIMERA MAN

BY JOE ALEGADO

Preface

There was no smooth transition. One week I was teaching and choreographing a dance piece in Bratislava, Slovakia; the next week, I returned home to Budapest, Hungary, where I typed some ideas into my MacBook. With each day, I continued to build on those initial thoughts. Finally, a week later, I raised my head from the laptop screen, and I realized I had written thirty pages.

What started as a writing exercise to pass the time while waiting for the government's decision on Covid restrictions in Hungary, evolved into the creation of my first book – *Chimera Man*.

I used the word *creation*, but I actually meant the act of *choreographing* my first book. My choreographies were my only reference to the creative process, so I

approached my writing using the same instinct. There have been occasions when I have storyboarded my dance creations, yet the majority have been created with nothing but instinct – and the music inspiring it all.

I had not written anything since my high school Creative Writing class in 1970-71. Fifty years later, I was allowed to write two thesis papers: a Bachelor of Arts paper on choreography and a Master's thesis in the methodology of my work in dance. Both documents fulfilled the diploma requirements of the Budapest Contemporary Dance Academy in Budapest.

Two thesis papers – in fifty years.

Fast forward to the days before Covid; nothing or no one could have predicted this abrupt change of direction. Yet, in the end, I embraced it as part of my professional creative process.

At first, the unexpected entrance of writing into my life created an incompatibility when weighed against the constant physical activity of life as a dancer and choreographer. Sitting on my sofa and writing for hours was the opposite of what I was used to. However, I soon came to realize I didn't miss dance as much as I thought I would. And since the Covid lockdown shut down my dance work around Europe, I directed all my energies towards writing.

Dance did not altogether leave me, though. Physically, I wasn't as active, yet I intuitively referred to dance when writing. The similarities between the two continue to surprise me as they serve to confirm how much one medium feeds the other. When I'm writing, I feel this continuous cycle from the written word to the physical dance movement and looping around as the movement in dance morphs into the language I use in my storytelling.

In my choreography, each movement transitions organically to the next. The essential criteria are always – do the steps communicate the desired intention of moving the narrative forward. In my writing, each word connects to the next. The purpose is to create a synergy that feeds the story, making it stronger and more impactful than the individual words themselves. The result – emotional pacing powered by a rhythmic instinct.

In other words, both art forms originate from the same source – instinct. In my creative dance or writing process, the essential goal is to bring together a vocabulary that best expresses the story. The ultimate focus is always to establish a connective tissue that can hold the guts of the story together. To achieve this, a combination of words must create a language that can breathe life into the characters and the narrative they are moving forward. Doing this creates an environment for the characters to live and thrive.

Each character is integrated into the story through a visceral need to populate the landscape of the book with people who orbit the nucleus of the story with a sense of purpose and direction. These qualities are the human elements that personify the human condition in all its faults and weaknesses and hopes and dreams.

The book's plot created itself as intuition was the motor that generated its direction and focus. In the hands of a more experienced and accomplished writer, I suppose this approach would appear irreverent. I was aware of this, yet later I realized this approach became my advantage. Being a first-time book writer, and being that the Covid lockdown afforded me more time than I knew what to do with – I used my intuitive approach to dance as the template for *choreographing* my first book.

The characters found their voices through their organic responses to situations, environments, and impulses provoked by the plot changes – which were, in turn, shaped by instinct. Relationships came about through the character's paths intersecting in space and relative to the time in which their roles emerged in the plotline's trajectory.

As for the book's story, the seed had roamed around in my head for well over a year before the Covid shutdown. The premise: an old, homeless man, because of life's circumstances, finds himself living in a park. Unknown to him, he has set up his temporary home on a park bench which happens to be close to a dance school.

One evening, a very young ballerina from the school crosses the park and is attacked by another man. The old, homeless man saves the little girl's life. Fast forward to the grateful mother of the child, who happens to be incredibly rich. The old man is offered a wish – whatever he wants, she will grant.

And now, the book is finished, and the story is almost unrecognizable from its original premise. The old homeless man and the young dance student remain integral parts of the book, yet the rest of the story is totally different.

All words, chapters, thoughts, expressions, and plot twists made their way through the book and came about through an organic, emotional need for the *movement of words* within a given space and time. Each segment connected to the next by linking the characters' emotions to the situations and landscapes within their environments. The story's twists and turns were generated by the plot's engine – the protagonist's need to find resolution for a past life of turmoil.

This is how this book was created. I *danced* this book to life. I started it as I had always choreographed all my dance works – with my instinct and the need to feel the movement of life expressing the human condition.

Ultimately, the protagonist's path in the story was a movement piece through a performance arena. The characters involved played integral roles in the arc of this man's journey. All contributed to the story danced on the stage that is the life of this book.

Read More: <https://joealegado.com>