Script for Performance by Storyteller, Soprano and Musician
(A memory of a performance)

MOUTH

My mouth and I have had a long relationship,

long before anything my mind can remember,

but the body remembers,

the mouth remembers,

it remembers the first food, the first meal.

My mouth remembers the tastes, smells and flavours.

My mouth remembers the seasons.

The right season, when each animal or plant is fat.

The right season to collect flowers, fruit or seed.

Educating the Mouth

Storyteller: When I was growing up in a small seaside town in Queensland, quite a number of activities involved acquiring food, some were tasks like maintaining plots of pineapples and bananas, raising ducklings and chickens, Others were seasonal, gathering mushrooms in the neighbour's cow paddock, that farmer also introduced me to molasses which he kept to feed his poddy-calves, I adored it.
(Molasses tasting - spoons and bowl of Molasses)

While other neighbours had mango trees, mulberries and guavas, being a forager was a part and parcel of my upbringing, a natural part of life. I can remember my brother and one of his mates showing me how to prepare the stems of vines so they could be quickly cooked on a fire and eaten. Though he managed to stab himself in the leg with the pocket knife and taught me that skinning vines is slippery work. We hunted rabbits and once had parrot pie, only once though, they were so small, all bones and no meat, it was not worth the effort.

We fished, for yabbies and eels in waterholes, for pippis on the beach, for oysters and mud crabs in the mangroves and would row boats out to the whiting grounds or to the reef. My dad and his mates netted Australian Salmon and Mullet from the beach, the women scaled and cleaned the catch, the men cooked a feast on a wood fire, the remaining catch was taken home wrapped in damp hessian, on the remains of the block of ice that had cooled the beer.

As a boy killing animals for food was a part of life, I can remember being taken to the local abattoir and watching a calf being killed. I am not sure whether this was on a school excursion or, as my sister worked in the local Butcher Shop, it was just a casual visit. Either way, while I felt sorry for the calf, the killing did not particularly affect, possibly because it was one of my jobs to kill any non-laying chicken, for the table. Remove head with an axe, drain the blood, dip in a copper laundry tub of hot water and feathers removed, then gut. The latter was fascinating, saving the heart, gizzard, liver and searching for un-formed eggs, just yolks, if there were a number we had made a mistake re non-laying, but they were collected anyway and used in cakes. The offal was cooked, the heart and gizzard were fought over by my brother and I, being older he usually won and had which ever he fancied on the day

When I started at the National Art School, I did so as a mature age student, after working for 12 years, I suddenly found myself studying, broke, working as a cleaner at night, trying to pay a mortgage as well as feed myself. Despite having had no experience in dealing with life's necessities, having been fed, housed and clothed by the good grace of the Royal Australian Navy, I discovered the joys of cooking and given the lack of finances, the joys of cheap cuts of meat, cheap seafood and cheap vegetables used to flavour bread, pasta and rice; all washed down with flagon wine. Tongue, liver, tripe, shanks, neck chops, ox tail and pork belly. Mullet, octopus, squid and mussels, and only those vegetables and fruit that were in abundance and cheap.

If I managed to eat out, it was Little Italy, Chinatown or the Greek's. After discovering an Indonesian restaurant in the basement of an arcade in Pitt Street, I sought out obscure grocery shops for ingredients, the library for recipes, and taught myself Indonesian cooking, even if, for lack of knowledge and ingredients, there was some ad-libbing along the way. This was a great way to learn cooking and discover other food ways. Today most supermarkets carry at least the basics for numerous national cooking styles, though the downside is that our food obsessed culture has discovered the cheap and it is now expensive, beef cheeks are no longer dog food and the squid that was fish bait is served faceted like a jewel, but at least tripe has not been discovered, yet.

Musician starts playing, Storyteller leaves

The Mute Mouth

Soprano enters silently with surgical mask on her face. She pushes a mobile tray.

Through mime the soprano tells the joys and sorrows of communicating, singing and using the mouth. Silently working the various mouth props at her disposal: Removes surgical mask , tries to talk , sing but nothing is heard, picks up masking tape and sissors and tapes over mouth, cuts out various images of mouth,(photocopies of the Mouth images on the walls of the exhibition space) hold in place over her real mouth, removes tape and cuts out other images with holes cut in for tongue to penetrate, for real mouth to be seen through. Then mimes singing, does what seems like aerobic exercises for the mouth, gives up and tries to talk and scream until finally low noises are heard. Noises, growls, bass notes get louder and evolve into a sustained note as Soprano leaves the space. Musician starting low joins in and plays.

Storyteller re -enters, dressed in science lab coat with clip board, and passing out bowl/s of Chinese salted plums.

Science of the Mouth

Storyteller: When you are young , you have up to 10,000 taste buds in the mouth; on the tongue, the sides and the back of the mouth. The life of cells in each taste bud ranges from 10 to 20 days, but the replacement rate does not match depletion and in old people there are usually about 2,500 taste buds still in operation.

The little bumps on the tongue are called fungiform papillae and each has an average of six taste buds buried inside its surface tissue. Food flavours are dissolved in saliva and transported to the taste buds. There are five widely recognised basic tastes - sweet, bitter, salty, sour and savoury. As well there are seven other tastes, some of which are only recognised within specific cultures:

calcium (chalkiness) people who dislike spinach are usually sensitive to calcium
fat, (eg in various meats or ice cream)
heat (chilli, spices)
coolness (menthol or peppermint)
rich, (long slow cooked casserole)
metallic (as when your tongue touches metal)
carbon dioxide (as dissolved in soda water)

(offer around tray/s of shot glasses of red and white wine)

Flavor is a combination of taste plus smell, specifically "retronasal olfaction," which is how your brain registers scent when you eat something. For example, smelling a chocolate will send a scent message through your nostrils to one part of your brain, and eating it will send a different type of scent signal to a different part of your brain where it will combine with the signal from the taste buds to give flavour.

Other senses that affect taste are sound, sight and touch.

(Crunch up handfuls of potato crisps. Crunch in the mouth and pass around bowls of crisps for audience to crunch on. Point out that the wine they are drinking is all the same white wine; the red is just the white wine with red food colouring)

Resume Science Mode

When your Mum kissed a scratch better, it was not just a psychological placebo, her saliva contains many important substances, including electrolytes, mucus, antibacterial compounds and various enzymes.

Saliva, which is 98% water, also has a digestive function, including moistening food, to help to create a food bolus, so it can be swallowed easily. It contains the enzyme, amylase, that breaks some starches down into maltose and dextrin, starting the digestion of food within the mouth, well before food reaches the stomach.

Soprano enters, interrupting the storyteller, talking about how there are other joys that come from the mouth, it is not all science, glasses of sparking wine are served to audience, the musician has started playing softly and gradually gets louder….

The Mouth gives Forth

Soprano sings Il Bacio (The Kiss)

(If possible, by pre-performance arrangement, a couple (or more than one couple) start kissing towards the end of the singing)

Il Bacio

Sulle labbra, se potessi, Dolce un bacio ti darei.

Tutte ti direi Le dolcezze dell'amor.

Sempre assisa te d'appresso, Mille gaudii ti dire.

Ed i palpiti udirei Che rispondono al mio cor.

Gemme e perle non desio,

Non son vaga d'altro affetto;

Un tuo sguardo è il mio diletto, Un tuo bacio è il mio tesor.

Vieni ah! vien! Più non tardare, Vien d'appresso ah! vieni a me!

Ah! vien nell'ebbrezza d'un amplesso Ch'io viva sol d'amor!

Sulle labbra, se potessi Dolce un bacio ti darei.

Ah! sì, Ah! vien d'appresso a me!

Storyteller starts talking over the last fading notes of song

The Evolved Mouth

Storyteller: Human lips are everted, that is the soft red fleshy part is permanently exposed, which, according to science, is one of the evolutionary responses to early humans changing their way of walking from partially on all four limbs to vertical on two. Once we were upright the genitals, in particular the labia, normally swollen and highly coloured when in oestrus, was no longer a highly visible stimulus. This attention seeking role was transferred to the lips and the mouth.

The lips have been artificially reddened for thousands of years, and the deliberate use of suggestively gaping lip postures in films and advertising frequently underlines their role as a 'genital echo'."

When we kiss, the movement of the muscles that control our lips and tongue cause five of our twelve cranial nerves (sight, hearing, touch, smell and taste) to launch a sensory reconnaissance of our partner. If the brain's limbic system likes the incoming data, an army of chemical messengers, flitting from synapse to synapse, disseminates it to nerve cells. . ....releasing a cocktail of neurotransmitters and hormones to make us feel good. . ..

Soprano and Musician interrupt, playing loudly and singing…
Storyteller shrugs gives up and goes to food table and opens a red wine - SA McLaren Vale wine called "Passion is Red Lips") and pours a drink. (audience are served glasses of the red wine)

Soprano sings

Testosterone Testosterone foundation stone
of the libido……. it will make you moan. . .... my bambino,

Dopamine is better than wine,
for love and romance

Oxytocin,. . . . . an emotional ocean
makes you attach, to me.

Serotonin . . . .a simple regression into obsession. . ....

Endorphins. . . . . Euphoria. . . . .euphoria

Breathing deepens, Pupils dilate

the pulse. . . . . it quickens. . .

The Erotic Mouth

The Storyteller and Soprano have free form discussion, asking each other questions: On the eroticism of sound / music, what nurtures our body and our soul; music, art, food ? What builds our relationships, how does food assist good relationships. How can we feed each other. Is feeding each other erotic. Is any food an aphrodisiac ?

Storyteller: In 1963 on one of my first visits to Sydney I went to see a new film, "Tom Jones " and my relationship with food was changed forever, the banquet with Tom Jones and Mrs Waters is seared in my mind; Oysters and pears became my coming of age, so to speak.

There have been numerous movies which include the intimate relationship human beings have with food and sex, from the egg yolk in "Tampopo" , Elio and a peach in "Call me by your name" through to Helen Mirren and asparagus in "The Cook, the Thief, the Wife and the Lover" as well as "The 100 foot Journey", but I still find the scene from Tom Jones the best, mainly because of the humour and enjoyment of sensuous eating as foreplay.

It is not just the food , the circumstances and the company add a frisson of interest to a repast. Some times meals cooked for you are inextricably associated with seduction, I remember a very simple meal that was cooked on the occasion of the first visit to a lover's home, we both knew that this was definitely foreplay, the glances and small talk during preparation and cooking, the pouring of red wine, setting the table and tabling the meal, the eating of which was never finished.

Soprano : All this talk, we should act, eat and .feel food in the mouth. We will feed each other

Soprano and Storyteller feed each other an oyster off the shell – Audience served oysters and asked to share with the person next to them.

Soprano queries other uses of the tongue and of the mouth…..

Storyteller gives Soprano a fig

Soprano: I sing I sing, I open my mouth, I open

wide at the back of my throat.

My throat is a love device.

Singers know this.

Nellie Melba liked to perform fellatio before a vocal performance because the semen lubricated her throat.

Such Decadence…

Storyteller: Melba's compatriot, Soprano Millie Ryan had a less exotic approach, and maybe clear up any uncertainties about where this performance is heading…."Dried prunes are good for vocal health"

Soprano : Let's feed each other with joy, with freedom, lets feed each other a prune…...a chocolate prune,

a chocolate prune poached in white port !

Chocolate prunes on spoons shared by Soprano and Storyteller and served to audience along with more glasses of sparkling wine.

Musician plays wildly as performers and audience share food, wine and sound. - Soprano singing, Storyteller talking, people laughing— our mouths all working overtime!

Max Dingle OAM June 2021

References

What every singer should know Millie Ryan Franklin Press 1919

Melba "gossip" from various websites

Pecking Order Sharon Bradley SMH Feb 2019

Soprano text – various Annette Tesoriero from performance working documents

Il Bacio (The Kiss) Music: Luigi Arditi (1822-1903) Text: Gottardo Aldighieri (1824-1906)

Biography, Max Dingle OAM : Artist, curator and writer, graduated from the National Art School in 1974. Deputy Director of the Australian National Maritime Museum until 2009, and during this period carried out research on food in Maritime History. Since leaving the museum he concentrates on his own art practice, curating exhibitions and has authored a number of books and articles on art, culture, food and wine for the Shoalhaven Regional Gallery, Jervis Bay Museum & Gallery as well as South Coast web-sites and magazines. https://www.maxdingleart.com

Biography, Annette Tesoriero : Singer and Performance Artist since 1985, experienced work place trainer, community facilitator, arts manager. mental health literacy educator and death literacy consultant. Masters of Management, Arts , Community University of Technology 2009, BA, Linguistics, Performance Studies University of Sydney 1988.

Biography, Megan Kovalic : Bachelor of Music from the Sydney Conservatorium of Music . Teacher saxophone, piano, singing and guitar at Jervis Bay School of Music.

Mouth photography exhibition: A series of fifty images by Max Dingle. These images are published as limited edition prints and are available from the artist.

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Addendum

What the body knows (but may have forgotten):

Mouth

Performance art for voice, music, photographic installation and food

This script is a memory of a performance..

If repeated, participants are free to make up stories, music, songs as they are inspired, in the first place, by the images on the walls and also by what the other participants are singing, saying, playing or doing. The only structure to be followed is provided by the headings of each section: Educating the Mouth , The Mute Mouth, The Science of the Mouth, The Mouth gives Forth, The Evolved Mouth and The Erotic Mouth .

The work first appeared at the The Haven Experimental Art Annex as a part of the 2019 *See Change Arts Festival*, Huskisson on the South Coast of NSW. The performers were artist Max Dingle, mezzo soprano Annette Tesoriero and saxophonist Megan Kovalik. Assistance provided by Natalie McDonagh and Sam Whiteman

Link for Video - ***Mouth: a memory of a performance***

https://www.dropbox.com/s/nkwqoyrm4ykj9k7/MOUTH%20a%20memory%20of%20a%20performance.mp4?dl=0

Mouth Photographic Exhibition - a series of limited edition prints by Max Dingle.

Website: https://www.maxdingleart.com