

# VIENNA INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL COLGRASS

## WORKSHOP INTERVIEW

**V** What are your workshops about?

**MC** I teach exercises on how to tune the human instrument – the body and brain. This includes such things as how to be at your best under pressure, to maintain concentration when faced with a time limit, to feel comfortable and relaxed when speaking publicly, and to utilize your energy efficiently. When time allows, I like to go a step further, showing people how they can balance their work with all the main aspects of their lives. The exercises are simple but require practice. Many of them have been developed in my workshops for over two decades, so I've had the chance to get reports from former participants and fine-tune the exercises they serve the practical needs of most professionals.

**V** What is the goal of your workshops?

**MC** I believe that all people have -- somewhere deep inside them -- an understanding of the things that I teach. But they may not know they know it. My job is to help them discover that knowledge and to show them how to recover and appreciate it and use it to their advantage. I also want people to understand that most of their limitations are largely self-created, not inherent, and that they can create virtually any new reality for themselves that they want. Of course, when you realize your potential is greater than you thought you need to decide if you are willing to adjust your life to accommodate the changes that this discovery may bring about. But when you learn to take responsibility for your own behavior, life becomes truly interesting, because you have more choices.

**V** You call your workshops *Excellence in Performance*. Does every human being have the potential for excellence?

**MC** I believe everyone is unique. I think that discovering and developing that uniqueness is the most exciting thing a person can do. And everyone is capable of doing that. American folk singer Willie Nelson looks in the mirror every morning and says, *Proclaim your rarity!* When you understand what your rarity is, and apply it to everything you do, then you are irreplaceable, because there is no one like you anywhere. That's your value, your personal excellence.

**V** What do you like about NLP?

**MC** NLP is very much in line with my philosophy of learning. It is constructive, defining patterns of success from models of excellence and teaching these patterns to others. NLP is also results-oriented, meaning it recognizes what works in practical application, more than in theory. This appeals to me as a performer. Performers need to achieve measurable results within a prescribed time limit. When performers have a problem with their performance they need to solve it quickly, because their career depends on it. I think the same applies to all professionals who perform a skill in the public eye. NLP also emphasizes the need to communicate clearly. Today's managers, entrepreneurs, trainers and business people – in fact people in all professions -- need these skills to survive in today's competitive market place.

**V** Does your experience in the arts affect the way you give your workshops?

**MC** When I studied acting I learned that a great percentage of an actor's training is physical. So I studied mime, modern dance, ballet, even took clown training, which was great fun. When I started to give workshops back in 1971, I thought it would be beneficial for participants to experience the benefits of physical training and see how these could be applied in daily living. So I teach gesture and movement in my workshops. As well as being fun, moving your body shakes the cobwebs out of your brain and makes a day of intense learning go faster. It helps develop the total human instrument.

**V** You have given workshops in both Europe and America. How do Europeans differ from Americans?

**MC** A key characteristic of Americans is that they are strongly goal-oriented. And they visualize their goals vividly. They create pictures in their minds of what they want and then enter those pictures and start living them. As a result, Americans typically accomplish a great deal in a short amount of time, which accounts for their highly competitive nature and tendency to be aggressive.

Europeans, generally speaking, are less aggressive and impatient in nature. They are more given to thought, respectful of the intellect and non-materialistic accomplishment, and seem to take more time to enjoy their lives. Hence they are known less for their initiative than for their quality of life.

These are generalizations of course and there are notable exceptions. In fact, I have noted that Europe is becoming more and more like the U.S., probably due to the preponderance of American television and advertising and the neutralizing effect of corporate globalism.

My wife was born and raised in Denmark and I in a small town near Chicago, later living in New York. Now we live in Toronto, Canada, which has characteristics of both American and Europe. So you might say my life is a combination of both worlds.

**M** How do your workshops affect the daily lives of the participants?

**MC** The whole point of the exercises we do in my workshops is to give people practical applications for real-life situations. I want participants to be able to immediately use the techniques I show them – at home, in school, at the office, in relationships, wherever it will benefit them most. Again, the performer's model is to perform at your best under any conditions, and to be able to adjust to any changes you need in the shortest time possible.

**V** In your experience as an international artist and NLP Trainer what is the most common desire among human beings?

**MC** The desire for happiness.

**V** What do you think is the key to happiness?

**MC** In his book, *Hero With A Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell outlines one basic story shown repeatedly in our myths, folk tales, novels and religions throughout history and which is common to people everywhere. The story goes like this: The hero hears a call, responds to the call, crosses a threshold into an unknown, acquires a guardian, enters into an adventure, encounters demons – who are neither good nor evil, but only forces who become enemies or

allies depending how the Hero deals with them – and then returns to share and implement what was learned.

We've all had calls in our lives. Some of us have had more than one, some many. To respond to your call is to open yourself up to your own personal creativity, and in the discovery of that creativity lays the secret to your happiness. Campbell advises us to *follow your bliss*, meaning to do what you feel is really right for you in life regardless what anyone tells you. Of course you must be willing to respond to your call, and then be willing to cross the threshold, taking a chance on an unknown outcome. But the rewards are great because you find out who you are, which is very deeply satisfying. I think that's a pretty good definition of happiness.