Addendum: Joe Williams

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ADDENDUM

Note: Contemporary theatre practitioners continue to be influenced by Delsarte’s ideas, either through Delsarte’s own words or books about him, or through others who were influenced by him. Two practitioners responded to our call for articles, and we have included photographs and text from each of them.

—The Editors
Joe Williams, a theatre practitioner living in New York City, began teaching himself in 1995 using The Delsarte System of Expression by Genevieve Stebbins and continued with other texts. Meeting weekly with friends, he studied and practiced exercises suggested by Stebbins, Shawn, Brown and by Delsarte’s own writing. Williams’ confidence in the Delsarte technique led him to create his own teaching program, The Delsarte Project, dedicated to restoring the credibility and validity of Delsartean practice, and he has begun training other teachers. Williams asks: “How has a study based on the Law of Correspondence—‘To each spiritual function responds a function of the body; to each grand function of the body corresponds a spiritual act’ (Shawn, 31)—become identified as an ‘external’ acting technique?” In his teaching, Williams carries forward Stebbins’ admonitions against “mechanical mugging,” “imitation” and “consciously” using Delsarte while acting, and has, instead, created a range of exercises, demonstrating Delsartean principles as an illustration of human nature and body language. As taught by Williams, Delsarte is not an acting technique, but a movement
exploration that coordinates the physical language of body, mind and heart for creative work, and improves motor efficiency, reflexes and range of motion. For Williams, the Delsarte material is part spiritual practice, part physical training for actors, and part therapeutic movement. He includes Delsarte materials in yoga classes he teaches, and uses Delsarte in training actors, dancers, singers and visual artists. He frequently travels to teach seminars and master classes on Delsarte, and is currently a faculty member of the Dalcroze Institute at Juilliard, using Delsarte to teach movement to musicians and music teachers. In addition to work as a teacher, he has for five years directed The Delsarte Dance Ensemble at the Fourth Universalist Society in Manhattan.