

LAST MONTH'S SPEAKER

by Maureen Young

Last month's speaker was Ornella Marini. For twenty years, she acted and directed in the theater and cinema, but most of all she taught acting, leading seminars for students who wanted to improve their stage presence. She soon realized that she was helping them to confront not only the stage, but life. She explained to us that this is because learning to act actually consists of learning to be yourself, and that in the process you learn to listen to your gut and to your heart. Drawing on her teaching experiences and on a series of personal experiences as well, Ornella ended up developing a program of conferences, workshops, and individual sessions aimed at helping people learn to listen more deeply to their own hearts, "*a cuore aperto*", as her workshops are called. The idea is to provide techniques that can help us to heal, to grow, to improve communication with family members, co-workers and others, to make better choices, and ultimately to live more satisfying lives by getting back in touch with our bodies, our innermost feelings, our personal truths.

So how do you begin to listen to your heart? It seemed simple enough: Ornella had each of us put a hand to our heart...and listen. The idea is that the act of listening to the place where we metaphorically "keep" our feelings will allow them to surface. What did we hear? Well...one of us heard an unpleasantly fast heartbeat; one heard no heartbeat at all, one felt she heard all our hearts, and our "Queen" had a rush of pleasant memories that brought tears to her (and our) eyes. Most of us, after verifying that our heart was doing its job as usual, probably just enjoyed a minute or two of meditation, perhaps after a hectic day of listening to no one but the clock. Actually, this exercise is just one of the techniques that Ornella uses in her workshops, which include free-style dancing, meditation to



movement, acting and role playing. Later she demonstrated one of the techniques she uses by having one of us (Judy) volunteer a conflict she was having between her "heart" and her "head". She picked two of us to act as Judy's heart and head, sat us facing each other, and stepped away to see where we would take things. Though we were not privy to the nature of her actual conflict, we had a good time fighting it out anyway, then changed places and ran out of steam, perhaps illustrating that the intellect is quite capable of taking feelings into account and vice versa..

For further information on individual or group sessions for learning to listen to your heart, see Ornella's website <http://www.cuoreaperto.it>.