

## OUR WORK

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Wednesday, July 8, 2015

### Disability. Dance. Artistry. Participants' Bios

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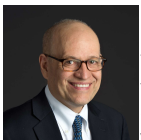
Keynote Speaker: Simi Linton (disability advocate/author)

Simi Linton is the subject of the documentary film *Invitation to Dance*, directed and produced with Christian von Tippelskirch. She is the author of *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*; the memoir *My Body Politic*; and numerous articles on disability. Linton was on the faculty at CUNY for 14 years, leaving in 1998 to write, and to develop her consultancy work with filmmakers, artists, and cultural institutions to help shape the presentation of disability in the arts and to increase the representation of works by disabled artists. She holds an undergraduate degree from Columbia University and a Ph.D. from New York University. Simi was a recipient of Barnard College's Medal of Distinction at their 2015 Commencement ceremonies.



Special Address: Victor Calise, Commissioner Mayor's Office for People With Disabilities

While riding a mountain bike in Forest Park in 1994, Victor sustained a spinal cord injury that left him in a wheelchair and without the use of his legs. Victor embraced this challenge. He got involved with disabled sports through United Spinal Association, and took up the sport of sled hockey. His dedication to the sport would take him to Japan in 1998 where he represented the United States on the sled hockey team in the Paralympics. In 1997, he began working with United Spinal Association as Recreation Coordinator. He was promoted up the ranks until he reached the title of Director of Sports Marketing. In October of 2006, Victor took on a new challenge, joining the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation as ADA Coordinator. The New York City parks system is a historic collection of properties, most of which were designed and built prior to accessibility requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While at Parks, Victor coordinated an effort, worked on by staff at all levels, to improve compliance with the ADA agency-wide. Additionally, Victor was tasked with preparing a transition plan to increase accessibility in the city's parks, beaches, recreation centers and other facilities. On February 17, 2015 Mayor Bill de Blasio reappointed longtime disability advocate Victor Calise as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). Victor was originally appointed Commissioner of MOPD by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in June 2012. While acting as the disability policy advisor to city agencies and the Administration, Victor's other responsibilities include: working to spearhead projects, partnerships and initiatives that better the lives of people with disabilities; advocate for the passage of legislation that will help the disabled community; and acting as the Chair of the Accessibility portion of the 2008 NYC Building Code revision process. Victor currently lives on the Upper West Side of Manhattan with his wife and two children.



Special Address: Tom Finkelpearl, Commissioner, New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

Tom Finkelpearl is the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. In this role he oversees city funding for nonprofit arts organizations across the five boroughs and directs the cultural policy for the City of New York. Prior to his appointment by Mayor Bill de Blasio, Commissioner Finkelpearl served as Executive Director of the Queens Museum for twelve years starting in 2002, overseeing an expansion that doubled the museum's size and positioning the organization as a vibrant center for social engagement in nearby communities. He also held positions at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, working on the organization's merger with the Museum of Modern Art, and served as Director of the Department of Cultural Affairs Percent for Art program. Based on his public art experience and additional research, he published a book, *Dialogues in Public Art* (MIT Press), in 2000. His second book, *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Duke University Press, 2013) examines the activist, participatory, coauthored aesthetic experiences being created in contemporary art. He received a BA from Princeton University (1979) and an MFA from Hunter College (1983).

#### Dance Makers on Disability



Moderator: Deborah Jowitt (dance critic/author)

Deborah Jowitt began to perform professionally in 1953, to choreograph in 1961, and to write about dance for *The Village Voice* in 1967. She has published two collections: *Dance Beat* (1977) and *The Dance in Mind* (1985) in addition to *Time and the Dancing Image* (1988) and *Jerome Robbins: His Life, His Theater, His Dance* (2004). She edited and contributed to *Meredith Monk* (1997). Her essays have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, and her criticism is now published at [artsjournal.com](http://artsjournal.com). She lectures and conducts workshops worldwide, as well as teaching in the Dance Department of New York University's Tisch School of the Arts.



Panelist: Sidiki Conde (Founder, Tokounou All Ability African Music and Dance)

My birth roughly coincides with Guinea's independence from French colonization, and I came of age artistically in a country whose president, Sekou Toure, considered culture to be its greatest national resource. In Guinea traditional music and dance are the vehicles by which people connect to their community. The performance of specific rhythms and dances are essential to the ceremonies associated with marriage, birth, baptism, the production of food and all other key events in a community's life. The national dance and music ensembles rehearsed in the presidential palace. During this time and at the behest of Toure, myself and other artists traveled to remote villages to learn the songs and dances of Guinea's 26 different ethnic groups in order to preserve and celebrate the rich cultural diversity of Guinea and unite the country. In this way, though Malinke was my born tradition I learned the languages and traditions of the Phuel, Toma, Susu and many other ethnics.

My music comes from the traditional rhythms of Guinea. Harmony is created by a series of melodic rhythms that are played by each of the instruments (kora, balafon and traditional drums). In my process I sing each instrument's particular melody to my musicians. In keeping with the West African griot traditions of my homeland the lyrics are my own compositions within which I chronicle my community's journey. In cultures where very few can read or write histories are passed by word of mouth from generation to generation. African traditional music is a

living art form; it speaks of present conditions. Music is never a solitary action for me. Music has always been about bringing together people and creating communities.

I lost the use of my legs when I was fourteen. Being disabled was devastating because in Guinea people with disabilities are thought to bring shame and bad luck upon their family and village. To protect the larger group, disabled people are sent away from their homes, cut off from the ritual and daily lives of the community. My case was no different. After my paralysis, I was taken out of school and sent to live in my grandfather's village deep in the forest. When the time came for the coming-of-age ceremony where the young men dance the traditional steps into manhood I knew if I did not participate in this ceremony ~ if I did not dance ~ I would forever remain separate and cut off from my community. I reconstructed the traditional steps dancing on my hands instead of my feet. I found a way of moving that was true to the traditional rhythms and steps while also being true to the capacities of my body. I sang and danced at the coming-of-age ceremony and reconnected with my community and my culture. I continue dancing and singing to reaffirm that connection.

I came to America in 1998 and founded my company Tokounou Dance Company \_All Ability African Music and Dance. In 2007 I was awarded the National Heritage Fellowship-Lifetime Honors from the National Endowment of the Arts.



Panelist: Heidi Latsky (Founder and Artistic Director, Heidi Latsky Dance)

Montreal-born Heidi Latsky founded Heidi Latsky Dance (HLD) in 2001. HLD's mission is to redefine beauty and virtuosity through performance, discourse, and educational activity. In 2006, Heidi began The GIMP Project, a body of work that includes dancers with and without disabilities. The Project has been presented nationally (August Wilson Center, Chicago Humanities Festival, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, TEDxWomen, Alverno Presents, Lied Center, Flynn Theater) and internationally (Nepal, Germany, Ireland, England) and is the subject of an Emmy-nominated news feature; an AP multimedia piece; CNN, NET and NPR stories; and a documentary short by Richard Move (Lincoln Center premiere, 2014). As part of the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and by invitation from the Commissioner at the New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, HLD will coordinate and participate in free performances in all five boroughs of NYC throughout July 2015. Upcoming performances also include the American Dance Festival, and the premiere of a site-specific work at The Atrium at Lincoln Center in Fall 2015.



Panelist: Kitty Lunn (Founder and Artistic Director, Infinity Dance)

Almost 29 years ago, Kitty Lunn (Founder and Artistic Director, Infinity Dance) slipped on ice, fell down a flight of stairs, and broke her back, leaving her a paraplegic. Having been a dancer her entire life, Lunn had to find a way to keep dancing. In the fall of 1995, she founded Infinity Dance Theater, a nontraditional dance company featuring dancers with and without disabilities. Infinity Dance Theater is committed to bringing the joy and drama of motion and movement to a new level of inclusion by expanding the boundaries of dance and changing the world's perception of what a dancer is. To this end, she has developed a wheelchair dance technique strongly rooted in and growing out of the technique of Classical Ballet and Modern Dance and feels very strongly that without technique and the pedagogy to train dancers with disabilities, we truly discriminate against them.



Panelist: Alice Sheppard (dancer, academic, activist)

As a choreographer and dancer, Alice Sheppard is driven to create movement that troubles the conventional understandings of disabled and dancing bodies. Her choreography has been commissioned by MOMENTA (Chicago), presented in New York, and experienced in universities across the United States. After performing in works by Marc Brew, Sonya Delwaide, David Dorfman, Kim Epifano, Joe Goode, Shinichi Iwa-Koga, Alex Ketley, Margaret Jenkins, Victoria Marks and Kate Weare, Sheppard began a freelance dance and choreographic career. She has danced in projects with Marc Brew, GDance, Ballet Cymru, Marjani Forté, MBDance, Infinity Dance Theater and Steve Paxton. She also performs solo work and academic lectures throughout the United States. Sheppard recently performed as a guest artist with Full Radius Dance Company, MOMENTA, and AXIS Dance Company. Presently, Alice is collaborating with maverick performing artist Baraka de Soleil on a duet project grounded in representations of disabled, racialized bodies.

### Presenting Dance & Disability



Moderator: Mario Garcia Durham (Executive Director, Association of Performing Arts Presenters)

In October 2011, Mario Garcia Durham became the fifth executive director of the Association of Performing Arts Presenters since its founding in 1957. He came to APAP from the National Endowment for the Arts where he was Director of Artist Communities and Presenting. At the NEA, Durham was a contributing team member of such programs as An Evening of Poetry hosted by the President and Mrs. Obama, the NEA Opera Honors, and he inaugurated the Artist Communities granting program. After holding numerous management positions and serving as performing arts director of the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in the 1990s, he founded Yerba Buena Arts & Events in 2000, the producing organization of the annual Yerba Buena Gardens Festival. This outdoor event offers more than 100 free performances by the San Francisco Opera, the San Francisco Ballet and more for an audience of 100,000 attendees. Durham has previously served on numerous boards including Galeria de la Raza and APAP's board and executive committee. He is currently a board member of the Alliance of Artist Communities, National Center for Creative Aging and the Cultural Data Project and is board chair of the Performing Arts Alliance. He is also on the WETA Community Advisory Council and the American University Arts Management Advisory Council.



Panelist: Jerron Herman (writer/dancer)

Jerron Herman is a writer-dancer from California who originally came to New York to produce theatre. In 2012 he was introduced to HLD, having never trained as a dancer, and is celebrating his third season with them. The New York Times called his work in HLD's world premiere Triptych "Inexhaustible" and he hopes to live up to that standard of dancing in every performance. As a dancer and a writer, Jerron is simply passionate about exposing great art to people.



Panelist: Heidi Latsky (Founder and Artistic Director, Heidi Latsky Dance)

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Panelist: Jed Wheeler (Executive Director for Arts & Cultural Programming, Montclair State University)



Jedediah Wheeler is the Executive Director for Arts & Cultural Programming at Montclair State University. He is recognized as a producer of theater, dance, music, opera and performance art, often fostering milestones in multi-disciplinary approaches to these art forms. Wheeler is artistic director of Peak Performances, the internationally acclaimed presenting program that celebrates artists and audiences of our time. He is the recipient of a Village Voice OBIE Award for Outstanding Achievement as creator and producer of *Serious Fun!* at Lincoln Center. The dance artists he has worked with in course of his career include: Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown, Twyla Tharp, David Gordon, Molissa Fenley, Ushio Amagatsu as well as more recently Bill T. Jones, Wayne McGregor, Richard Alston, Susan Marshall, Heidi Latsky and Liz Gerring to highlight but a recent few. He is the producer of the experimental program *Dance for Film on Location* at Montclair State University funded by from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. On June 18, 2015, the New Jersey Theatre Alliance and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts presented Peak Performances at Montclair State University with a Cultural Access Network (CAN)

Innovator Award for its innovation and commitment to increasing access to the arts for people with disabilities. Wheeler is indebted to the Association of Performing Arts Presenters for its unswerving belief in the importance of "the new" in building bold cultural communities fostered by institutions of higher education.

#### Developing Artists: Spaces, Access & Education



Moderator: Beth Bienvenu (Director, Office of Accessibility, National Endowment For The Arts)

Dr. Beth Bienvenu is the Director of the Office of Accessibility at the National Endowment for the Arts, where she manages the NEA's technical assistance and advocacy work devoted to making the arts accessible for people with disabilities, older adults, veterans, and people in institutional settings. She provides guidance and support to state arts agency staff and professionals working the fields of arts access, creativity and aging, arts and health, universal design, and arts in corrections. Prior to coming to the NEA, she worked as a Policy Advisor for the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), where she analyzed public and private sector policies and practices related to the employment for people with disabilities. She also served as an adjunct professor for George Mason University's Master of Arts in Arts Management program, where she taught courses in arts policy and comparative international arts policy, and she has a background in performing arts management. Dr. Bienvenu has master's degrees in sociology and arts administration and a doctorate in organizational leadership.



Panelist: Cora Cahan (President, New 42nd Street Studios)

After a distinguished career as a dancer, Cora Cahan metamorphosed into an effective arts administrator, co-founding and serving as Executive Director of the Feld Ballet, developing the Lawrence A. Wien Center for Dance and Theater familiarly called "890 Broadway," and acquiring and transforming the Elgin Cinema into the award-winning Joyce Theater, New York's pre-eminent theater for dance.

In 1990, Cora Cahan was recruited to become President of THE NEW 42ND STREET SM, a non-profit organization established by New York State and New York City charged with restoring and finding appropriate uses for seven neglected historic theaters on the blighted block between Broadway and Eighth Avenue. The renewal of 42nd Street began in December 1995 with the rehabilitation and restoration of The New Victory® Theater, New York's first theater totally devoted to children and families. Over the course of the following ten years, THE NEW 42ND STREET SM initiated and supervised the transformation of the remaining theaters and designed, built and operates the NEW 42ND STREET STUDIOS SM, a \$34.7 million facility which houses rehearsal studios, offices, and a 199-seat black box theater, SM; thus creating a permanent work place for performing artists and the creative process on 42nd Street.

Ms. Cahan serves on the Boards of The Park Avenue Armory; The Times Square Alliance and The Center for Architecture Foundation (NY AIA); is a member of Bessie Awards Steering Committee; and on the CalArts Board of Governors. She is Founder and Trustee Emeritus of both the Joyce Theater and Eliot Feld's Ballet Tech. She has served as a panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts. She has been a member of the Governor's Commission Honoring the Achievement of Women in New York State, and the Advisory Commission to the High School of Performing Arts, and served on the Board of Directors of the Greenwich Village Historic Preservation Society and NYC & Company. She has been the recipient of a number of awards for public service, including the 2001 New York State Governor's Arts Award. Ms. Cahan is married to Bernard Gersten, Founding Executive Producer of Lincoln Center Theater, and Jenny and Jilian are their two grown daughters.



Panelist: John McEwen (Executive Director, New Jersey Theatre Alliance)

John McEwen has served as the Executive Director of New Jersey Theatre Alliance since 2001. Prior to the Alliance, John served as Vice President for Development of the New Jersey Network Foundation where he was responsible for providing the leadership for an annual fund goal of more than \$7 million in support of NJN Public Television and Radio's programs and services. Prior to joining NJN, John served as the Director of Development for Paper Mill Playhouse where he oversaw all fundraising activities, long-range planning, and board development. John provided the leadership for Paper Mill's successful \$10 million capital campaign.

John developed the Alliance's Cultural Access Network Project in 1992, for which he received the inaugural Leadership Award in Access from The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and The Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation. John serves as Vice President of ArtPRIDE NJ, and he is a trustee of the Farleigh Dickinson Nonprofit Leadership Program and of the New Jersey Fund for the Blind. John has served as an adjunct professor in arts management at Seton Hall University, Drew University, and New York University.

John has consulted numerous organizations on board development, long-range planning, fundraising, and cultural access. He received a BA from Montclair State University and an MA from New York University. John is a graduate of Leadership/New Jersey and was selected as one of 50 nonprofit arts leaders to participate in the Executive Program for Nonprofit Arts Leaders at Stanford University, a partnership of Stanford and National Arts Strategies. When John is not attending the theatre, he enjoys cooking, collecting glass art, and anything to do with the water –boating, sun bathing, swimming.



Panelist: Nicholas Viselli (Associate Director, Theatre Breaking Through Barriers)

Nicholas Viselli is the Associate Director of Theater Breaking Through Barriers, the only Off-Broadway theater dedicated to advancing the work of performers with disabilities. He has been a core member of TBTB since 1997 and has performed or directed in nearly every production since that time. He has also served as the company's sound designer and travel coordinator. In NYC, he has also worked with the Pearl Theater Company, Performers Access Studio, The Oasis Theater and The Riverside Shakespeare Co., to name a few. He studied at the Royal National Theater in London and is a graduate of Hofstra University.



Panelist: Alexandria Wailes (actor)

Alexandria Wailes teaches American Sign Language with the Sign Language Center and is a teaching artist with Interactive Drama for Education and Awareness in the Schools (IDEAS). In addition, she is a docent for the Intrepid Museum and the Lower East Side Tenement Museum, and an educator at the Whitney. Wailes is an actor, and has worked on Broadway and upon stages around the world, in addition to making appearances on television and in independent films.

#### Creating Disabled Artists: Dance Education For Disabled School Children in NYC Public Schools



Moderator: Stephen Yaffe (Chair, Arts In Special Education Consortium)

Stephen Yaffe is an arts and education consultant and former professor. His professional development work has been praised by the Director of Education Programs for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting as being "brave, visionary, smart." He has mentored classroom teachers, teaching artists and arts administrators nationally, served as the VSA Teaching Artist Fellows coach, and has led professional learning communities in inclusive practices and Universal Design for Learning across the country. Additionally, he has provided training to those working in the field of disability in Croatia, Egypt, Ghana, Haiti, Hong Kong, Jamaica, India, Paraguay, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Stephen has evaluated numerous arts-in-education initiatives and conducted many needs assessments, including one of the New York State Council on the Arts' Arts-In-Education Program, and one of special needs students and the Arts in NYC Public Schools, K-12 (under the auspices of VSA). Stephen is a founding member and Chair of The Arts in Special Education Consortium. A graduate of the Yale School of Drama, Stephen's plays have been produced at the New York Shakespeare Festival, Playwrights Horizons and other venues. He is currently writing screenplays with his wife and writing partner, Barbara Vaccaro.



Panelist: Paul King (Executive Director, Office of the Arts and Special Projects at the New York City Department of Education)

Paul L. King is the Executive Director of the Office of the Arts and Special Projects at the New York City Department of Education. Previously, Mr. King served for four years as the Department of Education's Director of Theater Programs. Paul was previously the Director of Education and Community Service for New York City Opera; a position he had held for seven years. As a stage director, Mr. King has directed for New York City Opera, Houston Grand Opera and Los Angeles Opera among others. He was also the Festival Administrative Manager for the Central City Opera and Director of the Young Artist Training Program for Glimmerglass Opera. Mr. King has served as an artist educator for various opera companies and theaters with over twelve years' experience in high school, middle schools and elementary school instruction. Additionally, Mr. King has been an adjunct professor for Brooklyn College Performing Arts Management Program and worked as a guest artist for singer training programs at Chautauqua Opera, The Glimmerglass Opera and The Manhattan School of Music and SUNY/Purchase. Paul was the recipient of the 2015 Arts Education Focus Award from Magic Box Productions, the 2008 Broadway Theatre League's Apple Educator Award and was a member of the Mayor's Task Force on Diversity in Film, Television, and Commercial Production in New York City. He also served as a member of the New York City Board of Education's Pre-Professional Advisory Committee for Performing and Visual Arts. Mr. King holds a B.A. in Theater from the Colorado College and a M.F.A. in Performing Arts Management from Brooklyn College.



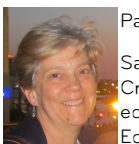
Panelist: Zazel-Chavah O'Garra (Artistic Director, ZCO/Dance Project)

Zazel-Chavah O'Garra is an accomplished dancer, actor, model, and brain tumor survivor. A Presidential Arts Scholar, she has performed with Mark Dendy Dance Company and Alvin Ailey II, as well as at the first Black History Month program on disability at the White House. A recipient of the John F. Kennedy Center (VSA) National Teaching Artist Fellowship, she teaches Modern, Jazz and African Dance master classes worldwide. She recently released a DVD, *Dancing Beyond Disability*, for individuals with mixed abilities. She is the Artistic Director of ZCO/DANCEPROJECT, which is comprised of dancers who are "Dancing Beyond Disability" with passion, drive, soul, and perseverance. She holds degrees from SUNY Empire State College, University of Michigan, and Fordham University.



Panelist: Ana Ines Rubenstein (Dance Teacher, Full Time Dance Teacher, Manhattan School For Children, PS 333)

Ana Inés Rubinstein is the full-time Dance Teacher at the Manhattan School for Children (PS333), where she developed a physically integrated dance program that includes children with physical disabilities in the general dance program. She was also among the early teachers to develop the Dual Language Program at the Cypress Hills Community School (PS89) in Brooklyn. She is an active member of the National Dance Education Organization, a Mentor for the Hunter College Arnhold Graduate Dance Education Programs, and a member of the curriculum writing team for the 2015 revision of the New York City Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts.



Panelist: Sandi Stratton-Gonzalez, MA (Dance Specialist, The Children's School)

Sandi is the Dance Specialist at The Children's School, an inclusive public elementary school in Brooklyn, where she teaches Creative Dance and oversees enrichment programs. She is also an adjunct professor at Hofstra University teaching dance education majors. Sandi is co-author (with Katherine Gallant, Diane Duggan) of *Dance Education for Diverse Learners: Special Education Supplement to the Dance Blueprint*, and her thesis research was published in *Dance: Current Selected Research Volume 7* (Lynette Young Overby and Billie Lepczyk, editors). Her most recent article, *A Movement and Music Program for Children with Autism*, was published in the premiere issue of *Dance Education in Practice* in April of 2015. Sandi was the founding Artistic Director of Soundance Repertory Company (1985-2000). Her choreography has been presented at venues throughout the Northeast.