

Disability. Dance. Artistry.

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Dance Service New York City, Inc.'s (DBA Dance/NYC) mission is to promote and encourage the knowledge, appreciation, practice, and performance of dance in the metropolitan New York City area. It embeds core values of equity and inclusion into all aspects of the organization. Dance/NYC works in alliance with Dance/USA, the national service organization for professional dance.

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TESTIMONY

"Timed to coincide with the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act, Dance/NYC brought together an impressive convening of both people with and without disabilities to focus on dance and disability. Dancers, choreographers, disability advocates, government officials, educators, and funders gathered—all interested in the advancement of dance to those who are often left out of the equation because of preconceived notions that people with disabilities don't dance. They do. Dance/NYC has demonstrated the vision to bring equity to dance through both its research and capacity to instigate important dialogue. I am happy that the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities can play a role as a collaborator in this important work and we applaud Dance/NYC for its leadership."

Victor Calise, Commissioner,
New York City Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities

TESTIMONY

"Once again, Dance/NYC has put forth thoughtful, forward-thinking research that frames inclusivity as an urgent matter with concrete steps we can take to make sure that all New Yorkers have the opportunity to access and engage with our vital dance community. As the Department of Cultural Affairs embarks on our own diversity initiative and the development of the City's first comprehensive cultural plan, we are honored to have Lane Harwell and Simi Linton as members of the Cultural Affairs Advisory Commission, where they will bring the deep insight and sensitivity captured in *Disability. Dance. Artistry.* to help guide these important activities and ensure that all of our work integrates the needs of people with disabilities."

Edwin Torres, Acting Commissioner,
New York City Department of Cultural Affairs

TESTIMONY

"The Department of Education is committed to ensuring that every child receives a rigorous arts education, and we have acted to support and expand access to dance and other arts education for students with disabilities. The *Disability. Dance. Artistry.* report is a call to action for a future where artists with disabilities flourish, and we will continue to work collaboratively with schools, parents and families, community-based organizations, and across City agencies towards this goal."

Paul L. King, Executive Director, Office of Arts and Special Projects,
New York City Department of Education

INTRODUCTION

More than a report on the status quo, *Disability. Dance. Artistry.* is a game changer in a growing movement toward a cultural ecosystem that expressly and equitably includes the disability community. It puts disability front and center as a positive artistic and generative force and advocates dance making by and with disabled artists.

The study extends generations of work by artists, activists, and academics, and responds directly to Dance/NYC's quantitative research, [*Discovering Disability*](#) (2015), and to a seminal [conference](#) it presented as part of ADA25NYC, the City's celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The qualitative findings and recommendations are grounded in dialogue surrounding the conference, and draw from a wide range of both disabled and nondisabled stakeholders.

The learning offered is an accelerator. By showing how dance made by and with disabled artists grows the art form's creative and progressive potentials, and how it delivers innovation, excellence, and impact, these pages make the case for removing systemic barriers and for working with disabled artists from the classroom to the stage.

Because the study pulls in so many voices and ideas, it offers meaningful individual entry points for every reader, while exhorting collaboration as a way to effect change.

New York City government is particularly well positioned for leadership. The study offers a dozen preliminary considerations for how to address disability through a comprehensive cultural planning process that was recently mandated by City Council, as well as reflections on how to enhance arts instruction for disabled students in the public schools—strengthening the pipeline for professional artists.

Dance/NYC's recommendations for the cultural planning process are both practical and bold, from employing a disability expert and mining interagency opportunities to laying the groundwork for a global center for disability arts, which would significantly evolve New York's role as a cultural capital. Without explicitly addressing usability and the meaningful participation of disabled people through the planning process and implementation, the City cannot realize an equitable cultural policy.

There is work everyone can do to advance art making by and with disabled artists. As examples, for grant makers, the study underscores how investing in disabled artists would have an exponential benefit for the future of the creative sector and society at large. For dance educators, the study points out opportunities for growing inclusive classrooms and expanding career readiness for disabled students. For companies, facilities, and presenters, it is a call to action for increased programming with disabled artists and a tool to improve communications, physical, and programmatic access. For my colleague service organization leaders, it offers that by developing a network focused on disability matters and partnering with government, we can play a critical role in achieving scale.

For Dance/NYC, the study continues a multi-year organizational effort to increase inclusion and access to the art form for the disability community that includes research, accessible online information resources, and convening. It has also changed and challenged all of us at Dance/NYC to live more fully in our organizational values of equity and inclusion. I invite you to visit [Dance.NYC](https://www.dancenyc.org) for evolving news and resources.

Finally, while Dance/NYC is mission-focused on a specific discipline and geography, the issues it is addressing through this study are arts and culture-wide and exist on national and international stages. Scaling the learning nationally through convening, with collaborators including AXIS Dance Company and the national organization Dance/USA, is an imperative for our next phase of activity.

On behalf of Dance/NYC's Board of Directors and committees, I am pleased to thank the project's funders, especially The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Stavros Niarchos Foundation, and New York State Council on the Arts; the City of New York, especially the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, Commissioner Victor Calise, and organizational partners Inclusion in the Arts and Art Beyond Sight for their critical collaboration on all aspects of this project; and research consultant Anne Coates, equity and inclusion coordinator Michele Kumi Baer, intern Gregg Mozgala, and the whole Dance/NYC staff for their work on the ground. Above all, I thank the members of the [task force](#) established for this project, and the many interlocutors and essayists, for lending your voices to guide the organization and the dance field forward.

With thanks also, dear reader, for all you may do in response to this report.

Onward,

Lane Harwell
Executive Director

CORE VALUES OF EQUITY & INCLUSION

Dance as an art form provides expression, celebration, exploration, and transformation for all people. Inclusion and equal treatment of all members of the dance community in the metropolitan New York City area are core values of Dance/NYC and central to its mission.

In achieving core values of equity and inclusion, Dance/NYC is committed to diversity in every aspect of its programming and services. "Diversity" in this context refers to groups, communities, and individuals identified by dance genre or form, race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, age, or disability status. "Inclusion" means a commitment to making all members of the dance community feel welcome and comfortable at Dance/NYC. Dance/NYC is committed to honoring, nurturing, and advancing dance through the lens of diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunity in all aspects of its programming, services, and organization.

Dance/NYC demonstrates its commitment to the core values of equity and inclusion by:

- ✓ Recruiting and retaining membership, leadership, and staff who reflect the diversity of the communities in which it serves;
- ✓ Providing educational and professional development programs, research, publications, and policy positions that are relevant and culturally competent;
- ✓ Acting as a leading voice in the dance and greater arts community for the recognition of the challenges to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and providing a platform for the honest and open exploration of paths toward a truly inclusive dance community in the metropolitan area; and
- ✓ Supporting Dance/USA's development of national standards, in conjunction with Dance/USA's overall mission, that promote and encourage the dance community to be knowledgeable and sensitive to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Dance/NYC acknowledges the acute need to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of dance groups, dancers, choreographers, and administrative/management staff from historically excluded populations who are currently underrepresented in the dance field.

**DANCE/USA'S NATIONAL STATEMENT ON AND CORE VALUES OF EQUITY AND INCLUSION,
AS ADAPTED FOR DANCE/NYC AND ADOPTED BY DANCE/NYC'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS.**
[DANCE.NYC/ABOUT/EQUITY-AND-INCLUSION](https://dance.nyc/about/equity-and-inclusion)

FOREWORD

Cultural Territories of Disability

Simi Linton



"Dance," "disability," and "artistry" met on a sultry summer day in New York City. These three had appeared together before on various stages, but the 2015 Dance/NYC convening signaled an intention to make their meetings less random and more sustained and pervasive.

I have over the years participated in many conversations on the nexus of dance, disability, and artistry, but they were generally within forums devoted to disability arts and scholarship. What the Dance/NYC convening did was to hold this conversation with creative leaders and decision makers in the professional dance world.

I was honored and excited to present the keynote address. What follows are my remarks, with some new thoughts and reshaping as a result of my experience of that transformative day.

In considering disability and dance, and considering the purpose of this convening, there is a fundamental question we should ask of this day: Are we here to further Disabled people's¹ efforts toward equity, fairness, and opportunity, or are we here to expand definitions and practices of dance?

In other words: Are we here to foster social change, or here to foster artistic change? Are we here to do something for Disabled people, or are we here to do something for dance and for all of us who love dance?

Are these mutually exclusive and incompatible ideas?

Now, the folks at Dance/NYC are fair-minded people, but they would not have put the enormous effort they have into this endeavor if they didn't feel that *dance* itself would be the better for it. Though they are kind, this is not about doing a good deed. Desegregation is a legal matter—and if we were

solely concerned with preventing discrimination, we would seek remedy in the legislature and the courts, not in a convening to discuss broadening the creative process, and making the practice of dance more inclusive.

And yet... **Putting Disabled dancers onstage is an action with consequences. The social meanings of disability inevitably shift as a result of witnessing Disabled people dancing.** Their appearance causes audience members to ask where they'd been before. Their presence asks people to reexamine beliefs and stereotypes. Disabled people onstage—whether in dance or in other performing arts—marks a dramatic shift in recognizing our² presence in the world. **When our presence demonstrates our agency, creativity, and unique perspectives, this act enhances the group's cultural authority.**

Throughout history the arts have served as a testing ground for society's most sacred beliefs and aspirations. **Therefore, the arts play a vital role in shaping our democracy—by provoking, revealing, reimagining, showing a new path.** In so many ways, the arts have stimulated thinking about race, about gender, about war and peace, about contemporary life—just the kinds of ideas that an informed citizenry needs to grapple with.

Ideas about disability have been “tested” on audiences since Sophocles, yet the mainstream art world, including major cultural organizations/institutions, as well as many of those on the fringe, have done little to open up ideas about disability, and explore the subject as well as the subjects in any meaningful way. It's a strange paradox: **Disability is both prevalent and yet invisible in all manner of cultural work—a reflection, perhaps, of our numerical presence in the world, and our simultaneous marginalization and isolation in society. While representations abound, they rarely increase the cultural authority of Disabled people, nor do those representations deepen audience understanding of our lives and thoughts, or the social factors that shape our experience.**

There are notable exceptions to these generalizations—work across the arts created largely by or with Disabled artists—where innovative and exciting work opens up disability and engages with it. I will be discussing some of these exceptions and growing recognition of this work: **the culturati are beginning to recognize the criperati.**³

Theatre, film, and literature have the capacity to explicitly take on disability, while more abstract representations in painting and dance, for instance, can engage these ideas and stimulate our thinking as well. Yet in the art that the general public is exposed to, the dominant culture's rendition of the disability experience prevails. Reality is too often cloaked in pathos or sentimentality that is cloying and largely irrelevant. Further, in all genres, even those with disability subject matter presented in a literal way, the work is often overlaid with heavy-handed metaphoric uses of disability, rendering a fictive version of the disability experience. Rife with stereotypes, rarely crafted from the insider's perspective, and, in performance, rarely enacted by actual Disabled artists.

For these and many more reasons, those of us on the inside believe that the arts have failed miserably in helping us as a society to provoke, inform, reimagine, or chart a new path. We actively scrutinize the arts and their role in shaping democracy with respect to disability. And we actively—and, for the most part, futilely—urge mainstream cultural institutions and creative leaders to take on disability in more interesting and more substantial ways. The Dance/NYC convening is an example of just the kind of engagement we are hungry for.

So, returning to the question I posed at the beginning, is this Dance/NYC endeavor destined to change the face of disability or to change the face of dance? The answer seems to be yes!

This convening marks a juncture. **The bringing together of disability and dance at this point in time is the product of two histories—the history of ideas and practices related to disability, and the history of ideas and practices related to dance. I am going to take a look at these histories, and consider how this moment is an opportunity to capitalize on the nexus, the coming together of these two threads.** Obviously, this will be a brief and very selective history of each.

Disability Now

We are at an exciting and yet simultaneously disappointing time in the evolution of Disabled people's quest for rights and freedom, and equitable participation in the social and cultural life of the United States.

The exciting bits first. Enormous progress has been made in securing legislation that is designed to guarantee rights and freedoms. More of us are out and about—riding public transportation, going to college in record numbers, securing jobs in places and positions that Disabled people have never had, and participating in the arts. There is a UN treaty on the rights of Disabled people that has been passed and ratified by 143 countries around the globe (though not the United States).

The disability community is strong, and growing. By that I do not mean there are more people who have impairments necessarily, but there are more people who identify as Disabled and are allied with the community.

That has strengthened the Disability Rights Movement, and increased the public profile of our issues. Disability Studies, a robust field of inquiry, is growing in colleges and universities across the United States and internationally, with undergrad and graduate programs increasing annually. You can learn more about the field by visiting the Society for Disability Studies website (disstudies.org), and by watching a short video in which I give a brief overview of the field (dance.nyc/DDAreport).

Arts institutions—museums, performance venues, etc.—have made concerted efforts in the last several years to be inclusive in serving their audience. Basic wheelchair access, though by no means complete and often poorly designed, is more the norm than the exception in many major cultural venues. Access for people with sensory and other kinds of impairments is much less consistent.

A disability arts and culture movement has grown, with artists of all genres bringing to the page, screen, canvas, and stage new ideas and images that counter prevailing stereotypes, undermine sentimental and outdated ways of thinking about disability, and present an exciting and provocative vision of Disabled people's lives.

Those artists are examining what I like to call *the vantage point of the atypical*. There are dancers, actors, writers, performance artists, and painters who identify as Disabled and who actively use the idea of disability in their work. They are producing art that explores what disability provides the artist rather than what feats someone can perform despite disability. I will be discussing this idea further.

There are a growing number of disability arts festivals in cities, from Melbourne to Chicago, Liverpool to Grand Rapids, with performances and exhibits housed in respected cultural institutions. There is a new generation of disability activists, artists, and scholars emerging—a strong cadre of young, informed Disabled people, with a fire in their collective belly. These young Disabled people and those of us who have been around the block a few times are a more public presence than ever before. And as we emerge, we are upping the ante on the demands for a truly inclusive society.

That is the exciting part of the picture. The disappointing, or more accurately depressing, part of the picture looks like this: Despite the antidiscrimination legislation that has been enacted, the courts do not consistently enforce the law, and the law does not really protect us from the kinds of discrimination and segregation we experience daily.

The unemployment rate for Disabled people is more than twice as high as for nondisabled people (for 2014, 12.5% versus 5.9%). That is an official, U.S. Department of Labor statistic, and accounts only for those who are actively seeking work ([bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/disabl.nr0.htm)). Countless obstacles—lack of transportation and attendant care, failure of employers to provide reasonable accommodations, weak community support systems, etc.—that are specific to Disabled people prevent many from actively seeking work. The unemployment rate has not changed appreciably since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act 25 years ago. Housing is inadequate or nonexistent for many, and unemployment and poverty mark the lives of far too many Disabled people. Despite promises to the public and to veterans, the VA system is in disrepair, and Disabled vets are struggling and suffering. Many Disabled people are still warehoused in institutions because individual states are unwilling to support people living in the community.

My local post office is inaccessible, my polling place only installed accessible voting machines in 2008—and that was after a lawsuit against the city—and such machines are not uniformly available throughout the country. Transportation options are limited; for people with mobility impairments, the bus is pretty much the only reliable option for getting around NYC; subways and taxis are rarely usable. Cities across the United States vary tremendously on this front.

Moving on to education. In the realm of primary and secondary education, many Disabled children spend much of their day in segregated classrooms, or with their adult aides, despite specific legislation that mandates inclusive education.

The UN treaty on the rights of people with disabilities, known as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), has indeed been passed and ratified by 143 countries; unfortunately, the United States is not one of them. President Bush refused to sign it when it was first presented, and while President Obama has fulfilled his campaign pledge to sign it, an obstinate Congress refuses to ratify it (nationofchange.org/why-us-refuses-ratify-un-disabilities-treaty-1395147907).

In the realm of design, while many arts institutions *have* created more accessible venues and programs, architects and designers rarely display creative imagination, nor consider the enjoyment and participation of wheelchair users and others with mobility impairments in making the decisions that they do. They appear to be focused on compliance with the law, seeing access as a problem to be solved rather than an opportunity to make something gorgeous and welcoming. The “solutions” typically adhere to the most basic requirements of the ADA codes and mandates, but show little evidence of either creativity or of deliberate effort to promote equity and integration.

The most egregious examples are found in new architecture, where purpose-built theatres and museums have separate and unequal entrances, or, within those buildings, the provision of less felicitous routes for wheelchair users than for other visitors. Access for people with low vision or people who are blind, for instance, is often not considered. Solutions

proposed by organizations specializing in disability-inclusive architecture are ignored. For instance, high-contrast color schemes or particular kinds of lighting that would make navigation easier for people with low vision are easily achievable with forethought.

Yet, if architects are presented with a project to, for instance, construct a building on the side of a mountain, on multiple levels, cantilevered over a precipice, they jump at the chance. But, it would seem, the opportunity to design a building that provides fluid, integrated, and equitable movement and engagement with space for all visitors does not excite them. I experience this disregard for my well-being and pleasure as aggression.

It is not rocket science to create a building that fosters real integration and equity. Yet, as a wheelchair user who goes to a lot of performances, I am consistently relegated to the far margins of the audience where my presence, it would seem, is thought to be less disruptive to the majority. I have stopped going to theatres where I can only sit in the very back row or other compromised locations.

In New York City where I live, there are exceptions such as the Beacon Theatre and Radio City Music Hall, which have created spaces for wheelchair users in a variety of locations from second row center to the rear of the house, or the Public Theater, where I often sit in the front row or another central location. In Paris, I. M. Pei created an entrance to the Louvre through a glass pyramid in the center court. As you enter the building, in front of you is a beautiful unenclosed platform elevator. The open design gives you full view of everything as you travel a route parallel to the one used by those going down the escalator.

When Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Guggenheim, no stringent access codes were in place and I tend to doubt that he conceptualized the grand spiral ramp as a playground for wheelchair users, yet the building invites me to play.

My point here is that access and integration have been beautifully designed into buildings, whether on purpose or not. It can be done. **Disregard for the equitable and pleasurable use of buildings is a decision that designers make and those decisions are based on ideas about who belongs there.**

Further, the endeavor to make a theatre or museum accessible rarely transfers to the content of what is exhibited and performed in those venues. Art, theatre, film, dance, etc., for the most part ignore Disabled artists of all stripes, particularly artists who actively use disability in their work.

So, while some thought has been given to Disabled audiences, little effort has been expended on what is presented in those venues, or who works in those venues. An analogy might be museums and theatres wishing to bring more women into their institutions as audiences or visitors, but then not showing work created by women—whether playwrights, painters, directors, or actors—nor employ them in decision-making roles. The Disabled audience members and visitors to arts institutions, therefore, rarely see themselves—authentic representations of themselves—reflected in the culture they consume.

As for dance, our focus here, Disabled people are, with some exceptions, not onstage. *Disability* is at times present, seen in enactments in narrative ballet or in more abstract representations in modern dance. The exceptions, of course, are the physically integrated dance companies that blend Disabled and nondisabled dancers onstage. More on that in the next section.

Dance education within—but particularly outside of—the schools is largely segregated. There are a number of worthy exemptions to this standard, and people working within the Board of Education in New York City, a few of them represented with essays in this volume, have addressed this divide.

While classes and schools of dance—from childhood training through to conservatory level—have occasionally taken in a dancer with a physical or sensory impairment, it is a rare phenomenon. The more advanced the level of training, the less likely it is that Disabled people will be accepted and that faculty in those institutions will be prepared and willing to adapt their teaching to a variety of bodies and learning styles in their classes. The few Disabled dancers who have been accepted into advanced study have most often had an uphill battle being welcomed, accommodated, and provided with a useful and meaningful learning experience.

There is a long list of reasons why the situation is the way it is. There are systemic conditions that have historically segregated Disabled and nondisabled people. There are attitudes about where Disabled people belong in the social landscape. There are many fixed ideas about what constitutes *real* dance and who is or can be a dancer.

Of the many roads we could go down in considering what impedes integration and the recognition of Disabled people, let's consider two that might not be readily apparent.

One is a particular mindset held by the general public that individualizes disability. While many of us on the inside focus on our collective concerns—discrimination that affects the group, and, in turn, each individual within the group—the public tends to view disability as an individual burden, affecting the person's body or mind. The individual focus shifts attention away from patterns of exclusion affecting all members of the group, albeit in different ways and to different degrees.

Further, in a number of ways we are judged by how we bear that burden. Are we "overcomers," those who are successful in some way, or are we passively resigned to our fate? We are too often consigned to the either/or designation based on our perceived degree of pluck and determination. In this framework, the discrimination and alienation that Disabled people experience seems an inevitable by-product of the individual's motivations, rather than something fixable that a willing and engaged citizenry could do something about.

Second, and I think in part based on the misunderstandings I've just outlined, **disability is rarely taken seriously when programs aimed at social change are undertaken.** For instance, in arts or education initiatives aimed at diversity, pluralism, and equity, disability is too often marginalized. When disability is conceptualized as an individual condition affecting the way a person's body or sensory system functions, it is logical that diversity initiatives designed to address underrepresentation would not place disability in that category. Instead, if disability were understood as a social designation, a condition that marks people and accords status and privilege, then disability would be included in such work.

The perspectives and potential contributions of Disabled people are conspicuously absent across a broad range of such endeavors. For numerous reasons, many still to be articulated, the construction of “diversity” places race and ethnicity at the center of the discourse. The history and the consequences of that construction are for the most part invisible, giving the impression that diversity as it is now rendered circumscribes the logical domain of reform, and completes the effort for full representation. Back in 1993 Henry Louis Gates wrote, “What is this crazy thing called multiculturalism?... Multiculturalism itself has some imperial tendencies. We are told that it has to do with the representation of difference—but whose differences? Which differences?” (6).

Yet, as with other forms of social construction, “multiculturalism” and “diversity” warrant consideration, particularly from the perspectives of the margins. **Diversity initiatives privilege certain knowledge and creative projects, and marginalize others. Thus, ironically, an endeavor designed to broaden representation and increase equity has created a particular hierarchy and systematic exclusion that is often unrecognized.**

It is important to note that in recent years disability has been included when listing vectors of diversity, but scarce attention is paid to it and the allocation of resources to projects focused on disability is lacking. The group of decision makers who choose how to allocate resources for such projects often do not include people with a focus on and expertise in disability issues.

This is particularly true in the arts, where we will turn our attention next.

Dance History with a Brief Excursion into Adjacent Territory

We have just ventured through a selective examination of disability, and now enter a specific foray into dance history—all to provide a foundation for the understanding of the confluence of these histories.

There are already numerous physically integrated⁴ dance companies throughout the United States and around the globe. They have achieved varying degrees of recognition by the dance world and the media.

With the release of this research report, Dance/NYC has issued a call to action to broaden the representation of Disabled dancers beyond those companies specifically conceived to present them. It is time to ask: How does this moment compare to other innovations in dance history?

Throughout the history of dance and the performing arts in general, there have been numerous moments when the introduction of unexpected bodies onstage startled audiences and provoked commentary.

Consider the introduction of women onstage in mid-seventeenth-century English theatre, or the introduction of nonwhite actors in mid-twentieth-century Shakespearean theater. Or recent appearances by openly transgender actors in film and television. Or when the larger-than-expected Lawrence Goldhuber began dancing with Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane. Or when Arthur Mitchell, the first Black ballet dancer in a classical company, first appeared in 1955 with the New York City Ballet. Or the atypically short dancer Lila York who danced with Paul Taylor for years. Or, for her time, the unconventionally tall Judith Jamison, a principal dancer with Alvin Ailey, and before her Maria Tallchief with the New York City Ballet. Tallchief was unusual for her time not only because she was taller but also because she was more athletic than ballerinas traditionally were, and she was Native American. There were the legendary tap dancers Peg Leg Bates and Crip Heard. Peg Leg, as his name implies, had one wooden leg tapered at the bottom, and he incorporated the unique sound it made hitting the floor and the movement of his pegged leg in his choreography. Crip Heard had one arm and one leg, and had an extensive career in Black vaudeville theaters and clubs in the 1940s and '50s. There was the virtuosic Homer Avila, a dancer with one leg who performed on stages from Frankfurt to Los Angeles from 2001–2004.

Some of the bodies that seemed startling and even transgressive at other junctures became, over time, more commonplace and unremarkable.

For instance, Tallchief was tall and athletic at a time when ballerinas were

supposed to be petite and dainty. Further, in the Eurocentric world of ballet, a Native American startled because her culture was often derided and mocked, its members not accepted in the cultural echelons of the ballet world. Yet, I like to believe that at the time there were some audience members and some critics who accepted these newcomers without question, and judged their performance on the merits of, well... their performance.

Of course, others balked, and couched their resistance in a variety of arguments about it not being the right time, that this or that performer was a distraction or a contrivance, reflective more of a political strategy than an artistic one. And still others wrote patronizing and ultimately dismissive commentary on the artists' bravery, novelty, or determination.

When nonwhite dancers first appeared onstage, responses to their performances varied widely. I would like to comment here on some of them to consider how there might be similarities in the reactions to nonwhite and Disabled dancers. My purpose is not to demonstrate parallels between race and disability as systems of oppression.⁵ Rather, I want to explore how divergence from the idealized dancing body creates disequilibrium among critics, dance makers, and audience members alike.

Today, critics are still thinking about the moment Arthur Mitchell appeared onstage in a duet with Diana Adams. In a 2007 article about *Agon*, specifically the 1957 debut of the Balanchine ballet, Alastair Macaulay noted: "It's possible that Balanchine introduced the black-and-white coloration of the 'Agon' casting in response to Stravinsky's atonal music. Himself an excellent pianist, he was dramatizing a new relation between the piano's white and black notes." He goes on to say: "Accounts of rehearsals suggest that he was especially interested in the precise juxtaposition of white and black skin tones: just where a hand held a wrist or an ankle" (nytimes.com/2007/11/25/arts/dance/25maca.html). Macaulay knows, and Balanchine must have known, that a Black male hand holding the white ankle of a woman in 1957 America evoked more than atonal music. In another context this action could have resulted in a lynching.

Writing in 1959, critic Edwin Denby didn't seem to think that Balanchine made much of the difference between Adams and Mitchell: "The fact that Miss Adams is white and Mr. Mitchell Negro is neither stressed nor hidden; it adds to the interest" (268).

And in 1993, Arlene Croce had this to say about that *Agon*: "Part of the revolutionary impact came from the fact that Adams was White and Mitchell Black. As Mitchell likes to point out, Balanchine enjoyed and exploited the contrast in skin color" (90). Croce cites a famous Balanchine quote: "I wish I had a company half white and half black. Then I could play checkers."

Balanchine's checkers metaphor is disturbing. For one, the notion that the Black dancers were prized seemingly for their "contrast" to the White dancers, and his reference to uniform and interchangeable checker pieces. It is as if the dancers' skin color would be the determining factor in the casting and then in the staging.

Of course every choreographer, to a degree, views dancers as objects valued as much for their appearance as for their virtuosity. A company director will desire a corps that is uniform in appearance. A choreographer may decide that there are too many blonds on one side of the stage, and reposition them. Yet, the objectification and erasure of Mitchell in his offhand statement has particular meaning, given Balanchine's status in the ballet world and the power differentials between him and this man newly made principal.

Balanchine's apparent comfort with positioning himself as a manipulator of dancers, analogous to checker pieces being moved about on a board, shows a particular kind of obliviousness and arrogance.

Mitchell seemed alert to Balanchine's use of him as a provocative body. For our purposes here, what is most useful to consider is the way that the presence of nonwhite dancer—particularly in 1957, and *specifically* a Black male dancer paired with a White woman—puts *race* itself onstage.

As we consider putting Disabled dancers onstage, we need to ask, what are the elements that would bring disability itself onstage, and how much of it do we want? I personally would love to see a lot of disability onstage—the time is ripe to open up the subject and show just how interesting disability is, and simultaneously, how ordinary it is.

As I mentioned earlier, *disability* has been onstage since Sophocles, yet rarely Disabled performers. Here are two exceptions from the early to mid-twentieth century.

In a 1931 piece on goings on about town in *The Chicago Defender*, a paper written for a primarily Black audience, Salem Tutt Whitney comments on Peg Leg Bates' appeal.

"There is a familiar tap with a woody sound on the tile and we turn to greet the smiling Peg-leg Bates.... Peg-leg is the marvel of all dancers to me. Not so much because of the marvelous dexterity with which he handles the peg, but because of the wonderful will-power and determination he has demonstrated by conquering a physical handicap that has made medicants of thousands. But instead of becoming a whining medicant, Peg-leg has capitalized his infirmity and made himself one of the most wonderful dancers of all time" (5).

In this commentary, Whitney does applaud Bates' dancing, but he devotes more words to a phenomenon I described earlier, that of Disabled person as "overcomer." I discussed that we are too often judged by whether we are triumphant through what is perceived as personal wherewithal and gumption, or whether we are "resigned to our fate." Whitney admires Bates' "will-power" and expressed relief that he was not the "whining medicant" he might have become.

The pressure for Disabled people to appear to be doing well continues to this day. I certainly feel it. It stems, I think, from belief that individuals who "try hard" can make it. It reassures the public and obviates the need for real social change. Another example from the mid-twentieth century is the tap dancer Crip Heard. He is mentioned in a 1955 article in *Variety*: "...one-legged dancer Crip Heard revitalizes matters without wooden-leg or crutch,

he does nimble tap, almost making pewsters forget his handicap."

In this piece, another enduring idea surfaces, that of talent or success of some sort making people forget someone's "handicap" [sic]. I long ago lost count of the times people have said to me, "I don't think of you as Disabled," or "handicapped" or "physically challenged" or used other cringe-worthy expressions. It is said, seemingly, as a compliment. And I'm sure it would come as a surprise to hear that is not my objective.

And it is not the objective of many contemporary Disabled performers. However, it is my objective and that of many writers and artists who take on disability, to alter people's perceptions of what disability *means*.

Yet, no matter what artists themselves do, they can't control audiences "reading" of what is in front of them. Some might say that simply putting a Disabled dancer onstage is putting disability itself up there. Others, such as the critic Edwin Denby did in reviewing Arthur Mitchell's appearance in *Agon*, may note that presence but not view it as dripping with meaning. You may recall that Denby wrote that the racial difference between the principal dancers in *Agon* was "neither stressed nor hidden."

If we compare the responses of other critics, we see that the same event is read and understood in a variety of ways by different people. A few decades later, in a review of the physically integrated performance of *Gimp* by Heidi Latsky Dance, Brian Seibert made a comment similar to Denby's: "The opening duet between Jennifer Bricker and Maximiliano Torandell is a conventionally sexy aerialist number using pendant strands of purple silk. As Mr. Torandell hangs upside down and Ms. Bricker climbs toward him in vertical somersaults, gathering the fabric around her arms, in search of a kiss, it both matters greatly and not at all that she doesn't have legs" (nytimes.com/2012/08/06/arts/dance/heidi-latsky-dance-performs-gimp-at-lincoln-center.html).

Yet, as casual as Seibert seemed about the configuration of Bricker's body, he wove a fantastical tale about the meaning of other Disabled dancers' bodies.

Seibert's review starts off auspiciously with the title: "Sailing Into a Summer Night on the Wings of Beauty" and does soon say: "much of 'Gimp' really is beautiful and moving." What strikes me about the review is how his perception of the dancers moods and feelings varies so greatly from my own interpretation of their performances, and, as I discovered, from the dancers' intentions.

"And it is to Ms. Latsky's credit," Seibert notes, "that the show isn't Pollyanna-ish. Frustration and shame course through it. Jerron Herman's limp is an angry strut, and at first it's unclear whether his jutting arm and middle finger are under his control. (The offensive gesture turns out to be optional.) As Akemi Nishida's miniature, three-fingered hand creeps all over her body, she regards it as alien. The look on her face is pained."

In an email exchange, Jerron Herman has this to say about Seibert's take on his intentionality: "... my makeup is bigger and more complicated than he made it. My Cerebral Palsy is also endowed with a spastic condition known as Dystonia, or 'spastic extreme.' How I move takes great energy, and so 'choosing' to move a certain way takes a lot of focus. I was very conscious of my middle finger and in realizing I was flipping a whole audience the bird I recoiled my finger."

He did add as a footnote: "I am worried that my palsied left arm is just a really great representation of my id; that all those things I do I really want to. I'm still on the fence."

While Herman is on the fence about the workings of his id, Seibert seems to want to function as his superego, almost chastising him for displaying what he saw as aggression. Only one of them has a sense of humor.

Akemi Nishida took issue with Seibert's interpretation of her facial expression. In an email exchange with the author, she notes that in general, "reviews of The Gimp Project often reflect ableism,⁶ which we all learn and internalize in our everyday lives." She notes that her solo is "nuanced, complex, and full of various emotions." She went on to distinguish between Seibert's idea that she regards her hand as alien, and her own idea that during that solo she was thinking of the way society

projects “hate and disgust” onto her hand. She further takes exception to Seibert’s interpretation and focus by pointing out that “toward the end of the performance, the audience sees that I look at my hand really hard, and bring it closer to my face, slowly touching my cheek. My face seems relieved, finding home in my body and hand.”

These artists recognize that art is put out there and people make of it what they will. But Disabled artists are tuned into the ways that critics’ unfamiliarity with disability creates a restricted set of interpretations based on ideas about our “pain and suffering,” among other things.

We will never know what prompted Seibert to see Herman’s movements as an “angry strut,” but it is important to consider whether his ideas about disability, and possibly race—Jerron Herman is Black, Akemi Nishida is Asian—and possibly gender—he was perceived as showing anger, she pain—played a role in his evaluation.

Speaking of one of the other dancers Seibert says: “Mr. Harrell stands alone, eyes closed, his five-fingered hand on his gut, thumb up. When his eyes open he inserts his stump into the ordinary notch next to that thumb.”

David Harrell notes: “I feel the word ‘stump’ was used for impact by the reviewer. I don’t refer to my hand that way, nor do many other individuals with limb loss. Would the simple phrase, ‘he is missing his right hand’ hurt the content or tone of the review?”

I know *Gimp* fairly well, and have seen this cast perform the piece a couple of times. My intention is not so much to dispute Seibert’s interpretation of the selected moments he commented on here, as I am raising questions about his overinvestment in those moments to support his claim that “Frustration and shame course through it.” By it, he means the whole piece.

I thought it important to create this “conversation” between Seibert and the dancers to illustrate what appears to me to be a frequent disconnect between the ways that critics and audiences see our creative work, and indeed our lives, in ways that often differ dramatically from our own experience.

I'd like to turn now to what I have identified in the heading of this section as a "brief excursion into adjacent territory" to describe some activity in theatre, art, and film that may help guide our thinking as we contemplate the integration of disability into dance.

A play appeared in 1983 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music titled *The Gospel at Colonus*, created by Lee Breuer with music by Bob Telson. It is a rendition of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*, in which traditional Greek theater and the Black gospel tradition are merged. It is a perfect pairing. Sophocles' story was transformed into a sermon, and the call and response of the chorus could easily be imagined as taking place in either ancient Greece or at a church down the street from the theater in Brooklyn. The preacher was played by Morgan Freeman, and his sermon recounted the story of when Oedipus, as an old blind man, came to Colonus looking for a resting place. The Greek "chorus" was in fact the gospel chorus, The Institutional Radio Choir, and they, along with The J. D. Steele Singers and J. J. Farley and the Original Soul Stirrers, sang many of the rousing songs.

Apart from the sheer genius of the piece, the music, and the excitement of watching Morgan Freeman preach, was an idea that the play put forth—something rarely evident in theater or literature. It was the *idea* of blindness—how it is perceived and how it is understood in the popular imagination. Oedipus was played not by one actor, but played by the Five Blind Boys of Alabama, a famous gospel group. When they first appeared, they entered stage left in procession, all wearing white suits. Each man had a hand on the shoulder of the blind man in front of him.

With *five* men, occupying the space formerly allocated to one actor, and five *blind* men enacting a role almost universally played by a sighted man, it rendered blindness simultaneously both more metaphoric and more concrete. The hyperrealism of the multiple "Oedipuses"—or perhaps Oedipi—highlighted blindness as idea, and the unprecedented—as far as I know—casting of blind individuals in the role navigating the stage as no sighted actor would, forced the audience to consider the reality of not seeing.⁷

The Gospel at Colonus brought blindness and disability onstage, and also brought race onstage. After all, it is a play that stems from the classic Greek tradition, here steeped in Black Baptist cultural traditions. The amalgam of the two, and the sampling and appropriation of both in a single work, comments on the hierarchies of cultural authority that would put classic Greek above Black Baptist.

Race is on stage in every production of *Othello*, whether the lead is a White actor in blackface, a Black actor, or, in the case of the production a few years ago at the Arena Stage in Washington, a White actor, wearing his own white face. Patrick Stewart was cast as Othello, and all of the rest of the cast was Black. The casting brought to the surface the racial tensions in the play and made them more substantial and less ephemeral, and yet rendered race as theme and idea more thoroughly than other productions ever have.

This is an example of "nontraditional" casting, though that term is typically applied to nonwhite actors playing roles historically played by White actors—but it is not what is known as "color-blind" casting.

This was a very purposeful reversal. A similarly deliberate switch can be seen in the production of *Hamilton*, which opened on Broadway in 2015 to rave reviews.

The original casting call for the leads in the production, playing key figures in the country's founding, from Alexander Hamilton, to George Washington, to Thomas Jefferson, sought actors who were African-American, Hispanic, Asian, South Asian, Native American, Middle Eastern, Southeast Asian/Pacific Islander, Ethnically Ambiguous/Mixed Race, or African Descent (backstage.com/casting/hamilton-bway-63813).

In other words, the casting required actors who were anything but White. Nevertheless, Michael Cooper, in an article in the *New York Times*, noted that the production was "embracing *color-blind* casting." It might more logically be called "color-conscious" casting, a term used by Bill Rauch, Director of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, a company known for its ethnic and racial diversity (nytimes.com/2015/09/06/theater/the-oregon-shakespeare-festival-focuses-on-diversity.html).

I am bringing these examples into the conversation primarily for two reasons. One is that these kinds of creative means to explore ideas about race and disability are in the air and are being mobilized in artistic works in ways that expand and enrich theatre and the broader cultural conversations. Two, that there is still confusion about how we talk about these changes.

And the changes are not across the board in the arts. There remain numerous examples of practices that are outmoded and offensive. Here is but one of them. Theatre and film have long abandoned blackface, but opera houses have continued to use it "into the early twenty-first century, long after minstrel shows and similar performances have been rejected as racist." A major news story in fall of 2015 was the announcement that the "practice is now being ended by the Met, after 124 years, for the new production of 'Otello' that will open its 2015–16 season..." (nytimes.com/2015/09/20/arts/music/an-otello-without-the-blackface-nods-to-modern-tastes.html).

That innovation has prompted questions about other kinds of "transformations" along racial and ethnic lines that are standard in opera. For instance, Cooper asks: "If dark makeup is deemed out of bounds for white Otellos, will that also change expectations for how, say, non-Asian sopranos should look or act when singing the title roles in operas like Puccini's 'Madama Butterfly' or 'Turandot,' which are both being performed at the Met this year?" (nytimes.com/2015/09/20/arts/music/an-otello-without-the-blackface-nods-to-modern-tastes.html).

This moment is an opportunity to broaden the conversation and ask, does this change in convention prompt examination of future decisions only in the area of authentic ethnic casting, or does it have implications for, let's say, authentic disability casting as well?

One wonders if future casting decisions will reflect more contemporary ideas and signal the greater integration of Disabled actors into the arts. Rarely do Disabled actors get to the stage or screen in major, or even minor, roles. It is a standard joke among our community that if a nondisabled actor wants to win an Academy Award, he (primarily) or she should take on the role of a Disabled person.

David Perry has recently written about the need to promote better representation of disability in Hollywood films. He notes that "these efforts have coalesced around two basic principles: Cast Disabled actors whenever possible and tell better stories. Too often, disability only appears as an obstacle to be overcome or a tragedy to which a nondisabled character can react." Perry quotes Lawrence Carter-Long, an expert on disability and film: **"How many times must we be subjected to the same kinds of hackneyed, overwrought and, let's face it, lazy storytelling? The best writing about disability focuses on character. Not a rehash of the same two-dimensional tragic or heroic movie-of-the-week stillness we've all seen a hundred times before."** (america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/8/the-disability-communitys-bechdel-test.html).

An example of disability-conscious casting was seen in the 2014 Off-Broadway production of *Beauty and the Beast* with Disabled actor Mat Fraser playing a unique Beast, and Julie Atlas Muz an inventive Beauty, got rave reviews, including the front page of the *Times* arts section (nytimes.com/2014/03/18/theater/julie-atlas-muz-and-mat-fraser-reinvent-a-fabled-couple.html). Publicity materials hailed it as a "wonderful and weird true love story of a natural born freak and an American beauty queen."

Fraser was no mythic Beast, but an unmasked and often naked actor with what he is given to describe as: "small and perfectly deformed arms." The bawdiness and humor of the production brought to light how often anything to do with disability keeps sexuality out of the picture and too often keeps earnestness in.

In these three examples from theatre, casting shifted the ground of familiar tales, destabilizing them in what I deem good ways. Five Blind Boys playing one blind man, White actor Patrick Stewart playing a Black man, and a naturally endowed—vis-à-vis disability—actor, Mat Fraser, playing a character that is usually rendered "beastlike" with the addition of a lot of fabric and papier-mâché.

I should add, and it may be obvious from what I am saying here, that I believe **the introduction of more Disabled people on stage and screen is inevitable. As we become a more common and ordinary part of the social**

landscape, as more of us, particularly children, attend cultural events and get turned on to the arts, and as more receive training, we will push from the inside to make that happen. Hopefully, audiences—both the Disabled and nondisabled members—will soon be clamoring for our authentic representation.

There is evidence of our encroachment. Some recent successes have been Peter Dinklage in *Game of Thrones*. An actor previously cast in more minor and marginalized roles, or in independent films, has become a central player in a major production. Mat Fraser, the “Beast” discussed above, has performed all over the world, but almost exclusively outside of the mainstream theatre and film world. This past year he had a recurring lead role on television’s *American Horror Story*, and he has gone from being invisible, or alternatively stared at, to being followed in hotel lobbies by young women and men seeking autographs. Similarly, Disabled actor RJ Mitte, who had a major role on *Breaking Bad*, and wheelchair user Darryl “Chill Mitchell,” who has a major recurring role on *NCIS: New Orleans*, both report being recognized and sought after in public.

Deaf West’s production of *Spring Awakening* opened on Broadway in the fall of 2015. Christopher Isherwood gave it a rave review in the *New York Times*. He recognizes the skepticism with which potential audience members might greet the prospect of Deaf actors in a musical. “But,” he notes, “you will be surprised at how...[you will] soon find yourself pleasurably immersed not in a worthy, let’s-pat-ourselves-on-the-back experience, but simply in a first-rate production of a transporting musical.” He reassures readers that this is not a production that “would only appeal to those with a particular interest in making more cultural space for people with disabilities.”

Latching onto his phrase “cultural space for people with disabilities,” let’s look at what else is happening. A packed house at the Brooklyn Academy of Music for the daylong CripFest in July 2015 brought onstage a wide range of Disabled artists from United States and United Kingdom. The physically integrated dance company AXIS Dance has performed across the United States, and members of the company appeared on *So You*

Think You Can Dance. A number of Disabled performance artists have appeared at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and numerous other avant-garde venues. Heidi Latsky Dance has been at Lincoln Center and multiple theatres in the United States and abroad. These are among the Disabled performers and physically integrated dance companies that have gained some mainstream attention. There continues to be a vibrant disability arts scene in lesser-known venues, reaching smaller but interested audiences.

Staying in the territories adjacent to dance a bit longer, let's take a look at the art world. There are a number of Disabled artists who are gaining recognition. I will concentrate on only a few for now.

Riva Lehrer is a Chicago-based Disabled artist who says of her work that it "focuses on issues of physical identity and the socially challenged body, especially in explorations of cultural depictions of disability." Her paintings and drawings have been shown in galleries and museums around the country, including the National Museum of Women in the Arts, the Arnot Museum, the DeCordova Museum, the Frye Museum, and the Smithsonian. Lehrer's subjects are Disabled people, rendered in exquisite detail. The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery has selected Lehrer as a finalist for the exhibition resulting from the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition (2015) (rivalehrerart.com).

Deaf artist Christine Sun Kim describes her work as using "the medium of sound through technology, performance, and drawing to investigate and rationalize her relationship with sound and spoken languages." It is said that her work investigates the politics of sound itself. She has exhibited at major museums throughout the world (christinesunkim.com).

Blind artist Carmen Papalia describes himself as a Social Practice artist who makes participatory projects on the topic of access as it relates to public space, the Art institution, and visual culture. His work has been featured in many prominent museums (bbc.com/news/blogs-ouch-31749643).

Park McArthur's show "Ramps" at Essex Gallery in New York City was listed by *Vulture* as one of the top 19 exhibits of 2014 (vulture.com/2014/12/19-best-art-shows-of-2014.html). They hailed this Disabled

artist and wheelchair user for taking on the subject of ramps. Her exhibit is “an amazing experience of activism and jerry-built ingenuity,” and said that she is “One of the sharpest artists to emerge in the past few years” (essexstreet.biz/artist/mcarthur).

These artists in choice of content and form put disability on display, and simultaneously query disability—showing how interesting a subject it can be for artistic exploration. It is similar to the way that the performers previously discussed put disability or race onstage. **The growing recognition of artists who directly take on disability subject matter, and who identify as Disabled, marks a shift and brings to the forefront the cultural authority of Disabled people.**

Disability in film, both in narrative and documentary form, is also showing signs of a broader public acceptance and interest. I was particularly impressed by Ben Lewin’s *The Sessions*, with John Hawkes, Helen Hunt, and William H. Macy. The central character, a Disabled man, was played by a nondisabled actor. My consternation was tempered by Hawkes’ deep and moving performance.

Recent documentaries that reveal complex, and socially relevant content have captured audience attention at numerous film festivals, and other screenings. For instance, *Becoming Bulletproof* by Michael Barnett, *Fixed* by Regan Brashear, *When I Walk* by Jason da Silva, and *Invitation to Dance* by Christian von Tippelskirch and myself have appeared at major film festivals, as well as disability-specific festivals.

Our film *Invitation to Dance* uses my personal history as the point of entry to tell the larger narrative of the rise of the Disability Rights Movement over the last 40 years. The story expands into an exploration of dance in the context of the emerging disability arts and culture movement. Ultimately, the film is a never-before-told coming-out story of Disabled people staking their claim to “equality, justice, and a place on the dance floor!” I hope that you will take a look at our website and trailer (invitationtodancedoc.com). They reveal, I think, why I am so passionate about Disabled people dancing—both onstage and off.

In making the film, Christian and I were strongly motivated by a statement attributed to Emma Goldman (1869–1940), feminist heroine, anarchist activist, editor, writer, teacher, jailbird, and general troublemaker: "If I can't dance I don't want to be in your revolution." We also read Barbara Ehrenreich's wonderful book *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*. Ehrenreich traces dance over time and across all cultures. She even contends that humans who engaged in collective bonding rituals through dance have had an evolutionary advantage.

There are differences, of course, between dancing on stage and in the streets, or in clubs and at parties. There are also similarities. Shame and inhibition haunt potential social dancers as well as performers. Ideas about which bodies should or shouldn't be flaunted and exposed play a part in who dances and where. It is likely that most professional dancers had some experience dancing with family and friends before ever taking a dance class. And it is in those early formative experiences that children learn how and if they should express themselves, freely, joyfully, and creatively. Those lessons continue as children see who is on the dance floor and who is dancing on their television screens and in performances they might witness.

As the data included in this volume attest, discrimination is rampant in all levels of pre-professional and professional dance education, in the audition process, in rehearsal space, and more.

While there are physically integrated dance companies around the globe, they are typically the sole representation of Disabled dancers on stages anywhere. Some estimate that there are about 100 such companies in the United States, and many more around the globe. Some of those are represented in essays in this volume, such as Heidi Latsky Dance, Kitty Lunn of Infinity Dance, ZCO Dance Company, and dancer Alice Sheppard, who has danced with a number of companies in the United States and the United Kingdom.

While many renowned choreographers have worked with Disabled dancers, including David Dorfman, Bill T. Jones, William Forsythe, Victoria Marks, Heidi Latsky, Marc Brew, Joe Goode, and Alonzo King, we know how rare this practice is.

The conversation started by Dance/NYC is a call to examine these restrictive practices and consider what might come of opening up the dance world to new possibilities.

For those who wish to create more integrated dance, I would like to bring up a number of what could best be described as “pitfalls” that dance makers might consider when planning this future.

Pitfalls

I am turning now to examine some of the “pitfalls,” the hidden hazards, as we move forward toward integration of Disabled dancers, and the opening up of ideas about disability in the arts.

These are not meant to be prescriptive but to illuminate some of the ways that social and cultural conditioning might, inadvertently, seep into the creative process. Those of us who critique the representation of disability in the arts consistently point out that ideas about disability as seen in most cultural renderings are not only inauthentic and narrowly conceived, but often they read as lazy capitulations to stereotypes. Moving forward does not just entail the incorporation of disability/Disabled artists, but seizing the opportunity to make use of disability in new and interesting ways.

This part is in five sections: **Objectification, Using Disability, Assimilationist Impulse—Erasing Disability, Reenacting/Recapitulating/Reinforcing the Stereotypes of Disability, and Novelty Acts.**

Objectification

There is a long and troublesome history of Disabled people put on display to be stared at, whether on platforms in circus sideshows, in amphitheaters in medical facilities, in tents in county fairs, on charity posters, and more. Disabled people have been exploited and objectified for a very long time—and therefore dance makers and Disabled dancers as well have to be vigilant that the means of presentation of extraordinary bodies does not objectify or pander to audiences' voyeurism.

This is very tricky. **Just putting an unusual body, or truly any body, onstage is an invitation to stare. Yet there are many ways creative people have in the past learned to decrease the objectification of other groups—let's extrapolate those approaches for these purposes.**

We can avoid some of the traps seen in the use of Disabled people on stages—of all sorts—in the past. For instance, and probably most familiar, there is the display of Disabled people as “exotics” or as “specimens” used to evoke shock or horror.

For instance, you may be familiar with the historical figure known as the “Elephant Man.” His true name, rarely used, was Joseph Merrick. He was put on display for profit in sideshows and by the medical establishment in the late nineteenth century. He had an unusually large head that had loose skin, enlarged lips, and a bony lump on his forehead.

Note that choreographer Edisa Weeks staged an evening-length dance piece based on the narrative of the Elephant Man, not to mention the existence of the well-known play and film. These works exposed that legacy of objectification and exoticism.

A woman named Saartjie Baartman was displayed in the early nineteenth century in sideshows, where she was known as the Hottentot Venus. In 1810, she was “discovered”—and bought—in South Africa by Hendrik Cezar and Alexander Dunlop, who brought her back to England where she was coerced into stripping naked and displaying her body for British audiences as a “human zoo” attraction.

After her death, her remains were on display—skull, body cast, skeleton, and genitalia. Her parts were, until 1976, at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, when they were removed from public view after complaints from feminist organizations. *Venus*, a play about her experience written by Suzan-Lori Parks, was produced at the Public Theater in 1996.

People of various bodily configurations, from conjoined twins to women with beards, were called freaks and displayed in circus sideshows. Academics in Disability Studies have written extensively about the Freak Show tradition and its meaning in disability history.⁸

A very different endeavor can be seen in contemporary culture. The Freak Show of olden days was controlled largely by nondisabled people, but there exists a modern day Freak Show controlled by people who are also the performers onstage. They have crafted a show with a very different sensibility. These shows can be seen in New York's Coney Island, the Lower East Side, and other national and international locations. One of those performers, Mat Fraser (discussed previously in the production of *Beauty and the Beast*), was featured in the fourth season of *American Horror Story*, which is set in an imaginary circus.

We are talking about Pitfalls, and we are in the section on Objectification. We are talking about how dance makers should avoid objectifying Disabled dancers, and be concerned about how such dancers are presented, never reducing them to objects by acting as if our bodily or sensory configurations, our parts or ways of moving are there, in of themselves, to be stared at.

I had a conversation recently with Disabled dancer and choreographer Alice Sheppard about the pitfalls of objectification, and here are some of the things she said:

Do your research: Understand the historical ways disability and difference have been presented, know some of the current conversations about disability, culture, and society, and be familiar with the contemporary expectations and beliefs of your audience. Be honest in your choreography: Examine again and again, the reasons why your choreography allows a disabled dancer to be seen in that way. Does your choreography continue these difficult historical traditions? Are you affirming contemporary stereotypes? Be grounded in your artistic responsibility: Raising difficult questions is not enough. Above all, assure that your dancers show agency—in the arc of your choreography as a whole and in any specific moments where aspects of their disability/difference are featured. Make sure that they are not objectified as passive one-dimensional figures. Finally, know the limits of your expertise: remember that your dancers know more about their bodies and assistive technologies than you do.

And in this latter statement, Sheppard is talking about process. Dance makers who are outside the disability experience can work against objectification by working collaboratively with Disabled dancers or consultants.

To her comments, I would add: Make sure the dancer or his/her adaptive equipment are not merely used in an instrumental way to make other things happen onstage, show them to be actors with intention.

Before we leave this section, I want to go a bit far afield. Many years ago, someone gave me one of those large coffee-table books, titled *The Last of the Nuba*, a book of photography of the Nuba tribe of the Sudan. I didn't notice till I had looked through the book and admired the stunning photos that the photographer was Leni Riefenstahl, the famous filmmaker of Nazi Germany who made propaganda films, including *Triumph of the Will*.

I was puzzled. Why would a woman who had aided Hitler in developing propaganda designed to promote the idea of the primacy of the Aryan race be interested in these very dark-skinned people. I realized after some time that what she had done is turn these men and women into aesthetic objects with a very distancing lens.

Not everyone may share my interpretation of her work. I bring this up because it taught me a lesson in the subtlety of some kinds of objectification in art. And how vigilant we need to be to avoid it.

Moving now to the second category in our list of Pitfalls...

Using Disability

There are two different ways we "use" disability without ever really working to know it or to get an audience to know it. One way is using the trope of disability without bringing real Disabled people into the center. For instance, nondisabled dancers twitching, or using crutches or walkers as if they're props—giving that equipment meanings that real crutch users don't.

A second way: Putting Disabled dancers onstage merely as a metaphor for something else, such as tragedy, morbidity, deficit, loss, insentience, innocence, social rejection, isolation, and more.

I have recently come across an example of “using disability” that is provocative and, I think, quite useful. In a 2014 article titled, intriguingly, “The Impossible Body,” Jonah Weiner profiles flex dancer Storyboard P. He is a star of the art form, and is unique in his blend of various forms of street dance—jooking and krumping—as well as “...classical moves, going from a sashaying vogue strut to a balletic flourish” (newyorker.com/magazine/2014/01/06/the-impossible-body). Flexing originated in Jamaica in the 1990s, where “a young dancer who called himself Bruck Up—patois for, roughly, “broken”—became famous despite, or perhaps because of, having suffered a bone infection in his right leg as a child.” Weiner recognizes that disability can provide an artist with a unique approach to the work. Bruck Up uses the configuration of his body to great effect. “Storyboard builds on the tension between virtuosity and handicap in Bruck Up’s dancing; he creates a feeling of grace only to hobble it.”

Storyboard does not imitate, or worse mimic Bruck Up, nor would I label it a “cultural appropriation” with its connotation of a dominant culture “borrowing” for its own gain from an oppressed culture. As far as I can see, it is a respectful use that Storyboard builds on and opens up.

Assimilationist Impulse—Erasing Disability

What do we mean by “assimilationist impulse”? To use an example outside of disability: Consider the history of the United States and the wave of immigrants who landed here in early-twentieth-century America. In their first stop at Ellis Island, many were forced to or chose to “Americanize” their names to make it easier for customs officials to pronounce, or later to help them get a job. As they moved on they were urged to fit in by masking the behaviors that might have been ordinary in their own culture but were marks of their Italian, Greek, Eastern European heritage, and therefore would work against their success in the new country. Their dress, eating habits, and more important their way of walking and talking were constrained by the imperative to fit in.

We see the imperative to assimilate constricting the behaviors of people in other groups. Consider how all of the so-called minority groups—for instance,

African-Americans, the LGBTQ community, Latinos, Asian-Americans, and Disabled people—have been instructed to be deferent to the dominant group.

We learn that we will be accepted and will succeed to the extent that we conform to the style and comportment of the majority culture. **Don't act too Black, or too Gay. Disabled people are expected to mask the behaviors that would disturb the public, and not to exaggerate or call attention to our odd forms or the way our forms function. This is certainly a message we are taught about "fitting in."**

A related concept, familiar in African-American culture as well as in Lesbian and Gay culture, is that of "passing." African-Americans who pass for White or Lesbians and Gay men who pass as Straight do so for a variety of personal, social, and often economic reasons. Disabled people, if they are able to conceal their impairment or confine their activities to those that do not reveal their disability, have been known to pass. For a member of any of these groups, passing may be a deliberate effort to avoid discrimination or ostracism, or it may be an almost unconscious, Herculean effort to deny to oneself the reality of one's racial history, sexual feelings, or bodily state. The attempt may be a deliberate act to protect oneself from the loathing of society, or it may be an unchecked impulse spurred by an internal self-loathing. It is likely that often the reasons entail an admixture of any of these various parts. (Linton 1998)

This presents a dilemma—because for many Disabled dancers their art is to exploit and expand on the quirkiness of their form, and to cultivate the interesting styles such bodies can produce. The assimilationist impulse comes sometimes from Disabled performers themselves who don't want to be thought of as a "Disabled dancer" but want to be thought of as a "dancer."

While I absolutely understand the impulse to want to be seen first and foremost as a dancer—there are issues in pulling away from being identified as a "Disabled dancer."

The urge to assimilate constricts the opportunity to use your body in the way that is most realistic and potentially most interesting. What if a dancer has a tremor or has spasms? Maybe it is controllable by medication. Should the dancer always be compelled to control that movement? What creative limitations does that impose?

An example from another domain: A friend of mine is a painter and has a tremor in her hand and other uncontrolled movement. In her early days as a painter, she had always worked to steady her hand so she could do precise brushwork. She took a class one time with a teacher who asked her why she put such effort into steadying her hand. Then she and the teacher had a long conversation and they wondered what is gained and what is lost in trying to stabilize her hand. Might her brush strokes, unmediated, render something on the canvas worth viewing? Not only because the resulting painting comments, in color and form, on the way her body functions, but because her work might display rhythm and pattern that are exciting.

We are taught to fit in, and to do what the nondisabled world identifies as "overcome." Our motto should be "We shall not overcome," when overcoming means to take on the burden of appearing as nondisabled as possible.

So, is the assimilationist impulse operative in dance, and is it a particular threat to the creativity and freedom of Disabled dancers? I think so.

I recently heard an expression that has helped my thinking about this nagging problem. "Model Minority Mutiny" is a term credited to writer Soya Jung. The Asian-American community has often been called the "Model Minority," and Jung writes with great urgency that that the imposition of that myth "invites a strategically and methodically groomed Asian-American population to hustle for honorary whiteness as a demonstration of meritocracy." She suggests instead an embrace of "an authentic Asian-American politics that is rooted in history, shaped by current conditions, and unapologetically antiracist" (racefiles.com/2014/10/13/model-minority-mutiny).

Mutiny—or fighting back—what Disabled dancers need to do when the assimilationist or constraining impulses of a choreographer demands that the Disabled person not display some of the movements that come naturally to their bodies. We need to recognize the ableism⁹ at work in those moments, and, borrowing Jung's teachings, realize that "It is time to kill the programming."

In contrast to the assimilationist impulse, there is an emerging cadre of dancers, actors, writers, performance artists, and painters who identify as Disabled and who actively use the idea of disability in their work. I have been most excited by art that explores what disability *provides* the artist rather than what feats someone can perform *despite* disability. The new genre of disability art exploits the unique configuration of body and voice that result from impairment and from the disability experience.

It is the painter who does not always steady her hand, or the dancer who does not hide body parts not up to idealized standards. It is the artist who considers how disability informs her art.

One dancer in particular had a keen sense of the use and meaning of his own Disabled body. His name was Homer Avila. He died in 2004.

When I met Homer, I instantly saw that he was a dancer—it may have been his neck or the arch of his back. He had one leg, and used crutches.

I learned that Homer had danced for many years on two legs, but cancer had forced the amputation of one of his legs and hip.

We had many long conversations about dance, about his body, and many other things. In one conversation he said that he had lost two legs and gained one. "Ah," I said, "you mean you lost two-leggedness." "Yes," he said, "exactly." We talked about getting some famous designer to create skirts or sarong-type outfits for him—not to mask the missing limb, indeed the draping he desired would reveal the space.

He once said, in talking about the collection of dances choreographed just for him, a grouping that he called *(Body of) Work in Progress*: "I have a limitation, but the work does not." Homer had exacting standards for performance, but not for the bodies who perform. He wanted to explore what people have and how they move. Not about a body that moved well "despite" its limitations, but a body that had something to say.

I know that he resented any implication that a dancer with one leg, or any dancer with a significant impairment, is a gimmick, not legitimate.

Though he had danced, and danced beautifully, on two legs, he did not see his one-legged movements as compensatory, the recapitulations of movements of more fully endowed dancers, with a reduction in artistry and excitement.

Getting at the essence of the anti-assimilationist impulse, Homer said that his prior dance training had been “predicated on recognizing my physical liabilities and working to reduce them to non factors.” That direction no longer made sense to him.

He passed that wisdom on to others. One night some months before he died, he met Alice Sheppard. She was at the time new to the disability game and had just started using a wheelchair. They had a drink together and talked until late in the night. As he was leaving the bar, he turned to look at her and said, “I dare you to take a dance class.” When he died, to honor him, Alice did take a dance class. She now has performed on many stages in the world, and the world is very fortunate to have her talent.

I learned many things from Homer. He and I both had a bicultural existence. We both had lived as nondisabled people and as Disabled people. In his one-legged body he developed a dance vocabulary that was unique. He viewed his one-legged state as a source of information and ideas. He had a curiosity about his new body that stimulated his own creative juices and that of the choreographers he worked with, from Alonzo King to Vic Marks and William Forsythe.

And this is the kind of curiosity I am urging Disabled artists and those who work with them to develop: interest in what Disabled bodies can do.

Reenacting/Recapitulating/Reinforcing the Stereotypes of Disability

The pitfall of reinforcing stereotypes of disability is enormous, but I am just going to point out a few things for us all to think about.

The idea that disability represents a “bad” thing—a loss, a source only of sadness and yearning—is very deeply ingrained idea.

Other ingrained ideas: that Disabled people are overcome with shame, and haunted by their imperfections. That we are passive and asexual. That if a Disabled person dances that it must be for a therapeutic reason.

And when we do dance, we are said to be "overcoming" our disability, and that we are "inspirational."

Because these ideas are so ingrained, even if a physically integrated dance piece does *nothing* to reinforce stereotypes, the public or critics may still read this into the work. Therefore, there is a lot to resist and to confront in creating physically integrated dance.

We know that critics have the ability to sway the public conversation about a work of art. We know of famous controversial reviews where critics' comments came under fire by some, but were embraced by others, causing divides in the artistic community. Arlene Croce's labeling of the Bill T. Jones piece *Still/Here* as "victim art." Or Alastair Macaulay's critique of a ballerina for having eaten one too many sugar plums. Or Macaulay's recent pronouncement at the start of his tepid review of Misty Copeland's debut in *Swan Lake*: "Let everyone know henceforth that an African-American ballerina has danced this exalted role with American Ballet Theater at the prestigious Metropolitan Opera House" ([nytimes.com/2015/06/26/arts/misty-copeland-debuts-as-odette-odile-in-swan-lake.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/26/arts/misty-copeland-debuts-as-odette-odile-in-swan-lake.html)). As if he was collectively patting the dance world on its back for its progressiveness.

Even if a choreographer and a company avoid the pitfalls of putting forth stereotyped views of disability, critics can bollix up the whole endeavor by interpreting the work through a sentimental lens and call it "inspirational."

Let's pause for a moment to examine the term "inspirational." It is one of the most overused terms when talking about Disabled people, and comes up frequently in reviews of Disabled artists.

Joking about being told we're inspirational is a real insider sport in disability circles. In fact, during the opening ceremony of the Paralympic Games in London in 2012, someone in the disability community started a game, I think on Facebook, that quickly spread around the world. Every time an

announcer or someone giving a speech said the word “inspirational” or some variant, everyone had to take a drink. There were many drunken Disabled people throughout the world that night.

Its overuse, and distorted use, has caused some to call the phenomenon “Inspiration Porn.”

The person credited with popularizing the term, Stella Young, was the editor of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s online magazine, *Ramp Up*. In an article titled “We’re not here for your inspiration,” Young provided an example. Inspiration porn “is an image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary—like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball—carrying a caption like “your excuse is invalid” or “before you quit, try” (abc.net.au/news/2012-07-03/young-inspiration-porn/4107006). In a forthcoming essay, Haller and Preston write that “‘inspiration porn’... marks the disabled subject as a source of inspiration for the nondisabled.”

Young describes the impact of these images on Disabled people: “Inspiration porn shames people with disabilities. It says that if we fail to be happy, to smile and to live lives that make those around us feel good, it’s because we’re not trying hard enough.”

The term is analogous in many respects to the better-known “Poverty Porn,” described as “any type of media... which exploits the poor’s condition in order to generate the necessary sympathy for selling newspapers or increasing charitable donations or support for a given cause” (aidthoughts.org/?p=69).

“Inspirational” is the fallback term that is used consistently in all media and in personal interactions. When you are dubbed “inspirational” for going to the supermarket or getting a college degree, acts that are, in many respects ordinary and expected for many people in the general population, the term wears thin.

When our art is described as “inspirational” it has the nauseating ring of something cloying and sentimental (even if the work is not). I don’t aim for our art to be “inspirational.” That seems to me to set a very low bar. I aim for our art to excite, to unnerve, to provoke, to stimulate, to activate.

Okay, the last of the Pitfalls...

Novelty Act

The online *Urban Dictionary* defines a novelty act as one “that is strongly linked to some particular gimmick that makes it stand out from the crowd, even though it has little intrinsic value, and is therefore likely to wear out its audience quickly” (urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=novelty+act).

Simply put, if integrated dance, or Disabled dancers onstage are considered a “novelty act,” talent and training aren’t important, as the work is not taken seriously.

I’ve discussed work such as the current production of *Spring Awakening*, *Beauty and the Beast*, or CripFest and other events and productions that were certainly novel, but not novelty acts. Whether a creative endeavor is a novelty act depends how artfully it is done.

Moving Forward

We don’t yet know what kind of creative work Disabled dancers and art makers of all stripes can produce until we make it possible. We first need to remove the obstacles and provide support for Disabled artists to learn, create, and perform. Alongside that, provide a place at the table for Disabled people as decision makers and creative leaders.

It is not solely up to the talent, nor the pluck and determination of the artists themselves, it is up to all of us deciding that the dance world just might be richer and more interesting with Disabled people in it.

I am excited to see this all unfold, and want to again thank Lane Harwell, and the team at Dance/NYC for this idea and their commitment. I feel it has already sparked conversation and generated action.

And I think opening up the dance world will ultimately yield, and this is my stake in the game—increased cultural authority of Disabled people.

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Foreword Endnotes

1. Throughout this piece you will notice that I use the term "Disabled people" and describe myself as a "Disabled woman." Some may be more familiar with, and indeed more comfortable with, the term "People with Disabilities." I use what is called disability-first language rather than people-first (e.g., People with Disabilities), to forefront it, to claim disability as an identity, and as a designation that is worthwhile to think about. When I use the term "Disabled people," I am considering a very broad definition of disability, including people with mobility impairments, people who are deaf, people with cognitive impairments, people who are HIV positive, and people with psychological/emotional conditions. I am talking about obvious, easily recognizable conditions, and those not readily perceived. Although in

previous times—prior to the start of the Disability Rights Movement—these groups often thought of themselves as separate groups, and were treated by society as being separate. Over the past 40 years or so, we have banded together, and it has helped enormously. The coalition that has been instrumental in the formation and development of the Disability Rights Movement are a cross-disability constituency.

2. Throughout this paper I use “our” or “we” when referring to the disability community. I identify as a Disabled woman. The particulars of my condition or of anyone’s condition are not relevant to the general conversation here. Those descriptions become important only in contexts in which the bodily, sensory, or cognitive configuration of an individual is relevant to the conversation (e.g., the dancer with one leg, the blind artist who explores ideas about sight). Throughout the paper, I refer to Disabled dancers as “they/them,” because I am not a dancer.

3. The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary online defines *culturati* as “people intensely interested in cultural affairs”; however, in general use the term often is used somewhat mockingly to describe those that consider themselves sophisticated and worldly when it comes to the arts. Crips (an insiders term for Disabled people) have come up with the descriptor “criperati” to talk about those of us intensely interested in disability cultural affairs. As with our nickname for ourselves, “crip,” it is a playful term, albeit one derived from the unsavory term “cripple,” which dates back to the thirteenth century and is now largely expunged from public conversation. Our reappropriation of the term, similar to the use of “queer” by the LGBTQ community, has been strategic and useful.

4. I use the term “physically integrated” to describe dance companies that include Disabled and nondisabled dancers. These companies are sometimes labeled “mixed ability.” I choose not to use this latter expression, in part, because “mixed ability” sounds like there are some good and some not so good dancers in the company.

5. On race as a system of oppression, this resource is good and includes disability: creativeconflictresolution.org/jc/maps-1/systems-of-oppression.html

6. "Ableism is a system of power and privilege that discriminates against people who are or are perceived as being Disabled and that privileges those who are or are perceived to be nondisabled. Its expression can take many forms, including social relations, institutions, and practices, and it can take the form of prejudices, discrimination, violence, and stereotyping. Ableism is an active force in history, a force that also served and serves settler colonialism." (Susan Burch, "Disorderly Pasts: Kinship, Diagnoses, and Remembering in American Indian-US Histories": unpublished manuscript, 2015, 32); this working definition draws on extensive conversations with others, including Eli Clare, Alison Kafer, Kim Nielsen, and Katherine Ott.

7. The original group the Blind Boys of Alabama first sang together in the glee club in 1944 at the Alabama Institute for the Blind in Talladega, Alabama. They retained "blind boys" in their title into adulthood, commenting perhaps on the fact that in 1940s and '50s Alabama each of them stood a chance of being called "boy" as an adult. I also don't know, but can speculate, that the fact that they are blind, with all of the stereotypes of naiveté and lack of awareness, and the infantilizing of Disabled people in general, the continued use of "boy" in their title may be their comment on how they are perceived. Or it just may be a reference to their origins as boys meeting for the first time.

8. See for instance: Thomson, Rosemarie Garland. 1996 *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*. New York: NYU Press.

9. See endnote 6.

RESEARCH CONTEXT & METHODOLOGY: NOTHING WITHOUT US

This study is the second research deliverable of a new Dance/NYC effort to advance inclusivity in dance and provide disabled people increased access to the art form. It extends a first phase of work grounded in available quantitative data at the nexus of disability and dance, *Discovering Disability: Data and NYC Dance* (2015) (dance.nyc/advocacy-and-research/research/2015/05/Discovering-Disability-Data-NYC-Dance), which called for more discovery through dialogue, with a sharp focus on opportunities for disabled artists.

In response to this call, in early July 2015 and on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Dance/NYC convened approximately 300 dance makers, presenters, funders, policy makers, students, teachers, advocates, and civil rights activists to explore the confluence of three ideas: *Disability. Dance. Artistry.*

Formal or informal, discovery based in dialogue has long been used as a research methodology, whether it is the testing of new ideas through formal discourse, or through activism and civic engagement. The methodology for this study embraces making meaning from three primary sources to arrive at common and new understandings: conversation onstage and among audience participants at the Disability. Dance. Artistry. convening, which is archived in video on the Dance/NYC website (dance.nyc/dancenyc-events/browse/video); a post-event survey to attendees, included as an appendix in the online version of this report (at Dance.NYC); and learnings contributed in the form of eighteen essays contained in the online publication. The key findings and recommendations presented here surfaced multiple times in one or more of these sources, or multiple times from one source.

In presenting *Disability. Dance. Artistry.*, Dance/NYC set out to catalyze conversations that would go beyond a pleasing and informative chat into places for research in which transformative suggestions for actions, collaborations, policies, and processes could occur. The underlying concept was to delve deeper—through the time-tested mode of inquiry—to uncover bright spots and visible leadership in the dance field, and solutions-oriented recommendations about how to provide disabled people with the same opportunities to the field of dance as currently exist for nondisabled people. Further, it asked the question: What art is made possible by disability itself?

The work, by design, remains iterative and encourages more inquiry, but it also resoundingly calls for more physical, communications, and programmatic access now. It presents opportunities—also iterative—for collaborative action with all of Dance/NYC's stakeholders, from dance makers and companies to the public and private funding sectors.

Defining Disability

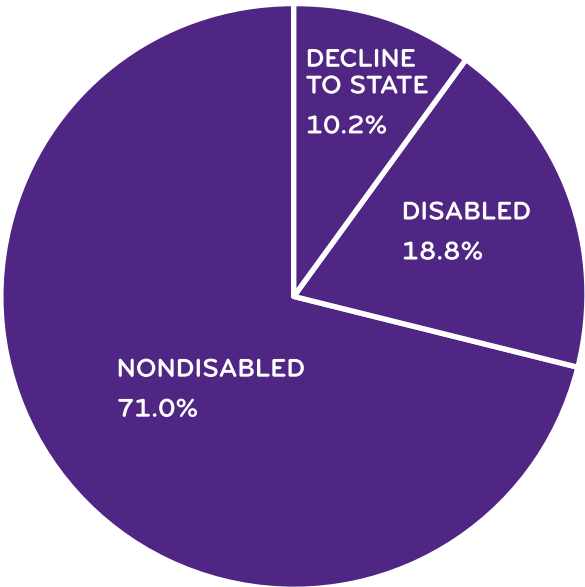
While discrepancies exist in the language employed by participants in *Disability. Dance. Artistry.*, as well as in the essays contributed to this report, the terms “disability” and “disabled” as used by Dance/NYC are intended as markers for identification and membership within a specific minority group—connected by social, political, and cultural experiences—and not intended to assign medical significance. This use of language follows movements in disability studies and disability rights, discussed in detail in Simi Linton's seminal *Claiming Disability: Knowledge and Identity*. Further, this research encompasses all impairments—mobility and physical, sensory (including, but not limited to, vision and hearing), intellectual, cognitive and/or learning, and psychological, whether readily apparent or not.

Task Force & Participants

As an underlying tenet of its inclusion work, Dance/NYC embraces the concept of “Nothing Without Us”: no policy should be formed without the full, direct involvement and vesting of members of the affected group.

This study is guided by a task force of disabled artists, educators, and disability advocates, many of whom provided counsel in shaping the Disability. Dance. Artistry. convening, participated on panels, contributed essays for this report, and helped interpret study findings and develop recommendations. The research-through-inquiry is, importantly, also inclusive by design, with disabled and nondisabled people represented among the convening’s speakers and attendees and this report’s essayists.

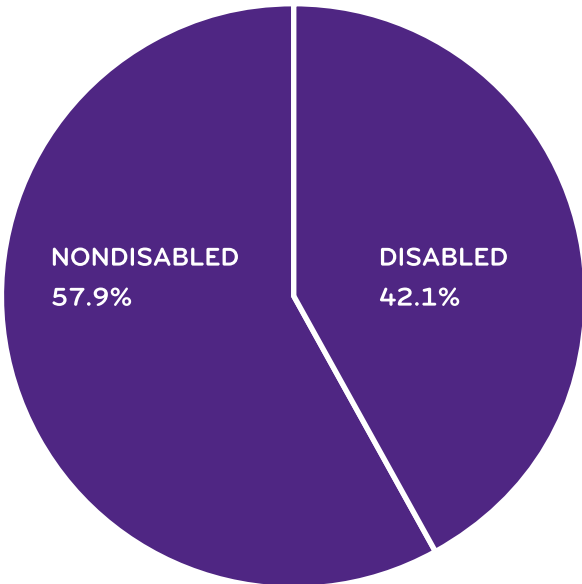
FIGURE 1: Disability. Dance. Artistry. Registrants' Reported Disability Status



Source: Dance/NYC, Convening Registration Form, July 2015.

Alt text: The pie chart displays *Disability. Dance. Artistry.* convening registrants' reported disability status : disabled (18.8%), nondisabled (71.0%), and declined to state (10.2%).

FIGURE 2: Disability. Dance. Artistry. Panelist, Moderator, and Keynote Speaker Disability Status



Source: Dance/NYC, Convening Registration Form, July 2015.

Alt text: The pie chart displays *Disability. Dance. Artistry.* convening panelist, moderator, and keynote speaker disability status : disabled (42.1%) and nondisabled (57.9%).

KEY LEARNINGS ABOUT DISABILITY, DANCE, AND ARTISTRY

These findings emerge as through lines across the primary sources used for this study: conversation onstage and among audience members at the Disability. Dance. Artistry. convening; a post-event survey to attendees; and learnings contributed in the form of essays contained in the appendices of this report.

Dance Makers & Presenters as Pioneers

There are pioneering dance companies creating work by and/or with disabled artists and presenters working together to realize performance experiences focused on artistry, not the condition. These bright spots are revolutionizing the way people think about disability and changing the way people think about dance. Enhanced opportunities to create opportunity and visibility for them must be found.

Bringing Disability Forward with Intention

There is growing interest not only in working with disabled artists but also in bringing disability forward in the work with intention, not as incidental or accidental, but as part of the artistry. The process of creation and presenting must therefore foreground disabled artists. And, and as offered by Simi Linton, those who work in this space, dance makers who are disabled and/or work with disabled artists, have a critical opportunity to clarify and communicate the intention of their work—whether it is to foster social change or expand our definition of dance, or both.

Moving Beyond the Therapy Model

There is a persistent divide in the field about the role of disability in dance. For many, notions of therapy, usefulness, and recreation still prevail as the primary—in some cases only—intersection between dance and disabled people. Yet the dance artists and other interlocutors engaged in this report are demonstrating how disability can advance artistry and new frontiers for dance.

Need to Focus on Artists as Well as Patrons

The dance field's focus on accessibility currently skews to the experience of the general public. However, the same programs and venues that are accessible to disabled audiences may present serious barriers to disabled artists, from stages without wheelchair ramps and inaccessible backstage restrooms to providing ASL interpreters for Deaf artists so that these artists can communicate and participate in production cues and decision-making. A concurrent focus on artists must take place to more fully realize inclusion.

Public Funding & Accessibility Requirements: Need for Better Understanding

Organizations that receive any kind of public funding for a program, service, or product, regardless of the level of support, must ensure that the funded work is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Yet ADA compliance is not the only metric. Many interlocutors for this study encourage a broader usability philosophy and demonstrated, active intent to include disabled people.

Need for Buy-In at All Levels of Dance Organizations

Accessibility and inclusion are not sustainable at an organizational level without commitments supported and enforced by staff and leadership—including nonprofit boards.

Unspoken Meanings Behind Accessibility Efforts

There is a need for dance groups to examine what “accessible” really means and be willing to look at the meaning behind the accessibility features they do, or do not have. Consider this: What might an organization be communicating by not being flexible, proactive, and intentional about inclusion?

Education, Tools & Resources Needed for Dance to Advance Inclusion

The dance field and its practitioners need more tools, resources, and education to address gaps in awareness, knowledge, and expertise and to confront real and perceived barriers to accessibility and inclusion.

Access to the Arts for Disabled People A Priority for the City’s Cultural Plan

Survey results from a post-event attendee poll show that a full 91% of respondents advocate that accessibility should be a priority in the development and implementation of a comprehensive cultural plan for New York City.

Opportunities in Public Education to Spark Imagination & Aspiration

There is a need within the NYC Department of Education (DOE) to increase dance instruction for all students, both disabled and nondisabled. Bright opportunities exist to bring disabled students to dance early—to learn the discipline of dance and what it means to be a dancer.

Who Has a Role in Nurturing & Developing the Artistry of Disabled People? We All Do.

As supported by data from Dance/NYC's post-convening survey, every stakeholder has a role to play in nurturing and developing the artistry of disabled people. But it is only within a shared framework and through collaboration that real change will be achieved.

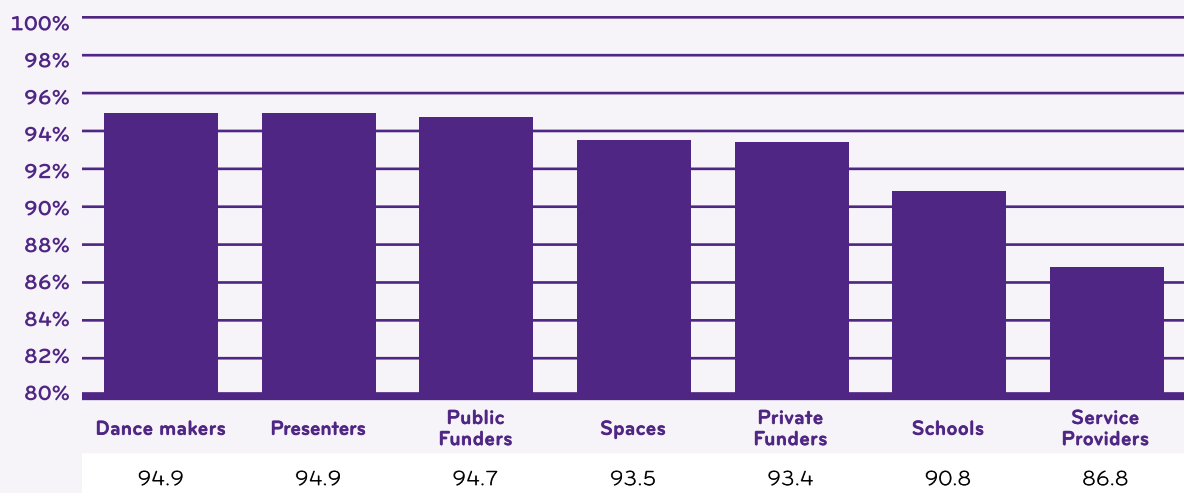
This Work as a Beginning

To quote Kitty Lunn of Infinity Dance Theater, and echoing many voices, "This was a good *beginning*." What the field does with these learnings and momentum is where the real magic will happen.

Survey Finding Detail

- There is a role for dance makers (who create and/or perform dance) to nurture and develop the artistry of disabled people (94.9%).
- There is a role for presenting institutions to nurture and develop the artistry of disabled people (94.9%).
- There is a role for public funders to nurture and develop the artistry of disabled people (94.7%) and for government to develop policies that will support the nurturing and development of this artistry (90.9%). New York City should make access to the arts for disabled people a priority in cultural planning (90.9%). New York City's public schools have a role to play in nurturing and developing the artistry of disabled young people (90.8%).
- There is a role for dance studios, residencies, etc. to nurture and develop the artistry of disabled people (93.5%).
- There is a role for private funders to nurture and develop the artistry of disabled people (93.4%).
- There is a role for service providers to nurture and develop the artistry of disabled people (86.8%).

**FIGURE 3: Potential for Role in Nurturing Dance for Disabled People
—By Stakeholder Type**



Source: Dance/NYC, Post-Convening Attendee Survey, July 2015.

Alt text: The bar chart shows the percentage of post-event survey respondents who think that there is a role to be played by dance makers and dance stakeholders in nurturing and developing artistry among disabled artists: dance makers (94.9%), presenters (94.9%), public funders (94.7%), spaces (93.5%), private funders (93.4%), schools (90.8%), and service providers (86.8%).

RECOMMENDATIONS: HIGHLIGHTS ACROSS STAKEHOLDERS

It is Dance/NYC's overarching recommendation that work focused on increasing inclusion and access to the arts for the disabled community continue and deepen. Chief among the priorities that emerge from its research is activity centered on nurturing and developing disabled artists—from the public school classroom to the professional stage. This is work that can advance the art form's creative and progressive horizons—its innovation, excellence, and impact.

A wide variety of approaches and priorities for advancing inclusion and access, as well as supporting and nurturing artistry, are offered up by the conversations that took place during the Disability. Dance. Artistry. convening and the essays contributed to the online version of this publication (at [Dance.NYC](#)). These sources, on their own and as collections, are of special value to readers looking to dive deep by issue area or stakeholder type.

The eight highlights offered here are neither comprehensive nor absolute but are intended to offer the reader a framework and concrete steps forward. Grounded in the available qualitative data, these highlights are commonly held and apply across key stakeholders: above all, dance makers (who create and/or perform dance), as well as presenting institutions, dance spaces/studios, schools, policy makers, funders, and service organizations.

While generated with a focus that was discipline, community, and geography-specific, the recommendations also invite arts and culture-wide activity to advance the metropolitan area as a creative capital, as well as attention to issues of inclusion and access that are not exclusively local and statewide but exist on national and international stages.

An important next step for Dance/NYC in continuing and deepening its work will be to leverage an organizational alliance with Dance/USA, the national service organization for professional dance, and other partners to put these findings and the local stakeholders engaged in this work into conversation with those doing work on the ground in diverse geographies. Dance/NYC begins this work with a town hall gathering bringing together Judith Smith of AXIS Dance Company and Heidi Latsky of Heidi Latsky Dance—two leaders in the physically integrated dance space—to discuss the state and future of physically integrated dance, both locally and nationally, and offer up ways for audiences and other dance enthusiasts to get involved. This is part of a larger effort to bring disability arts leaders from around the country into conversation with disabled artists and activists in the New York City metropolitan area to explore and advance key issues concerning accessibility and inclusion for disabled people in the art form.

Challenge Status Quo

There are abundant opportunities to examine cultural practices or norms, challenge what may appear as “givens,” question how current inclusion practices might be interpreted, and make substantive change toward inclusivity.

Make Disability Inclusion a Priority

Opportunities exist for every type of organization—from dance companies to funders and public agencies to review policies and practices in place, and to work to institute new and comprehensive plans to advance inclusion internally, making it an institutional priority. This starts with education and understanding of the ADA, but extends to usability and a welcome and inclusive environment for all. This will likely be an iterative process, with implementation done in stages. But it is important to stress that this takes leadership and adoption at all levels of the organization, beginning at the board and executive levels.

Adopt & Practice “Nothing Without Us”

Ensure that disabled people are central to planning for inclusion, change and implementation, and are a part of all decision-making bodies in the field (for example: advisory committees, evaluation panels, staff and board positions).

Create & Participate in Opportunities for Solutions-Oriented Dialogue

Create opportunities for deeper, intentional, and proactive dialogue (for example: presenters with presenters, presenters with artists, dance makers with journalists, educators with disabled artists, policy leaders with disability activists) to discover solutions that engage on multiple levels so that more—and better—solutions can be identified and brought to implementation.

Provide Disability-Specific Training to Leadership & Staff

Conduct disability-specific trainings at all levels and in all departments of constituent organizations (board, staff, and volunteers), to build knowledge, expertise, and cultural competence. Understanding that the component parts of an organization—its people—change with regularity, such trainings should be offered as part of onboarding processes, as well as at regular intervals.

Include Disability in All Equity & Inclusion Policies, Planning & Implementation

All stakeholders are encouraged to seize this opportunity to ensure that disability issues have parity in planning and implementation, and in all discussions of inclusion, dance education, data collection and use, audience building, access solutions, communication strategies, training opportunities, and best practices. Given the stated emphatic priority currently given to equity and inclusion in the arts and funding communities, tremendous opportunity exists for commitment to policy for and practice of full inclusion of disability matters alongside other critical inequities being addressed.

Collaborate on Identifying Pathways for Increased Resources & Impact

There is a big opportunity among and across dance stakeholders for solutions-oriented collaboration—for public-private partnership in investment, and in funder/dance community partnership in identifying impactful opportunities for investment that results in real, demonstrable, and quantifiable change. These then become new bright spots to spur ideas, new investment, and increased momentum toward equity and inclusion.

Research

Gathering, analyzing, interpreting, and sharing data and larger learnings are offered as a common refrain from sources. In particular, sources highlight how better understanding the experiences of disabled audiences, and the role and impact of disabled artists and their work, can help advance dance artistry. Research enables successes to be identified for replication and propagation, and failures to be shared as learning opportunities.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

Of the key stakeholders identified, it is the New York City government whose opportunities for scaling up a philosophy and practice of access and equitable participation for disabled people are most urgent. The 25th anniversary of the ADA in 2015 is an occasion to acknowledge the role government has played in addressing accessibility gaps for disabled people across the nation. It is also a time for government at all levels—City, State, and Federal—to act on new opportunities for expanded and new policy, programs, and funding to advance inclusion and access in dance and culture—and every sector.

The opportunity for change is especially timely in New York City. The work aligns with the mayoral administration's commitment to addressing inequality and dovetails with key ongoing City initiatives, including, first, a diversity initiative launched by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) in 2015 that encompasses disability; second, the department's cultural planning for New York City, a requirement for which was legislated by the City Council in 2015 (New York City Charter, Local Law § 2015/046, legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=1853941&GUID=15689E9B-3860-4882-B9D3-F67A4C896AAC); and new investment and activities in the New York City Department of Education (DOE) to universalize arts education in the public schools.

Spotlight on Cultural Planning

The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs' (nyc.gov/html/dcla) demonstrated commitment to diversity, as well as its participation and support of this work, sets the stage well for a cultural plan DCLA will complete on or before July 1, 2017, taking seriously the findings of this report and—as Simi Linton puts it, the “vantage point of the atypical.” Importantly, Dance/NYC’s work calls out for the plan to address access not only for audiences but also for artists and other cultural workers. To that end, it proposes thirteen steps DCLA may use as it undertakes planning.

- Engage representatives from the disabled community in the cultural affairs and citizens’ advisory committee engaged in the cultural planning, as well as the community outreach process established for the plan; ensure that all aspects of the planning process, facilities, and communications are usable by all;
- Employ a disability expert designated to both planning and implementation;
- Prioritize identifying and solving for accessibility needs and meaningful integration as part of planning foci on the availability and distribution of cultural activities throughout the city; affordable housing and affordable long-term and temporary studio, office, and rehearsal space; and the creation of public art in public space;
- Prioritize a role for the disabled community in achieving additional planning mandates, from addressing the relationship between cultural activities and social and economic health and welfare in the city to incorporating cultural activities into community development, economic development, and land use planning processes and policies; seek opportunities to advance employment of disabled artists;
- Assess the viability of establishing an international center for disability arts and other blue sky opportunities to advance the city as a global cultural capital;

- Identify opportunities to improve grantees' inclusion and access work (for instance, through planning requirements and technical assistance), as well as targeted capital investments in facilities and technology, including website development and overall communications;
- Develop protocols for increasing capital and program awards made annually for art making by and/or with disabled artists;
- Undertake a parallel internal plan to improve DCLA's physical and communications environments, and workforce development and training;
- Wherever possible, leverage learning from the DCLA's ongoing diversity initiative, which includes a survey instrument to capture disability and other demographic data on the cultural workforce, existing grantee applications and reports, Dance/NYC research and additional field research on disability to support planning recommendations;
- Use the planning opportunity to develop benchmarks and mechanisms for regular "state of inclusion and access" reports on the field to guide future interventions;
- Address opportunities to adapt government practices to increase inclusion and access in the arts that have been modeled effectively in other regions, for instance, by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts; explore government partnerships at every level, including the New York State Council on the Arts and NEA's Office for Accessibility;
- Coordinate with the Department of Education to increase arts education and cultural activities for disabled students and explore partnership opportunities with Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to serve disabled New Yorkers; and
- Explore opportunities to demonstrate leadership through cross-sector collaboration, including program and service development with arts and disability organizations.

Working with Neighbors: New Jersey Offers a Case Study for Use in the City's Cultural Planning

The New Jersey State Council on the Arts' work to advance access among its grantees serves as one model that could be adapted and extended by State and City governments nationwide, and which DCLA may consider through cultural planning. Currently, the New Jersey State Council:

- Requires funded organizations to perform an accessibility assessment and develop, and have in place a three-year board approved accessibility plan before funding is authorized, which could be modified by DCLA to meet inclusion and access goals;
- Includes a disabled person on every review panel approving accessibility plans, a requirement for every council-funded organization on a three-year rolling basis, which could be similarly applied to review panels organized by DCLA;
- Partners on the Cultural Access Network project with New Jersey Theatre Alliance. Services and initiatives include ADA planning support, technical assistance and training, online resources, mini-grant programs, and an awards program. The programs of Cultural Access Network Project are guided by a volunteer steering committee representing arts patrons, state and county officials, arts administrators, and managers from organizations serving people with disabilities. A similar partnership between service and cultural groups is envisioned as a priority outcome of cultural planning.

Spotlight on Public School Education: Creating Disabled Artists

The New York City Department of Education's current focus on ensuring that every child receives an arts education provides a positive context for new policy setting, program and service development, and budgetary allocations impacting disabled students. For Dance/NYC, and the majority of interlocutors engaged in this research, it matters not only that disabled students may receive arts education in the schools but it also matters how, and from whom, disabled students are educated—and whether, critically, the education supports these students' artistry and the lives they may choose to pursue in the arts. To that end, Dance/NYC proposes ten steps that the DOE can take in the short term to improve arts instruction for disabled students, and recognizes the work the DOE has already done to implement several of these recommendations.

- Ensure that all advisory and decision-making committees of the DOE include representation from the disabled community;
- Increase collaboration with cultural organizations working with disabled artists; connect disabled students to the work of disabled artists, to provide important examples for artistry and career choice and development;
- Leverage partnerships with institutions of higher learning (such as City University of New York, Hunter College) to grow the pipeline of certified disabled arts educators; make it a priority to hire disabled certified arts educators and disabled teaching artists;
- Conduct teacher training on Blueprint for Teaching in the Arts: PreK–12 (newly expanded to include content for diverse learners) focused on material for disabled students, and increase professional development offerings led with disabled facilitators; engage disabled artists and educators in the development of all future curriculum guides;

- Deploy technology and site visits to share best practices among arts instructors working with disabled students and demonstrate the benefits of inclusive practices;
- Extend existing parent and arts partner activity to focus on programming with parents of disabled students;
- Leverage ongoing research efforts and a new five-borough Arts Directors program to examine local need and develop programming for disabled students;
- Employ a disability expert designated to this work within the Office of Arts & Special Projects;
- Invest in facilities improvements to increase access and universal design throughout the school system; advance overall technology and communications environments; and
- As part of a broader commitment to increased interagency cooperation, pursue collaborative opportunities with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities and DCLA.

ESSAYS

Dance/NYC commissioned Disability. Dance. Artistry. participants and task force members to offer reflections on their learnings and takeaways from the day.

They are presented here using the day's organizing framework of "Dance Makers on Disability"; "Presenting Dance, Artistry, and Disability"; "Developing Artists: Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces"; and "Creating Disabled Artists: Dance Education in the NYC Public Schools."

Dance/NYC thanks the essayists all for their generosity, wisdom, and leadership in this rich and promising space where disability, dance, and artistry meet.

FIGURE 4: Essay Keywords

cultural must art new full
needs^{now} artists people
professional dance training
disability inclusion artistry
time education company
dancers access spaces
students work world

Source: Essays, *Disability.Dance.Artistry.*, Dance/NYC, 2015

Alt text: The word cloud reflects the most frequently recurring language presented in the essays in this publication, weighted by frequency, including in order of emphasis: disability, dance, inclusion, professional, artists, dancers, work, needs, new, access, education, students, artistry, training, company, cultural, art, field, now, time, full, world, must, dancer, time, spaces, field, company.

Essayists, in order of appearance:

Dance Makers on Disability

Deborah Jowitt

Sidiki Conde

Heidi Latsky

Kitty Lunn

Alice Sheppard

Presenting Disability, Dance, and Artistry

Mario Garcia Durham

Jerron Herman

Jedediah Wheeler

Developing Artists:

Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces

Beth Bienvenu

John McEwan

Nicholas Viselli

Alexandria Wailes

Christine Bruno

Creating Disabled Artists:

Dance Education in the NYC Public Schools

Stephen Yaffe

Zazel-Chavah O'Garra

Sandra Stratton Gonzalez

Diane Duggan

Elisabeth Axel

Deborah Jowitt

Dance Critic and Author; Moderator, Dance Makers on Disability

About a month before the panel “Dance Makers on Disability” was to take place at the July 8 Disability. Dance. Artistry. conference, the participants agreed in a conference call that there were two words that we would not use: “adaptation” and “accommodation.” The disembodied voices that day belonged to Guinea-born Sidiki Conde, dancer, drummer, choreographer, and director of Tokounou Dance Company; Heidi Latsky, dancer, choreographer, and artistic director of Heidi Latsky Dance; Kitty Lunn, dancer, choreographer, and the founder and artistic director of Infinity Dance; Alice Sheppard, dancer, choreographer, and scholar; and me, the panel’s moderator. These identifications barely hint at what the four artists have accomplished—the students they have taught, the presentations and performance they have given, the awards they have received.



Not “adapted,” said Lunn emphatically during that telephone session, “but transposed.” A former ballet dancer, rendered paraplegic by a slip on the ice over twenty years ago, she lines up at the barre in ballet classes in her specially designed wheelchair. At the conference session, when I accidentally used the term “wheelchair-bound,” she tapped me—hard—on the shoulder. “Wheelchair freed,” she said, “wheelchair enabled.”

We had agreed to talk about new skills that she, Conde, and Sheppard—all wheelchair users—had had to develop in order to continue or pursue a career in dance, as well as what Latsky, a dancer-choreographer with no perceivable disability herself, had to discover and draw out of dancers in The GIMP Project, a body of work that features performers with and without disabilities. And talk the four did during our July 8 session—articulately and fiercely; those not speaking tended to nod in emphatic agreement. When I queried them about the creative decisions and physical risks involved when choreographing for dancers of mixed abilities, Sheppard jumped in:

"Instead of trying to think what are the obstacles you have to overcome to work with disabled dancers—as if we were a burden—let's talk about what it actually takes to make work. What techniques are available to us? What is the choreographic principle at work?" The physics and momentum of wheelchairs also come into play for these choreographers (Conde had created a tango for a horde of partners—one in a wheelchair, one on foot—to be featured in the Pan American Games 2015 later in July).

Over the course of our forty-five minutes, the panelists, in various ways, stressed the fact that *all* dancers have to learn to develop the individual body that each possesses—its skills, its expressiveness. All have to venture outside their comfort zones. All understand that risk is a factor. And with courage, talent, and perseverance, each finds his/her own way.

Latsky, who started dance training at twenty, found herself too short and too old for the ballet career she craved. In Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, she learned about diversity (size, shape, style). Working with the late visual artist and dancer-choreographer Lisa Bufano, a bilateral amputee in AXIS Dance Company, occasioned a shift in how she perceived dance. Sheppard, whose field was originally Medieval Studies, came to dance in her mid-to-late thirties, working with AXIS and with Lunn's company. One of her inspirations was the late dancer Homer Avila, who continued to perform on one leg—masterfully—after cancer caused the amputation of his other leg and hip. It was he who urged her to consider, "Where are your *integrities*? He meant that physically, politically, artistically, aesthetically, and culturally."

"True handicaps," said Conde, "come from the mind." Sidelined by polio at the age of fourteen, he turned his powerful arms into dancing feet. At first, when he stopped being able to use his legs, people kept away from him; in Guinean culture, a person with a disability brings bad luck on those around him, and his/her only job option may be to beg in the streets. Seeing dancing inspired him. Once he had trained himself to dance on his hands, people watching him smiled, he said, and dancing itself made him happy.

Although three of the panelists perform in (and around) wheelchairs, that doesn't mean that they view these in exactly the same way. Lunn's chair—

a vital part of her artwork—can also become a partner, while Sheppard thinks of her chair as “part of my expressive body.” When, during the question and answer period, a pointe shoe (or a tap shoe) was equated with a wheelchair, Sheppard spiritedly debunked the comparison. The shoe, she said, is an addition that can be used to expand a dancer’s capacities; the wheelchair is integral to the process of embodiment.

She also urged young wheelchair users not to be discouraged from starting to train because they can’t yet afford the kind of equipment that she and Lunn use in performance (relatively easy to get in and out of and highly mobile—able to maneuver swiftly in tight spots, to trace complicated patterns, and to turn on a dime). Conde mentioned that it had not been easy to procure a wheelchair of any kind in Guinea.

The panel also discussed how the process of working with a physically integrated company had opened new creative doors for them as choreographers. Latsky gave one transformative example from the early days of her work in physically integrated dance: “I trusted the strength of my performers, so that I could begin to use stillness more.” Until then, she had never felt comfortable about incorporating that element into her choreography. Her disabled performers—her “mentors”—could fill stillness with their presence. A person whose opinion she respected told her that this company was the strongest she had ever had.

The panelists agreed that, as choreographers, they work with the dancers that they have, just as they as performers work with the bodies that they have. And doesn’t any choreographer, any dancer do the same? They begin with the talents that they already possess and build from there. Lunn, approaching sixty-seven, says that she’s stronger than she was thirty years ago—more athletic, more acrobatic. As artists and as individuals, these gifted choreographer-performers are dauntless. Their focus is on the powers that they and/or the performers they work with possess, and on the artistry that they can develop.

Sidiki Conde

**Founder, Tokounou All Ability
African Music and Dance;
Panelist, Dance Makers on Disability**



I first began dancing to belong. I lost the use of my legs when I was fourteen. Being disabled was devastating because in my homeland of Guinea people with disabilities are thought to bring shame and bad luck upon their family and village. 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 sang and danced at the ceremony and reconnected with my community and my culture. I continue dancing and singing to reaffirm that connection. At that time there were no wheelchairs in that rural village, so my choreography was defined by what I could do on my hands. I gained fame in the region and eventually in the whole country through my skills. At first my attraction to the crowds was my oddity; however soon my skills as a choreographer and dancer for Guinea's leading dance and music ensembles of nondisabled dancers gained recognition. My training was in the rigorous and specific steps and rhythms of Guinean traditional dance. This discipline is as rigorous and specific as any classical ballet form. I could not relate to the parallel training and discipline Kitty Lunn spoke of as the core of her choreography.

In my country traditional music and dance comprise the vehicle with 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 other key events in a community's life. It is inseparable from the community whole and not an isolated performance event. Though my own choreography adapts and restructures the traditional forms for performance, the core of the source remains, reaffirming community.

In my professional life I teach both able-bodied and dancers with disabilities. I feel what they can do and I lead them by my heart. Dance is dancer. I don't agree with limiting one's vision by disability. We transcend any disability when dancing. It disappears.

In a recent professional experience with wheelchair dance I was asked to join American DanceWheels for a tango wheelchair dance performed in the Pan American Games ceremonies in Canada this summer. The choreography paired stand-up dancers with dancers in wheelchairs. I had to learn the intricate movement and posture of tango dancing. During numerous and extended rehearsals I acquired the language of tango. In tango the upper torso is held still and the movement comes from below my wheels. My partner and I merged into one. The dance is both formal and expansive. The chair disappears in these movements. My partner and I are one. We belong.

Heidi Latsky

**Founder and Artistic Director,
Heidi Latsky Dance;
Panelist, Dance Makers on Disability &
Presenting Dance, Artistry, and Disability;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**



This was an impactful day: a sharing with a room full of those who were already deeply involved in both educational and artistic endeavors and those who were new to this intersection of dance and disability.

I am certain that for those from the two communities who were new to each other it was probably somewhat overwhelming.

Conversely, for those of us who have been working this way for many years it was an extremely significant step in the right direction. In addition, from the feedback I have been getting since the convening, it was also enlightening and sparked the imagination of many.

I was struck by the large group of attendees and their diversity, ranging from dance presenters, dance makers, and educators to government officials and performers both disabled and nondisabled.

This gathering was not haphazard—it was structured, purposeful. That in and of itself brought a professionalism and organization that I personally have been waiting for many years. What Dance/NYC has accomplished this past year is to bring the disparate members of this community together to brainstorm and push the field forward collectively.

This is important and worth pausing on for a moment. Dance/NYC was able to bring ALL of these people together; none of us could have done this on our own. And, it was—and is—necessary.

My takeaway was, first, an elation coming from a sense of belonging to a community that was passionate, curious, and striving to move forward and create change.

Upon deeper reflection, I was struck by Simi Linton's reference to the phrase "the vantage point of the atypical," which for me fit in beautifully with the task force's—and the disability community in general's—motto of "nothing without us." She also talked about the need to uphold the "cultural authority" of the disability community.

And it was wonderful to hear the differing perspectives on each panel. But there was also an underlying prevailing sense that so much more has to be done: that resources are slim; that systems need to change; and that we need to continue to dialogue.

It was heartening to hear about Fractured Atlas and watch Lisa Niedermeyer engage with disabled dancers with the intent of learning about their needs and serving them.

It was heartening to hear Jed Wheeler talk about what he learned from presenting work that is physically integrated, and his commitment to getting "better" at it.

It was heartening to hear both Commissioner Victor Calise and Commissioner Tom Finkelpearl speak about the importance of nurturing disabled artists.

It was heartening to hear people so passionate about education and the impact of the dance form.

But it was also clear that we have a long way to go; that more disabled dancers need to be teaching in the schools; that more physically integrated dance companies need support so that they can also feed into that educational system as role models and as arbiters of social change; that the modern dance world can become more curious about, and open up to, the myriad possibilities that disabled artists bring to dance, seeing this inclusion as not "limiting" but "expansive."

And, especially as voiced by many people in the audience, that we need to be more inclusive.

Some really good suggestions were offered. One visually impaired person talked about how she enjoyed rehearsals more than performances but that she was not sure how to go about being invited to such events. My company enjoys it when people attend rehearsals, so her comment got me thinking about how I could engage more with the disability community by inviting them to rehearsals, to incorporate this invitation into our rehearsal periods in a systematic way.

So where do we go from here?

This was truly a terrific starting point.

But I find myself yearning for more: for more questions, for more answers, for difficult discussions that need to happen that will tease out the complexities of the issues we face that challenge us, that divide us, but take us someplace exciting, fresh, and innovative.

My dream would be for splinter groups to be created around specific disciplines with people from the various fields that influence those disciplines whether they be artistic or educational. Think tanks that are proactive and engage on multiple levels so a more in-depth conversation and more solutions could be discussed and even brought to implementation.

For education, it seemed that what could be helpful would be a group of educators, policymakers, and disabled and nondisabled artists and teachers discussing the logistics of how to implement more inclusively focused programming and, most important, how to engage more disabled teachers.

As for my panel with fellow artists, I felt there was not enough time to delve into the meat of the work and the exploration and discussion of the many different viewpoints, aesthetics, and choices and how those choices attract and affect different audiences. I found myself longing for more focused conversation around artistry and of excellence, of pushing artistic

boundaries further, of how physically integrated dance can advance the art form.

In my experience, there is an overarching misperception that physically integrated work is "community work," "therapy." I believe that, although ideally we want the art to stand on its own merit, when we make the choice to work in this way at this point in time, we need to be very clear about our intentionality/point of view and what we are trying to convey to the audience.

Simi echoed this sentiment when she discussed the need to clarify the intention of the work—whether it is to foster social change or expand our definition of dance, or both.

I was reminded of my experience with dance presenter David Ravel from Alverno Presents. Whereas, prior to my interaction with him, most people discussed my work *GIMP* from a social justice/disability perspective, his appreciation of the work came from his shift in perception about dance—that after *GIMP*, he saw dance with "greater acuity."

A longer, more in-depth discussion with both this panel and other dance-makers who work in this way would be something I would be very interested in seeing happening to open up a much needed discourse for those of us involved.

With respect to the presenter/artist panel, I have a similar feeling.

I think a discussion amongst a group of diverse presenters about their fears, experiences and successes with dance and disability would be very revealing and could be extremely beneficial to this growing field.

Jed's candidness was well appreciated, but I would have loved him to have spoken to a larger group of presenters about the rewards and the challenges of this work. Without exposure to this form, there are many assumptions made that often are incorrect. For instance, often presenters are worried about accessibility and often assume that "disability" = wheelchair users, which in my company for instance is not always the case.

Often too, presenters worry about the accessibility of their theaters for their audiences—a reality that needs to be addressed by actually bringing in this kind of work to motivate and stimulate change not by shying away from it because the venue is not as ADA-compliant as they would like it to be.

Curation is complex. It is subjective, personal, and connected to the venue's audiences and funders. Artists need venues to share their work. Presenters need artists to realize their vision. Physically integrated work can bring in new audiences and partnerships and attract media attention. A forum between artists and presenters could illuminate the benefits in that regard and specific strategies that would expand audiences and create new opportunities for all.

Another group to begin dialoguing with is journalists/dance writers. It has taken me many years to understand the disability community, and I continually talk with my mentors in that community about the work I am doing and the way I am presenting it.

Critics and dance writers also need to be educated in the various points of view that exist within the community and the actual disabilities themselves so that they can better critique the work they are seeing. I have the utmost respect for Deborah Jowitt, and she was as open as you can get to the nuances of talking about disability. But it is clear that even she had a steep learning curve when it came to talking about this kind of work.

We desperately need more writers to be as open and as generous and curious as Deborah so that they can better understand the complexity of this form. After all, we need the support of these writers to bring our work out to the public in ways that honor the disability community—ways that move away from the medical model to embrace the artistry of the community and the unique contributions and perspectives of the disabled dancers, choreographers, and educators who are striving to add their voices to the already diversified field of dance.

This was a great start. For the field, the form, those who practice in the physically integrated space, and those who might—we need more.

Kitty Lunn

**Founder and Artistic Director,
Infinity Dance Theater;
Panelist, Dance Makers on Disability;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**



I want to thank Lane Harwell, Anne Coates, the staff and volunteers of Dance/NYC, as well as my colleagues on the Dance/NYC Task Force, for your commitment, passion, and support to and of this remarkable art form. Without that passion, this historical conference would not have been possible. Until now, little or nothing has ever been discussed about programmatic access and/or presentation of disabled dance artists in mainstream dance venues.

As we honor the twenty-fifth anniversary of the ADA, this is the right time, and New York City is the right place. The time for “Nothing Without Us” is *NOW!* Disabled dance artists must take their rightful place in the larger picture of the dance community of New York City and beyond. We have earned it!

As disabled artists and colleagues working day in and day out in this art form, we are seldom ever in the same place to hear each other discuss methodology and process. It is so interesting and inspiring to hear and discuss the diverse points of view regarding disability, dance, and dance making. Sometimes I feel as though I’m working in a vacuum. It is very joyful and productive to bounce ideas off colleagues who understand the art form, especially since we each approach the work somewhat differently.

I feel it is important to convey the difference between a professional dance concert with professionally trained disabled dancers and presenting community outreach performances with disabled people. Both are valid and both have merit, but they are not the same things. However, the mainstream dance world often dismisses them as the same, and therefore not really worthy to be presented in mainstream venues. I find that curious. Community outreach dance programs using nondisabled people are not confused with professional dance concerts. Why is that?

One thing is certain. There is a huge need for more and better training opportunities for disabled people who wish to explore dance as a profession. Professional nondisabled dancers working in inclusive or integrated dance companies are expected to have a certain level of technical competence in a variety of dance disciplines in order to be hired. Not so with disabled dancers. Most of the time disabled dancers are not required to have even a basic knowledge of dance to be included in a company and called a professional. Why is this acceptable? It has been acceptable because training opportunities have traditionally been very limited for disabled people. But I ask why shouldn't disabled dancers have the same training opportunities as their nondisabled peers?

I urge disabled people interested in becoming professional dancers to take a risk and venture out to where dancers are taking dance classes. Put your money on the table and take a class. If it's an open class, they must let you in. It is the law! Do it even if you feel you are never going to be a ballet or modern dancer in the mainstream sense. I know firsthand that having a working knowledge of just such a dance vocabulary can give all sorts of dancers discipline and provide useful tools for improvisational and creative movement choreography.

In my opinion, so much focus on the DOE as the primary educational authority on dance for children is a bit limiting. The DOE can and should be a valuable partner in this cause, but certainly not the only one. The DOE has been slow to embrace change from the dance as "therapy" medical model regarding disability. Dance therapy is a very valuable and important teaching method for students with serious emotional and developmental disabilities. However, not all disabled students fall into this category.

Disability is not "one-size-fits-all," like tube socks! A better understanding of this is imperative if universal dance for every child in the public schools is to become a reality. Disabled and nondisabled dance students alike benefit from experiencing professional disabled teaching artists working alongside nondisabled dance teachers. When students see teachers who look like them, in positions of power and authority, they can better see themselves as having more power and control in their own lives. This is

particularly important for disabled students. Working with disabled teaching artists often encourages students to strive to achieve more than they or their nondisabled teachers thought possible.

We must ensure that students graduating with master's degrees in dance education receive proper hands-on training with disabled teaching artists who address the needs of students with physical disabilities. It should be offered as a required course as part of the degree program. Many of these graduates are fed into the New York City public school system as teaching artists. They must be properly prepared to meet the challenges that will be thrown at them in their classrooms. The financial powers that be must make the funds available for their faculties to make this happen.

The conference only touched on these crucial issues that must be thoughtfully considered. This conference was never intended to be the be-all and end-all discussion. It was intended to open up a passionate and intelligent dialogue between disabled dance artists, dance makers, presenters, educators, and the dance community. I believe this conference was a perfect *beginning*. I sincerely hope the discussions will continue and real plans of action developed.

New understandings of the meaning of dance and dancer will only come about through the risk-taking of intentional collaboration. By this I mean dance makers, presenters, and educators with and without disabilities must make conscious choices to work together and share ideas of aesthetics, methodology, and creative process. This will not only ignite new and very exciting choreographic work for presentation, but will also prepare dancers who are ready to embrace this very challenging work.

We must be the change we want to see in dance.

Alice Sheppard

**Dance Artist and Choreographer;
Panelist, Dance Makers on Disability;
Dance/NYC Board Member and
Task Force Member**



WEIGHT SHIFT

To the nondisabled dance world, the work of disabled dancers can seem disconnected from dance tradition and history. Without these contexts, our artistry and virtuosity are frequently unrecognized, and our work is instead interpreted according to powerful (but harmful) social stereotypes and well-meaning (but misguided) intentions. For disabled dancers, the nondisabled dance world can seem to be a closed system. We may enter, but thus far we have not widely been accepted as artists whose work is more than therapy, community amusement, or fad.

The Dance/NYC symposium Disability. Dance. Artistry. asked how we can change these circumstances. The essays that emerge from that day are set around finding the constituent elements of change: Will new work, different perspectives, new solutions to long-standing problems, or carefully nuanced action plans enable a more equitable and inclusive dance scene?

Dancers know how to shift our weight; we also know how to work on and off our centers. The Dance/NYC disability and dance initiative is an important weight shift; it marks a moment of transition from a time when disabled dancers are distanced from the mainstream to a time when we are more integrated in the field. We can re-center ourselves on this new point of balance by changing how we approach the question of integration.

When disabled dancers are more fully a part of the New York dance community, things will undoubtedly be different. In some instances, perhaps, they will be unrecognizable. But change does not always mean having to radically alter the status quo. Indeed, the anticipated weight of having to do something differently can be a burden that hinders change. Instead of

providing the nondisabled world with a daunting to-do list, and instead of asking disabled dancers to keep proving our worth, we can perhaps ask how all of us can live more fully in our personal missions as artists, deepen our existing dance principles, and create and perform visionary work.

The tension between the nondisabled and disabled dance worlds comes in part from the mainstream habit of seeing dance as the organized and structured expression of physical ability. A second contributing factor is the common interpretation of disability as the outcome of a medical condition that prevents a dancer from properly achieving and executing the desired movements. This focus on ability and deficit means the moment disabled artists enter the studio, they become a problem. To be sure, every time a disabled dancer pushes onto the stage, the nondisabled dance world faces a challenge to some of its defining aesthetics, ideals about desirable bodies, and codified movement vocabularies. But the ensuing conversation does not have to be about adaptations, translations, transpositions, and versions.

If we position dance as the moving expression of a culture, of an ideal, of a community, then dance can connect us to history, to ideas, and a wider range of people. Disabled dancers may well have different bodies and minds, but those differences can be generative and creative. Disability is not just about a difference of body-mind; disabled people share a complex social and political history. Disability art and culture are rich areas of inquiry. Disability dance¹ is an established and growing field.

If you accept our invitation to enter this world, things will change. Living out your vision may mean educating yourself so that you are prepared to choreograph, dance with, present, and teach disabled dancers. Over the course of the past thirty years in various parts of the world, disabled and nondisabled movers have come together to create a new art form. No one has to reinvent the wheel: the Internet offers just a small archive of some of the work and resources available. AXIS Dance Company, Candoco Dance Company, Dancing Wheels Dance Company, Full Radius Dance Company, Infinity Dance Theater, StopGAP Dance Company, and Touch Compass Dance Company are among the best-known companies. There are also a number of important solo artists including Marc Brew, Claire Cunningham, Bill Shannon, and David Toole. This work is foundational.

You will wrestle with the practices of access and accessibility and face new questions about training and education; your approaches to making work may well change; you will both learn and develop new techniques. Your audience will become more diverse; you will be presenting, participating in, and making work that challenges the status quo. You will be involved in deeply rewarding provocative art.

Disabled dancers may find it more complicated to live in our mission and vision. Change does not happen because we have studied with disabled and nondisabled teachers, participated in mainstream classes, taken workshops with leading companies, or performed with a high degree of technical and emotional virtuosity. We face severe systemic barriers that include few opportunities to train, teach, choreograph, work, and perform; environmental and economic inaccessibility are routine. Furthermore, unless we live in one of the geographic hotspots where integrated dance has taken root, community is hard to find. Many of the changes that we would need to rightfully take our place are not in our power to effect.

These fundamental realities raise a question familiar to all activists and those who live and work in minoritized communities: what is the best stance toward the mainstream world—assimilation, integration, or isolation? As we find and nurture individual artists, create community performance groups, and build professional companies, all three approaches will play their role. Equally as important is a familiarity with disability art, culture, and history. In the nondisabled world, dance as an art form does not exist in isolation; it responds to its own history, traditions, and conventions even as it converses with the larger political, social, and cultural world in which we live. Dance created by and for disabled dancers must do the same.

In this regard, the world of disabled dancers is not such a big step away from that of the mainstream. Working with disabled dancers does not mean bending backward to accommodate us: the responsibility for building a collaboration belongs to both of us. By shifting our weight from our familiar ground and by being willing to balance off-center, we can dance with the recognition that the difference of disability is both creative and generative.

1. Along with a growing number of disability studies scholars and disabled artists, I use disability dance as a technical term. Integrated or inclusive dance refer to work and techniques that feature disabled and nondisabled dancers. Disability dance is work made and/or performed by disabled artists that is influenced by and/or makes explicit use of disability history, culture, and work by other disabled artists.

Mario Garcia Durham

**President & CEO, The Association of Performing Arts Presenters (APAP);
Moderator, Presenting Dance, Artistry,
and Disability**



I was honored to be asked to moderate the panel titled "Presenting Dance, Artistry and Disability" with Jed Wheeler, Executive Director for Arts & Culture, Montclair State University; choreographer Heidi Latsky; and Jerron Herman, a dancer with Heidi Latsky Dance. Although my personal experience in this specific area of the dance field is limited, I applaud Dance/NYC for bringing a much needed focus to this issue.

I was with the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco in the 1990s and had the pleasure of witnessing a number of individual choreographers (there were more than 400 companies in the local dance organization Dance Bay Area) who were looking at dance outside of the boundaries of what is traditionally considered dance, as well as at the issue of what type of physicality or physical traits a person traditionally needed to be considered a dancer. At Yerba Buena I had the honor of working with Judith Smith of AXIS Dance Company, who is a true champion for the cause of working with dancers with and without disabilities. We commissioned Judy to create a new piece, and I thoroughly enjoyed working with her on the process. Also, as a program officer for eight years at the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), I reviewed applications from remarkable differently-abled theater and dance companies. Both my work in San Francisco and at the NEA truly helped me develop an appreciation for looking at dance as a much broader and more open discipline than I had previously thought. The reason I accepted the offer to moderate this panel is that I think the more we open minds to new ways of perception, the more it will benefit not only disabled dancers, choreographers, audiences, and presenters, but also the way we view the arts more broadly.

The panel was amazing. Heidi, Jerron, and Jed were a joy to work with. As I stated while moderating, these panels were an education for me. Jerron was beautiful in the work samples I saw and in his hugely generous spirit. I challenged him a bit with a question about my impression that disabled dancers need to push themselves into the arena more and not make prejudgments about for whom they should or should not audition. In other words, do our own actions limit our potential? His articulate and honest answer affirmed that universal truth. Heidi emphasized how important it was to work closely with a presenter and to be clear-eyed regarding expectations. She showed the boundless optimism and laser-focused vision that is needed to lead an artistic company. (I have encountered many arts leaders in my years and am always impressed by this unique energy. Heidi has it.) Jed, an old friend and colleague, is a unique person and presenter. He understands clearly that he exists to support artists and their work. He has a drive to promote that work and share it with as many individuals as he possibly can, hence his insistence on a single, inexpensive ticket price for all seats and all performances. Also, his response to one of my questions regarding audiences was another learning for me—he does not use the term “audiences,” but rather “individuals.” That sounds like a small detail, but it is brilliant way looking at the work of presenting and is manifest in all that he does.

Finally, as I stated to Lane Harwell in a conversation, the topic of dance and disabilities is, unfortunately, not an issue that a lot of people have on their radar. I cannot recall in many, many years a focus, outside the universe of the tireless advocates for disabled dance and the arts, on this work or subject. At the numerous conferences I attend on an annual basis, I think there is scant if any discussion of this topic from either the artist or the presenter's perspective. Lane and Dance/NYC were clear about a goal of the daylong convening Disability. Dance. Artistry. It was to generate conversation, awareness, thought and, most importantly, actions that would further the development and support of this work. The convening certainly brought my focus back to this important issue. To be honest, the ongoing demands of my work on serving our almost 2,000 members often pulls my focus. *I truly believe the key to movement and further progress on this issue is organizations, such as Dance/NYC, Dance/USA, APAP, and*

other influential partners, and advocates working together to ensure that the work of the day will continue and not languish until another convening.

I look forward to communicating to my board and APAP membership the importance of this work and to provide concrete actions with our conference and programs to further our collective goal of supporting, honoring, celebrating, and increasing the impact and opportunities provided by the incredible field of disabled dance.

Mario

P.S. My friend, mentor, and previous boss at Yerba Buena, John Killacky, Executive Director for the Flynn Center in Burlington, Vermont, has written an excellent article on the Flynn Center's work titled "Inclusion for All." It's printed in the *Burlington Free Press*. I highly recommend it. burlingtonfreepress.com/story/opinion/my-turn/2015/08/14/opinion-inclusion/31733461

Jerron Herman

**Writer and Dancer;
Panelist, Presenting Dance,
Artistry, and Disability**

THIRD FROM CENTER

The number 3 is important: This is my third year with the Heidi Latsky Dance company, and in July's Dance/NYC discussion on Disability. Dance. Artistry. I was its third panelist: sitting third from the moderator, buffeted by two luminaries in the dance field, and the sole person with a disability. These optics never concerned me before. I came into the dance world doe-eyed, naïve, and young. I didn't concern myself with the visual politics of being the younger, black, disabled representative onstage. Now, I sat on a panel, and those politics had to be confronted. As a dancer I was comfortable with postperformance talk-backs: opportunities to expound on my positive experience in a specific work. However, this distinct panel, which expounded my layered experience as a person with a disability (PWD), was more catalytic. Society has taught me to be marginal and not expect the sunlight that graces the Center of Influence. Because Dance/NYC seated me in this unfamiliar place as a panelist, I have a newfound awareness of my seat entirely.



In the middle of discussion our moderator, Mario Garcia Durham, asked me what I wanted to see change in this climate of dance and disability. I said something which even surprised me. I said how I'd like the disability community to seize the moment and saturate the airwaves with our faces, experiences, and lives. I said I thought there had to be ample recognition of my nuance before my acceptance. My values strengthen: Society needs to know the range in disability is vast and substantial. Anything less and what is perceived as acceptance can actually be exotification or even fetishism: gross inaccuracies of our makeup. The combatant to this impulse, then, is a panel like this one.

As a dancer my relationship to the presenter is limited. I relegate all communication to my director/choreographer, because my input on things like lights and program text is inappropriate as the company member. In concert, I am inexperienced as a dance maker having only created a handful of short improvisations on the fly, so I can only speak peripherally about the artistry of dance. Therefore within the three tiered discussion, "Presenting Dance, Artistry, and Disability," I was fully suited for one. My whole life I've presented my cerebral palsy with grace and vigor, never allowing this disability to be misread as ugly, even when it causes me to throw up the middle finger once in a while. It's this that has led me to encounter relationships with presenters and dance itself. Whatever my acumen for these three elements in discussion, I was crucial to the panel. It would have been visually disastrous to have three nondisabled speakers confidently mill through two aspects of art making, like presenting and choreographing for PWDs, only to speculate on what it means to be presented and choreographed as a disabled person. This would have still been the case had the conference not been explicitly about dance and disability.

Here's the moment of sunlight, then. My inclusion on a discussion I didn't feel I embodied would have otherwise been lacking had I not been a part of it. I see my panel experience as the next wave of interaction with PWDs in general. When Mario Durham asked my insight into certain areas, I became his expert. More crucially, I became an asset for developing access. Where once PWDs were only diagnosed, now we make cultural diagnoses. The Center's axis is changing. "Ability" is aggressively transforming, and as a person with a distinct facility—I can do a mean arabesque and gyrate ridiculously fast, but Lord help me, I can't do a "proper" tendu—I am so necessary in that transformation. However, until I sat on a raised platform, with a time slot to speak on my experience, and a moderator to reiterate it, this kind of beautiful engagement was only speculative. This need to "matter" to the Center of Influence is sadly ringing throughout our country in several capacities, and I ring with it. As my father lovingly said to me once, "You're young, Black, and disabled: that's three strikes already." Still, I manage to present my abilities with that grace and vigor with expertise, even without the guarantee of being noticed. Now, the Center is genuinely looking to its margins for some answers and insight. Thankfully, I am only third away.

Jedediah Wheeler

**Executive Director, Arts & Cultural
Programming, Montclair State University;
Panelist, Presenting Dance,
Artistry, and Disability**



A PRESENTER'S DILEMMA

The overarching theme I experienced at Dance/NYC's extremely important conference was "inclusion," which reminded me of a phrase that new parents may hear for the first time when their children start kindergarten. *You Can't Say, You Can't Play* is the title of an important book by Vivian Gussin Paley, which suggests the moral dimensions of kindergarten activity.

Could there be a better principle upon which to consider presenting dance? Not because dance is for kindergarten children, but because the impact of moral choice starts early and can affect a child throughout life. Perhaps its most starkly poignant scenario is when children play together (generally at an adult's prompting) and one child is either willfully or inadvertently excluded. The reasons are all over the map. The excluded child is different. That child is loud. That child is quiet. A different color or sex or ethnicity. Not so smart. Too smart. But generally speaking the selectivity is a function of an adult charged with the well-being of children. An adult who rightly or not has made a judgment based on some sense of protection. In my view difference is magnified by a generalized assumption of what will be good for a group as a whole.

Presenting embodies both an artistic as well as a moral dilemma.

With no claim to child development expertise, nor wishing to convey paternalism, the metaphor of play is helpful to me in understanding inclusion in the arts, because presenting is about how we can play together in a highly creative way and how to honor our differences.

What is it about kindergarten that gets lost over time? And what can we learn as presenters from childhood experience?

In kindergarten, everyone knows how to dance. By third grade, children become self-conscious about their personal abilities and quite often begin to say when asked to dance, "I do not know how to do that," even though each had been an enthusiastic dancer earlier. Self-awareness has built a barrier against inclusion!

Being a presenter/producer of dance (and other art forms) is to embrace hard and contradictory choices. Inclusion partnered with exclusion. Noticeable at the Dance/NYC conference on disabilities were the heartaches experienced by those artists who are not seen. Who are overlooked. And excluded from the playground... so to speak... because of difference.

The poet E. E. Cummings wrote, freely interpreted by me, that curled in the word "yes" is a world of undiscovered possibilities. Yet to unfurl the mysteries of yes, a presenter must say no. Ouch.

What is seen when a dancer can only sit while tremors flow majestically from his body? No leaps, twirls, or toe taps. Are we seeing a man with Parkinson's disease? Or do we see a man performing to his own personal and poetic capacity? Does a dancer in a wheelchair evoke her limitations as an artist or is she expressing an amazing creative passion that only she can reveal?

The post-modern choreographers of our time made movement with objects and bodies in ways that confused audiences expecting traditional forms of dance. Many said that choreographers such as Trisha Brown or David Gordon were not artists of significance. They were dismissed for seeming to ignore the dance canon that preceded them. But now? Consider the disdain thrust on Merce Cunningham a few decades ago and how his work is revered today.

The task of presenting nontraditional artists is to see all abilities and to celebrate our common experience as people of great difference. Build an audience's passion for seeing something new. A hard thing because the familiar is so comforting. Audiences become real one person at a time.

One brick at a time (thank you, Trisha Brown). I encourage each audience member to see what can be seen or heard or felt. Without a filter of no. But with the embrace of yes.

Dance should be celebrated as a universal language of all bodies. Bill "Crutchmaster" Shannon's profound gift was the way his individual character blended seamlessly with his deeply intuitive movement.

Dance is deeply inclusive. Presenters can make it more so.

Beth Bienvenu

**Director, Office of Accessibility,
National Endowment for the Arts;
Moderator, Developing Artists:
Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces**



I had the honor of moderating the panel on opportunities for New York dance spaces at the Disability. Dance. Artistry. convening on July 8. Dance/NYC assembled a remarkable group of dancers, choreographers, arts administrators, advocates, and educators for an informative day of discussion about the future of disability and dance. After a series of discussions on the artistry and creation of dance, our panel addressed the challenges facing the field and the progress toward developing accessible spaces for dance to make the dance community more inclusive.

At this convening, I was pleased to see attention paid to two key issues: increasing opportunities for dancers with disabilities by building support for the field of physically integrated dance and dance education, and supporting audience members with disabilities by improving access to performance spaces and engaging the disability community with increased and focused outreach.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has long supported both cultural accessibility and physically integrated dance through funding and technical assistance for cultural organizations. For several decades we have supported the work of dance companies such as AXIS Dance Company, Dancing Wheels Company and School, and Infinity Dance Theater Company; presenters such as universities and touring houses; choreography projects and commissions such as the Maggie Allesee National Center for Choreography; and multidisciplinary dance initiatives such as Tigertail Productions' danceAble project.

As accessibility director for the NEA, my goal is to help ensure inclusion for people with disabilities as both audiences and artists. I work with cultural organizations to help them understand the accessibility requirements under

the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, and identify ways to be more inclusive. We have also developed leadership initiatives to support artists with disabilities, including a series of national and state convenings and projects to provide mentoring, training, and funding opportunities.

We have seen, over the past several decades, a number of great strides in the fields of accessibility and dance. Cultural organizations now think beyond curb cuts and accessible seating to include sensory-friendly performances, audio description for dance, preshow touch tours, and innovative projects that integrate both audiences and performers with disabilities. The NEA requires that its grant applicants demonstrate how they will make their projects accessible, and its grant recipients must also complete a checklist to ensure accessibility measures are being followed. These efforts have helped encourage the arts community to think more inclusively about their facilities and programs, and we have seen a significant increase in accessibility for people with physical, sensory, cognitive, and intellectual disabilities across the cultural sector.

There is still a long way to go to reach full inclusion, however. We are challenged by a recent [Survey of Public Participation in the Arts](#) report showing that people with disabilities are less likely to attend an arts event than people without disabilities. The report doesn't offer reasons for the disparity, but we can assume that it is at least partly due to a lack of accessible programs and spaces. In addition, many schools and conservatories have yet to expand their ideas of who dancers are and what dance can be. For example, I recently visited a small liberal arts college with a new performing arts building that had two steps leading into the dance studio. What type of message does this send to students about the nature of dance and the characteristics of dancers?

So what can we do as a field to help address these barriers? I see several areas for opportunity, growth, and change:

Front-of-house and backstage accessibility—We must continue to educate cultural organizations about not only their legal requirements, but also the benefits of accessibility. People with disabilities and their families are a large market segment that can enhance and expand dance audiences,

so it is important to attract and retain them through full inclusion and accommodation. The NEA, state arts agencies, and networks such as the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' Leadership Exchange in Arts and Disability (LEAD) are playing a key role in educating the field and expanding capacity, but we must continue the efforts as staff turns over, budget priorities shift, and new technologies emerge.

Audience development—A trip to a cultural venue for a dance performance can be intimidating for a number of people in our communities. Lack of information on the accessibility of the facility, lack of accessible transportation, ticket costs, and even lack of exposure to art forms such as modern dance and ballet can put up barriers for attendance. Dance companies and performance venues can foster partnerships with local disability organizations and create advisory boards to gather input on how to create a welcoming, inclusive experience. They can publish informational guides for visiting their facilities, develop "social stories" and create sensory-friendly/relaxed performances for people on the autism spectrum, and offer performances at schools, community centers, and nursing homes, as well as matinees and morning performances, to engage those who cannot attend evening performances.

Field development—For the field itself, I pose a few questions. How do we encourage dance companies, dance schools, conservatories, and choreographers to expand their view of dance to include people with different types of bodies and disabilities? How do we encourage presenters to include physically integrated dance on their rosters? How do we foster opportunity for exploration and innovation within the field of dance?

I pose these questions and suggestions to help continue the discussion, but I also applaud the organizations that are doing great work to advance the field. I look forward to seeing the progress of Fractured Atlas' SpaceFinder project, which will help dance companies find accessible venues. I look forward to the continued success of the Theater Development Fund, which is helping make theater accessible through sensory-friendly performances of Broadway shows and other accommodations. And I look forward to seeing continued progress through the efforts of Dance/NYC and the rest of the dance field as it continues to motivate and open minds toward fully integrated dance for all dancers and audiences.

John McEwen

**Executive Director,
New Jersey Theatre Alliance;
Founder of the Cultural Access
Network Project of New Jersey;
Panelist, Developing Artists,
Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces**



ARTS ACCESS—COLLABORATION
NEEDS TO BE CENTER STAGE

"Unity is strength. ...When there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved." —Mattie Stepanek, American poet

I had the honor and privilege of serving on a panel at Disability. Dance. Artistry., an event hosted by Dance/NYC. My panel looked at how dance spaces (i.e., presenting organizations, studios, and residencies) can better support the training and development of disabled professional artists and their work.

For presenters, studios, and dance companies alike, cultural access needs to be an organizational priority. Yet cultural access, from the perspectives of both audience and artist, cannot be achieved without collaboration among boards of directors, management, artists, patrons, and a wide range of community organizations. Access is not the responsibility of one individual and will not be achieved successfully by working in a vacuum.

The first step is the development of an ADA policy statement that demonstrates that the organization is committed to ensuring that all audiences and artists have equal access. This policy statement needs to appear on websites, press releases, and other communication vehicles to educate a wide range of constituents of the organization's commitment.

Artists and patrons with disabilities want to be, and need to be, included in the planning of initiatives and staff/volunteer education. Organizations need to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge and the networks among

individuals with disabilities by engaging them as advisory board members, ambassadors, and advocates. Many organizations have good intentions, but failing to involve constituents they wish to serve in the planning process often leads to frustration and a feeling of not being valued. Organizations need to be aware that access is more than individuals with mobility impairments; artists and patrons with vision loss, hearing loss, deafness, and cognitive disabilities are equally important.

Conducting staff sensitivity training sessions, the development and implementation of customer service policies, understanding appropriate terminology for oral and written communication, and having an opportunity to better understand what makes a worthwhile cultural experience for an artist or patron with a disability are crucial in creating a welcoming environment.

Cultural access might seem overwhelming to many organizations, but it does not need to be. Here are few important steps to get started:

Conduct an assessment: There are self-assessment tools designed to help organizations assess facilities, programs and marketing/communication elements of an organization. The assessment should be a collaborative effort between staff, advisory board members, and/or representatives from organizations serving artists and people with disabilities. By completing the assessment, you will have a greater understanding of where you are and what is possible.

Planning: As organizations develop strategic plans for their operations, cultural access needs to be an essential component of the plan. Policies, employment, programs, marketing, and facility all need to be considered in the planning process. Everything does not need to be done overnight, but by having a clear roadmap, the organization can begin to take the necessary steps toward full inclusion. As organizations have budget line items for marketing, programs, etc., they should also have one for access. Many things can be done with little to no expense; however, there are some items that will require resources, and organizations should identify those resources in their planning process.

For dance companies that tour, I suggest developing a tour rider that can be completed by your presenting organization so there is a clear understanding of its commitment to access and the services they provide. Work with the presenter to identify areas where you can collaborate on making programs and services more accessible, and include the tour rider as an amendment to your contract with the presenter.

Cultural access benefits all patrons and artists. It is more than the ADA. It is simply the right thing to do. Take a step at a time and with the engagement and collaboration of your internal and external partners, you will create a welcoming and forward-thinking environment that supports dignity and independence for ALL.

For access resources and a self-assessment tool, please visit njtheatrealliance.org/ada-planning.

Nicholas Viselli

**Artistic Director, Theater Breaking Through Barriers;
Panelist, Developing Artists,
Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**



DISABILITY, ART, AND THE SILVERING OF THE ADA: A DANCE ON THE CUSP OF CHANGE

With great fanfare, New York City commemorated the twenty fifth anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act by hosting a monthlong celebration, replete with festivals, symposiums, lectures, performances, and our city's first Disability Pride Parade. It was quite a party! That being said, it's hard to believe that the ADA is only twenty-five years old. For myself, it's even more incomprehensible that the ADA came into existence virtually one year before I began calling New York City my home. How is this possible? How could it be that one of our country's most important pieces of legislation since the Civil Rights Act of 1964 *only* came into existence twenty-five years ago? My own age notwithstanding, why does it feel like we just celebrated the birthday of a child?

An anniversary can be a sobering occasion: It can warmly compel us to reflect on where we've been and how far we've come, and it allows us to celebrate all the great things we've accomplished. At the same time, an anniversary can coldly remind us how far we need to go and what we lack, and it forces us to face the seeming impossibility of what needs to be done.

It was this stark dichotomy that toned the festivities of New York's ADA silver celebration and fueled Dance/NYC's stunning panel symposium, Disability. Dance. Artistry., at John Jay College on July 8.

Dance/NYC has always been a leader and key advocate for disability inclusion in the NYC dance community. This past year, however, it broke new ground when it formed a task force, in conjunction with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, to investigate the current state of NYC

dance companies in relation to their work with disabled dance artists. The investigation focused on several key issues, including: programming by and for disabled performers; the availability of fully accessible performance and rehearsal spaces; and educational training and audience involvement. The task force spent months researching and trolling for answers by reaching out to dance makers, government agencies, arts educators, and rehearsal/performance venue management. Sadly, though not surprisingly, the committee's findings were disappointingly grim.

Disability. Dance. Artistry. introduced Dance/NYC research to the public and organized several key panel discussions around each issue facing our disabled arts community today: Education, Presentation, Accessibility, and Artistry. The result was a provocative, comprehensive, and heartfelt symposium, which sought to find solutions to several ongoing, immensely challenging issues.

The daylong event was packed with invaluable information, thought-provoking discussion, and genuine inspiration. For myself, the greatest gift of this symposium was simply the opportunity to come together with a cross section of people from different areas and echelons within our community to share an honest dialogue concerning the current plight of disabled artists in our society today.

Disability is a very tricky subject to navigate—even in a room of like-minded individuals, dedicated to advancing the same cause. It became quite clear to me as the day unfolded that while everyone agrees that we must strive to create a level playing field for our artists, there is great variance on how this must come about. Of course, there are many answers. We have many great sources of inspiration and leadership, several of whom were present and helped to set the tone for the day's discourse. The event provided a unique experience to actually meet some of these people firsthand and connect with them. Discussions ranged from stimulating to controversial to downright frustrating. The one certainty was that none of it was boring.

The key question, which I feel has yet to be answered, is how can we, once and for all, alter the perception of disability in our society from one of marginalization and pity to one of fortitude, uniqueness, and acceptance?

Perhaps there is no right answer. Some of us choose to be activists and put disability above all else. Some choose to downplay disability and focus on the art. Some choose to do both, shamelessly and without apology. None of these are wrong.

Retrospective of our gathering, it is clear that we are certainly closer than ever to changing our stars. Our world has certainly become smaller. The advent of instant communication and social media—a double-edged sword—has opened the floodgates of possibility. It's clear that we now have a very big microphone to amplify our cause. The best way to influence perception is to share our ideas through thoughtful, meaningful discourse. We need to create more forums for discussion, like Disability. Dance. Artistry. We must focus on opening the dialogue and widening the circle. The more we share our ideas, the faster we will be able to rewire antiquated perceptions surrounding disability and bring about meaningful change. As artists, we have an added advantage in that we can profoundly influence through the power of our art. Ultimately, disability will matter only as much as we want it to matter.

Ours is still a young revolution. We have made more progress altering perceptions of disability in the past twenty-five years than throughout the whole of human history. The very fact that Dance/NYC was able to successfully organize this extraordinary event and attract so many people to take part makes it abundantly clear that we are dancing on the cusp of change.

We have come a long way these many few years and have a great deal to celebrate. But as we do so, let us cast a glance on the long road ahead and proceed together, moving forward confidently.

Alexandria Wailes

**Actor, Dancer, Teaching Artist;
Panelist, Developing Artists,
Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**



It has been enthralling being a member of the task force for Dance/NYC for the last year and half.

Then, on July 8, 2015, I was witnessing conversations about the current momentum within the dance world, while listening to shared experiences and observing the ideologies implemented into practice, as well as being plugged in to a room full of people who were comfortable in sharing their journeys. It was enriching. What I walked away with was the enthused urgency, stronger agency, and marked awareness that, collectively, we can and will continue to encourage social changes within the world of dance. I am also very pleased with the announcement of the upcoming launch of SpaceFinder's Disability and Dance Workspaces Directory. This will absolutely provide better vetted services for consumers, facilities, and venues throughout the city. I deeply appreciate every person for doing the work to implement this service and maintaining the upkeep of said provision.

As a panelist on "Developing Artists: Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces," it was crucial to share/remind the room of some of the challenges faced by artists working and creating when going through the logistics of booking spaces for rehearsals and being in venues for presentations and performances. It became quite clear that despite the challenges of preexisting physical spaces, especially in NYC, and naïveté toward cultural sensitivity, the critical point of improvement needs to start at the top of an infrastructure in organizations, companies, and venues.

There have been instances in which a default to the ADA has been used in which a venue defines itself as compliant, but is not entirely transparent as to what exactly that entails. Therefore, what ends up happening is an inconsistency in communications on a company-to-company basis with

regard to the ever-changing variables necessary within each company that is physically integrated.

From personal experiences within the last four months, I witnessed a breakdown in communications within the dance company and between the company and venues. In two separate venues, I found myself spending time on numerous emails and face-to-face haggling for ASL interpreters, especially for tech rehearsals. For one venue, the organizers believed the request for ASL interpreters didn't give them sufficient time to make necessary arrangements—they were informed three months in advance and were reminded a few times as performance dates neared, and their campus had an accessibility office. The dance company ended up finding a pro bono, one time solution of an interpreter at the last minute for only two hours out of an eleven-hour tech schedule.

The other venue knew at least six months in advance of the company's residency. Yet again, on short notice a week and a half prior to the company's visit, the organizers told us, the company, of their extremely limited parameters as to what they believed they could handle financially since ASL interpreters were an unforeseen cost. We came to an agreement and made the best of the limitations granted.

Additionally, in preparations for being in both venues, I and another Deaf dancer asked for and were ready willingly to discuss with the venue's crew and to support the company's technical director with where to implement cue lights off in the wings so we would know when to come onstage. Our request and offered support didn't happen due to "lack of support and complexity of the piece."

With these experiences fresh in my mind, I questioned how to prevent this from happening again in the future.

Keynote speaker Simi Linton used a brilliant physical analogy of the closefisted right hand representing the community of artists with disabilities and the open left hand representing society at large, and how the two come together with the left hand covering the right hand in working together.

Experiencing this gesture visually, I thought it reflected exactly what has been happening: A coming together of communities, yes, but not on a fully equal playing field. This means that what needs to transpire, from this point on, is for both hands to be open and come together fully clasped. This riff off the existing analogy will be the game changer.

One viable solution would be to create a new standard in complete and consistent transparency from the onset in conversations between venues, companies, and artists.

My fellow panelist, John McEwen, mentioned tour riders, which I strongly believe benefit both parties and strengthen work relationships—short and long term.

Another suggestion would be to implement ongoing sessions of sensitivity training throughout the fiscal year on all levels. This includes and is not limited to: founders; boards of directors; in-house departments; venue coordinators; development/grant writing departments; accessibility coordinators; ushers; box office personnel; choreographers; dancers within physically integrated companies; and company, stage, and tech management.

Organizers should continue to follow protocol in having staff person(s) maintain and modify websites of venues and facilities. These updates benefit audiences, artists, and organizers.

If these are financial challenges, seek out local, state, and federal grants. In the meantime, do not hesitate to reach out to other companies and artists with disabilities within the dance and theater communities who may be available and may want to engage in conversations, share experiences, provide guidance, and discuss solutions.

We, art makers, are generally creative thinkers. Continue to think outside of the box, all the while reminding ourselves and others what resources do exist right in front of us.

Thanks to technology, we are in an era of social information exchange. Learn the latest, reach out, connect, have conversations, improve on the strengths of our companies, and address the areas that need more attention.

Support exists.

We are indeed shifting the social paradigm, via dance, in rehearsals and performances and in interactions of organizers, artists, personnel, and audiences. I think with more conversations—strengthening awareness and sensitivity, starting from the top (comprising organizers, facilitators, choreographers and dancers)—more will be accomplished.

We are acknowledging the actual physical accessibility of performance spaces. What we need to continue to examine is what the experience of accessibility means when deemed to be suited “for all”—from the lens of the artists themselves.

Christine Bruno

**Disability Advocate, Inclusion in the Arts;
Attendee, Disability. Dance. Artistry;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**



CREATING WELCOMING SPACES

"The studio building is dedicated to the performing artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and to the spells you cast. And that was the starter yeast for that building. It's really simple. It was so that people could bleed, cry, sweat, laugh, embrace, and go out with a work of art at the end of their time there that was beyond what they had hoped for." —Cora Cahan, President, New 42nd Street Studios

When Cora Cahan shared her thoughts about her vision for the New 42nd Street Studios at Dance/NYC's Disability. Dance. Artistry. convening, they carried a dual message. As Disability Advocate at Inclusion in the Arts, whose primary mission is to advocate for the full inclusion of underrepresented artists in film, theatre, and television, I was encouraged to learn that this universally designed venue in the cultural and commercial hub of our city was conceived of as a purpose-built space envisioned by a group of people who understand that art is made by and for *everyone* and that in order to make good work, artists need, and, more important, *deserve* a space that both welcomes them and encourages creation. What I found most exciting was that Cahan's comments didn't directly address disability or disabled artists in any way. She felt no need to distinguish between disabled artists and nondisabled artists because her spaces exemplify the inclusionary impulse at work. The New 42nd Street Studios were designed to serve artists.

Almost simultaneously, however, I was reminded that for every New 42nd Street Studios, there are thousands of rehearsals spaces and venues across the five boroughs that are either entirely inaccessible to the constituency of disabled artists Inclusion in the Arts' serves, or make creating work—and performing—in the those spaces challenging at best.

As reported in *Discovering Disability: Data & NYC Dance* (pp. 37–43) through data compiled by SpaceFinder (nyc.spacefinder.org), of the 1,728 spaces registered on SpaceFinder, only 330 reported being ADA-compliant, 78% of those located in Manhattan. Internationally recognized as one of the world's leading cultural centers, New York City needs to do a better job of serving its disabled citizens, audiences, and artists. From its cultural institutions to its funding organizations to its rehearsal spaces, there should be no exceptions or loopholes to providing access and inclusion across our city. Dance/NYC can continue to play a pivotal role in moving toward full equity and inclusion for dancers and dance makers by encouraging dance companies, venues, and space owners to begin the conversation by considering three essential points:

- ADA compliance is the baseline of accessibility;
- The disabled dancer knows best what his/her individual needs may be; and
- As one attendee stated, We need to stop asking, "Is my space accessible?," and start asking, "Is my space welcoming to all?"

The panel discussion further confirmed that New York City continues to fall significantly behind other cities and states (as evidenced by New Jersey State Council on the Arts/Department of State's required ADA plan and the Massachusetts Cultural Council's move toward universal design), with respect to both the availability of accessible spaces and venues, and the adoption of mandatory ADA-compliance-plan funding eligibility requirements. Disabled artists (as well as many nondisabled artists) who attempt to make work or perform in New York City often do so with the innate understanding that several factors beyond our control may make it more difficult for us to do our best work. Among them:

- A lack of available real estate for new construction and regulations that limit the renovation of historic buildings;
- A lack of accessibility among existing rehearsal spaces and venues;

- Inadequate funding and/or staff support among arts organizations to make their spaces ADA-compliant, let alone fully accessible, structurally and/or programmatically;
- Virtually no existing sustainable financial infrastructure, at the City, State, or Federal level to support capital improvements funding for ADA compliance;
- Limited understanding of disability, disability rights, and disability culture; and
- Lack of awareness of and/or little interaction with the disabled dance community.

Given these and other challenges, how then can dance companies, venues, and dance service organizations be more proactive and begin to follow an inclusionary impulse that will allow dance makers to do their best work in welcoming environments?

As New York City's leading dance service organization, Dance/NYC—supported by its core values of equity and inclusion; *Discovering Disability: Data & NYC Dance*; collaborations with allies such as Inclusion in the Arts and Fractured Atlas; and ongoing consultancy with disabled dancers, advocates, and activists—is perfectly positioned to help shift the paradigm from basic ADA compliance to full inclusion and equity for dancers and dance makers.

- Dance/NYC can play an even greater leadership role by ensuring all of its initiatives and programmatic activities going forward represent and include dancers from every disability community across the five boroughs. Ongoing dialogue with dancers and dance makers among all disability communities is crucial.

- Dance/NYC can continue to provide an online home for its constituency by including on its resource page:
 - Information about how to develop an ADA plan that goes beyond basic compliance and embraces full inclusion;
 - A list of available funding resources (NYSCA, DCLA, corporations, foundations, private donors, crowdfunding sites, etc.) for dance organizations and presenters looking to make structural improvements;
 - Information about nonstructural ADA compliance (Web accessibility, audio description, captioning, sign language interpretation, etc.); and
 - Information that outlines the responsibility of the presenter and the company (e.g., the importance of having a contract rider).

Dance/NYC and its allies can continue to play a key role in bringing awareness and education to dance organizations, venues, and rehearsal space owners about not only the legalities and moral imperative of providing a welcome space for disabled dancers to create, but helping them understand the financial (according to a 2010 survey, disabled people in the U.S. have \$220 billion in discretionary spending), and, more important, artistic benefits making a commitment to full inclusion can bring to their organization or institution.

Dance/NYC and its allies can begin a dialogue with city and state funding agencies about the importance and value of instituting a policy that requires dance companies/venues and cultural organizations to submit a comprehensive ADA plan that goes beyond basic compliance as a condition to receiving funding, adopting elements of the best practices model of NJSCA and the Cultural Access Project Network, as well as developing ongoing evaluation and accountability tools.

Dance/NYC can continue to work with Fractured Atlas to expand the scope of the SpaceFinder program to include comprehensive buy-in from the disability community that includes periodic, unannounced site visits to all registered venues. Fractured Atlas can revise its platform to reflect one that is recommendation-based rather than review-based, as well as invite artists to provide ongoing feedback (including a ratings system). Dance/NYC can encourage the organizations it serves to maintain an ongoing dialogue with Fractured Atlas regarding their space(s) and report any changes in their accessibility status.

As the country's leading arts service organization dedicated to promoting full inclusion for disabled artists and artists of color in film, theatre, and television nationwide, Inclusion in the Arts looks forward to our continued collaboration with Dance/NYC. We support the incredible work they are doing to increase opportunities for disabled dancers and advance the practice of inclusive dance making, and share their vision for a city that is fully accessible to and inclusive of artists who represent the full diversity of all its communities.

Stephen Yaffe

**Chair, Arts In Special
Education Consortium;
Moderator, Creating Disabled Artists:
Dance Education in
the NYC Public Schools**



There is a great need for more collaboration between the dance community and New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE) dance teachers serving students with disabilities. This would benefit the dance community, the dance teachers and, most important, the students.

Such collaboration needs to be in the classroom, outside the classroom and two-way—i.e., both *sides* sharing their considerable expertise, not one “partner” receiving the services of another.

In the Classroom

Dance teacher discussants on the Creating Artists: Dance Education in the NYC Public Schools panel (Disability. Dance. Artistry.) expressed a strong desire to work with dance teaching artists (TAs). Such collaboration would provide them greater connection with the professional dance world and give them and their students access to new ideas, approaches and techniques. A further benefit TAs bring is that they come from the world outside school—something of particular significance to those whose lives may be contained because of their disabilities.

An important obstacle to dance teacher/TA partnering is that principals can see it as “redundant.” The thinking goes like this: *Why should I bring in a teaching artist to work in a dance class when I already have staff to provide that art form?*

What is lacking is a sense of the synergy provided by such collaboration and its benefits to the students. Those values don’t magically convey

themselves. The more the dance community understands them and communicates them—clearly and explicitly—to school administrators, the better it will be served.

Dance teachers often work in silos. That connection with the professional dance world is craved by many of them and can be highly reinvigorating professionally, which in turn is advantageous to their pupils.

Pairing a TA with the dance teacher instead of, or as well as, a non-art classroom teacher can help ensure the longevity of a teaching artist's work beyond a residency, which, by definition, is finite. This is not to suggest a classroom teacher won't do so. But a dance teacher may be more likely to build on the effort and incorporate the new ideas in his/her own work.

The dance teacher/dance TA collaboration is a school dance and professional dance partnership. It implies a bridge and access to that professional world. For this reason panelists talked about, in planning for the session, the value of collaborating with a disabled TA and showing video of his or her work in class. That would, as one put it, speak eloquently to students about overcoming barriers and what can be attained.

Out of the Classroom

School/dance community collaborations should include student attendance at live performances, especially ones occurring at professional—i.e., nonschool—venues. Those featuring disabled and/or mixed ability dancers would be of great value. This would extend the notion of what is possible, along with notions of beauty and dance.

Visiting a professional dance rehearsal would also be of benefit. Students could see firsthand the process of dance making and the need for fine-tuning.

Panelists also felt that professional development (PD) with the dance community would be "very useful." There is great opportunity here.

Such PD would enable NYC DOE dance teachers to receive training in areas of interest and need. These include but are not limited to wheelchair

dance techniques and wheelchair movement, training in styles they may not be familiar with (flamenco or Afro-Caribbean, to mention just two) and choreographing with mixed ability dancers. (Heidi Latsky comes to mind regarding the latter.)

Although discussed less, the dance community would benefit from professional development provided by the education community. Many TAs are not sufficiently prepared to work with students with disabilities. This is not surprising given the intricacies and span of a field that includes physical, cognitive, social, and emotional domains. Areas in which teaching artists need education include learning about specific disability classifications and their pedagogical implications, how to prepare for the special education residency, and working in the inclusive classroom and behavior management.

While there is great knowledge within the NYC DOE in general and District 75, its "special" education district, dance teaching artists would be particularly well served if professional development was provided them by NYC DOE dance teachers with special education expertise.

It is recommended professional development—whether provided to teaching artists or provided by them—move beyond the single workshop model, that it be multisession and contain real-world means by which the work can be transferred, troubleshoot, and coached. To that end, PD could be a component of TA residencies with the teaching artists serving as dance teacher coaches in the classroom, and/or vice versa, depending on the content and nature of the PD. Such a tiered approach would take the partnering and synergy to a new level.

If this PD also included occupational and physical therapists (who could be invited to observe and/or participate), something dance teachers called for—it would have the added benefit of helping dance and the dance community grow new and deeper roots within schools serving students with disabilities.

Zazel-Chavah O'Garra

**Artistic Director, ZCO/Dance Project;
Panelist, Creating Disabled Artists: Dance
Education in the NYC Public Schools;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**



The disabled dance community is growing and expanding with the knowledge that everybody can dance with intention and purpose and working on the basis of what dancers can do rather than what they can't.

The dance community offers wide-ranging opportunities for disabled children and adults to engage with dance: personal and collective creative expression, advocacy for disabled people in the larger community, artistic skills, and now increasing professional opportunities.

To address the developing interest in disability dance education, dance teachers, teaching artists, and dance therapists are receiving comprehensive and continuous training to develop their careers in a vast array of programs and schools both nationwide and abroad. Artists recognize that teaching dance to children and adults with disabilities is a developing process that needs the proper skill set to promote self-confidence, self-awareness, positive interaction, and cognition to develop and thrive as professional dancers.

In New York City, dance therapists can obtain a three-year degree from 92nd Street Y's Alternate Route Training Program. The program features classes in shared creativity, authentic movement, and methods in dance therapy, everything designed for persons with movement disorders and physical disability, which can help to increase awareness, enabling them to cope better with their disability.

Pratt University, which is located in Brooklyn, offers a master's of science in dance movement therapy; it's designed to enhance therapeutic skills in physical, mental, social, and emotional development.

The Hunter College Dance Program recognizes the uniqueness of each individual and "strives to support the healthy development of every voice." The College's Arnhold Graduate Dance Education Program is designed for educators/dance artists to weave their own artistry and blossom in this rigorous program that will benefit the children they will educate. Hunter College also offers a five-year dance BA/MA program.

The VSA (Very Special Arts) John F. Kennedy Center Program offers the Intersections: Arts and Special Education Conference, which provides dance teachers and teaching artists with disabilities training on the National Core Arts Standards. The NCAS is a guide for educators in providing a unified qualified arts education program for student's K-12. NCAS stresses creating, performing, presenting responding, and connecting.

The Royal Academy of Dance UK has a dance program for teachers. Its primary goal is for teachers to have students gain leadership skills, build confidence, communicate better, and interact with others in a nonverbal way.

The last few years has seen the increase of disabled dancers performing in professional dance companies. Students are becoming better prepared to meet the challenges of being professional dancers by learning the demands of variety of different dance genres, and by finding the courage to perform in front of audiences in theatres.

Dancers and dance companies are collaborating with choreographers and discovering innovative dance language. Companies such as the AXIS Dance Company, based in California, exist to change the face of dance and disability by not letting dancers' physical disabilities stand their way of executing artistry.

The School of Dancing Wheels in Cleveland, Ohio, uses movement and performance in a unique approach to education and therapy. The company's founder believes individuals, who previously found limited access to the arts due to physical, sensory, or developmental disabilities, enjoy inclusive dance and participatory learning with their disabled and nondisabled peers an invigorating experience. The company continues to work on a "greater understanding and professionalism in individuals of all ability levels."

Dance should not exclude anyone. Dance is a creative expression that satisfies the desire to move, interact, and explore boundaries. Disabled dancers are now beginning to feel more empowered because they are being recognized.

Sandra Stratton-Gonzalez

**Dance Specialist, The Children's School,
PS 372; Adjunct, Hofstra University;
Panelist, Creating Disabled Artists: Dance
Education in the NYC Public Schools**



How can the public schools nurture the education and development of dance artistry with disabled young people?

There are students with a wide range of challenges and disabilities in public education. The Children's School, P.S. 372 in Brooklyn, has educated children with disabilities and children in general education side by side in every class at every grade level since 1990. We use an ICT (Integrated Co-Teaching) model of instruction, with two teachers and one paraprofessional in each classroom. Classes are more than 40% percent children with special needs and include children with ADD, ADHD, Speech, Hearing and Visual impairments, Autism Spectrum Disorders, Emotional Disabilities, and many other challenges.

The P.S. 372 dance program focuses on nurturing each child's artistic development. Dance instruction is built around the principles of Creative Dance. Students are encouraged to develop expressive skills while exploring the elements of dance, making dances, expanding physical abilities, and learning about dance in history and culture.

Rather than fitting my children into a mainstream aesthetic, I work to expand the idea of dance. Dominant concert and entertainment dance styles are challenged. Student work stands on its own, and is not judged by current norms. As public education dance programs become more inclusive, student diversity will change dance education. One likely result is the establishment of a generation of dancers, choreographers, and audience members with an expanded aesthetic framework.

As children leave elementary school in New York City, there are not as many opportunities for dancers with disabilities. There are fewer middle and high school dance programs overall. Of those available, many are audition-based with standard criteria. What is the child's extension and turnout? How quickly does the child pick up movement phrases? Less attention is paid to the aesthetic choices of the child and how she renders ideas in movement. An expansion of middle and high school opportunities, coupled with the development of new admissions criteria, are in order.

How do we support inclusion of disabled dancers in the profession?

What do we mean by professional dancer? Are we limiting professional status to those dancers and choreographers who make a living wage at their craft? Do we acknowledge the thousands of highly trained dancers who cannot find paid work? Do we aspire to add more students to BFA programs while continuing to limit professional options?

Let's redefine the term "professional." Professionals include dancers who teach and dancers who perform. Professionals include dance writers, critics, editors, program developers, promoters, costume designers, and community arts practitioners. A professional is an artist who contributes to the dance field consistently, over time, by playing any number of these roles with respect and integrity.

We must engage our students in a broad dance education and give them tools to embed dance into the fabric of daily life. As we open dance education to students with a wide range of abilities we must simultaneously ensure that all dance artists are accorded professional respect. Then, as our students render their world through dance, they will change the dominant dance culture. They will become professionals; leaders in their communities who use the language and discipline of dance as a vehicle for expression, celebration, and community engagement.

What type of professional development is needed for dance educators and current professionals? How do we build models of collaboration?

Dance Educator Intervisits

A redefinition of professionalism, and the inclusion of dancers of diverse abilities, requires that respect be intentionally developed between all stakeholders. Intervisits and sharing between dance educators at the NYC Department of Education is one place to start. These gatherings can be organized around student populations; for example, organizing a meeting of teachers of children on the autism spectrum, or of teachers of students with physical challenges. Groups might also be convened around a theme such as social studies integration or classroom management. Funds must be provided for coverage by substitutes so that educators can visit each other's programs, and space and time allocated to share and document best practices.

Dancers with Disabilities as Guest Artists and Staff Developers

Another key step is to invite dance artists with disabilities to work as guest artists in the schools, and to provide ample funds for compensation. This will allow our students to see themselves as professionals and allow public school dance educators to experience new approaches to educating their students. In addition to bringing the artists directly to the classroom, videos of work by a wide range of differently abled artists can be funded and made available for teachers for use in the classroom.

In addition to working with students, disabled artists can also provide workshops for public school dance educators focusing on their choreographic work, and on the strategies they have used to face challenges in the field. Parallel workshops can also be provided by dance educators for disabled teaching artists on topics such as classroom management and public school dance class basics (class size and composition, facilities, collaborative teaching strategies, etc.).

Professional Colleagues and Curriculum Development

Performers, choreographers, dance educators, dance writers, and designers all have a great deal to learn from each other. Facilitated meetings, organized around essential questions, can be used to develop new curricula for public school students. Topics might include: How do choreographers develop duets with differently abled dancers? What are the challenges that dancers with autism face as performers? How can we use technology to support learning by students with learning disabilities and with physical challenges?

Expanding Education and Hiring Practices

Finally, universities can actively recruit artists with disabilities as dance certification candidates, and the NYC Department of Education can recruit disabled dancers as full-time teachers in the public schools.

These strategies will help us to expand the nature of dance education for all dance students. Implemented consistently, and with respect, they will help us all to honor the gifts of students, teachers, and artists with varied abilities. By doing so we will redefine dance aesthetics and the concept of professionalism, and revolutionize both dance education and dance itself.

Diane Duggan

**Licensed Psychologist—Board-Certified
Dance/Movement Therapist,
New York University and 92nd St Y
Harkness Dance Center;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**

The first step in developing artistry in disabled dancers is to commit to providing dance education to all children and youth, regardless of disability. Ongoing, active participation in inclusive dance programs will give all youngsters the opportunity to experience self-exploration, self-expression, and communication through dance. It is vital that all children participate actively and not merely as spectators. Traditional ways of teaching creative movement and dance technique should be adapted to meet the needs of young dancers with disabilities. They also need opportunities to engage in performance, in venues ranging from the classroom to the proscenium. Universal, inclusive, appropriate dance education delivered by well-trained dance professionals will nurture the disabled dance artists of tomorrow and provide a solid foundation for further training. A commitment to inclusion will educate tomorrow's dance audiences as well.

The best strategy to reach every child is to provide dance in the schools. This arrangement will prevent children from being left out because of a lack of transportation, economic factors, and/or bias against people with disabilities.

There are many disabling conditions that affect children and youth. Emotional disability, including psychiatric conditions and behavioral disorders, is the most common. Other types of disability include autistic spectrum disorder; physical, intellectual, and learning disabilities; blindness and deafness; and multiple disabilities. Some disabilities are readily apparent, while others are less obvious. Within each type of disability there is considerable diversity among individuals.

Each type of disability presents a different kind of challenge. Dance professionals working in schools need training in the strengths and needs of students with specific disabling conditions and the appropriate approaches and adaptations in dance.

In addition to teaching dance professionals specific adapted techniques, educators should be provided with tools to increase their awareness and understanding of the youngsters they are working with. Dance therapy training is highly recommended for dance professionals who work with youngsters with disabilities. It teaches how to observe, analyze, and respond in the moment so that the flow of a lesson is grounded in what's happening with the students. Adults must be able to recognize and effectively respond to children's unique voices and needs.

While serving on Dance/NYC's Disability Task Force, I was surprised to learn that there is some misunderstanding about what dance therapy entails. Dance therapy is the use of dance as a means to engage people at their current level of functioning, identify and cultivate their strengths, and respond to their needs, both self-identified and specific to their disabling condition. It can include anything from self-awareness exercises to advanced dance technique and every aspect of dance in between.

For example, my dance therapy program with adolescents with emotional and learning disabilities was based on dance making because that was a highly effective way to engage the young people. Together we created dances that they performed in schools and in prestigious venues such as Lincoln Center, South Street Seaport, St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery, and the Apollo Theater. Important therapeutic goals such as self-awareness, self-regulation, and socialization were achieved as a result of their working together to create and perform the dances. Recognizing and utilizing the inherent therapeutic properties of dance does not preclude presenting dance as an art form and developing youngsters as artists. It does, however, require special training.

I was surprised to learn that educators at the Department of Education are largely unaware of the therapeutic value of dance. Students classified as having disabilities can achieve many important social-emotional, physical, and cognitive domain Individualized Education Plan goals through dance. Dance educators and dance therapists working in the schools should be taught to articulate the value of their work so they can educate their colleagues.

Training for dance professionals working with youngsters with disabilities can take many forms, including classes, professional development workshops, intervisitations, residencies, peer education, coaching and mentoring.

An important learning for me had to do with language. Our task force privileged identity-first language, i.e., "disabled dancer" rather than people-first language, i.e., "child with a disability." Identity-first language makes a potent political statement. However, I believe that given its political impact it needs to be actively adopted and "owned" by the individual, not automatically bestowed by others.

People-first language has advantages in educational settings because it focuses attention on the individual, not the disability. Schools often group students according to categories to make delivery of educational services more efficient. These groupings can promote stereotyping and tend to obscure the individual. People-first language puts the person first, a practice that helps staff see individual youngsters rather than just their disability.

A related problem with identity-first language is that it can obscure people's strengths with its use of disability as a defining feature of the individual. The most effective and respectful way to work with anyone is to start with his or her strengths. A focus on the person can enable young dancers with disabilities to identify and access their own strengths and discover a movement palette with which to embody their personal aesthetic and express their own experience.

The most important thing I learned in this experience is how profoundly disabled people can be empowered by claiming their disability. Identity-first language is both a recognition and an honoring of the right of disabled people to self-determination. It is vital that educators teach students about the work of disabled artists and provide them opportunities to interact with disabled artists in both educational and performance settings. It is also vital that educators present identity-first language as a choice with powerful political implications so that youngsters with disabilities can consider their own identity in that light and decide how they see themselves and how they want to be referred to by others. The knowledge gained from exploring their bodies and movement through dance will add richness and depth to their sense of identity.

Elisabeth Axel

**Founder/President, Art Beyond Sight;
Dance/NYC Task Force Member**

DANCE BEYOND PERCEPTIONS

Dance, a liberating, expansive abandonment of the self to an exploration of space and movement through the body's self-expression, is an artistic exercise in mastering mobility. Master dance—or no less vital, learn to move in harmony with your body—and you've made bold strides in your journey toward mobility independence. Yet for most individuals, this is no easy feat to accomplish.

Regardless of our abilities, it's often difficult to overcome feeling awkward or shy and let loose to the beat. Fearing to seem foolish, we inhibit and constrict our world. These self-imposed limitations may be our biggest hurdles to soar above. Those of us in the dance and disability communities must clear the path free of obstructions—self-imposed, educational, mental, physical, and societal—in order to help dance makers with disabilities feel free to enjoy and benefit from the artistic emancipation of dance making.

Awareness is the first step. This is followed by creating disability-inclusive dance education and programs, which is followed by getting these to the proper participants and audiences. Simple and evident to state. Difficult to accomplish.

So just how do we achieve this? For me, it starts with perception.

Limitations can be a consequence of perception. As the founder in 1987 of Art Beyond Sight (then known as Art Education for the Blind), a nonprofit organization dedicated to using the arts—performing, visual, and folk arts—as a vehicle for education and personal enjoyment among people with visual impairments and other disabilities, I have lived through several decades of perceptions and change. For instance, in the 1980s, the New Visions Dance Project, a free program for people who are blind or visually impaired, had participants at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center in

Manhattan moving to an exciting new beat. The program, the brainchild of choreographer and dance innovator Alvin Ailey, first started in 1982 as a pilot workshop for teenagers with visual impairments in New York City. It gained strength and numbers in the coming years, expanding to other states and, in 1984, to other nations. Initially designed to introduce young people who are blind or visually impaired to the art of dance making, the project now also embraces people of all ages (from teens to the elderly) and all types of disabilities to the enriching, liberating act of self-expression and creation through movement. Today, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center continues its "open door" policy to people with disabilities; any person who is blind can call in, in advance, and be assured of a warm welcome to take part in any class offered.

While these and other similar initiatives seemed to make promising strides, somewhere along the way we failed to keep the lead, faltering through missteps and hesitations. Encouragingly, however, we have once again started to see new indications of progress. The very fact of the recent Dance/NYC convening in July, which drew such a large and engaged gathering of leaders in the dance and disability communities to discuss the state of the art of dance, is one such encouraging sign. Another is the increasing exposure to and openness of the mainstream public to the *abilities* of people with disabilities. One recent example comes strikingly to mind: how the judges and audience of *America's Got Talent 2015* embraced the talents of 14-year-old Benjamin Yonattan, a fearsome dancer who also just happens to be legally blind. At first the judges and audience were incredulous and hesitant when they saw this young man walk out with a mobility stick and Google Glass to explain that despite having no peripheral vision, he would be performing a contemporary dance. But they gave this inspiring young man a chance and he literally jumped with it, wowing everyone to a standing ovation and many to tears.

Without him needing to say anything, Benjamin's performance sent a powerful advocacy message. By his very presence on a national stage, he helped raise interest in and sensitivity to the cause of disability and inclusion, igniting a national conversation as his YouTube performances were viewed and commented on in huge numbers.

Benjamin's impact was evident during his next visit before the judges. In greeting, judge Howie Mandel remarked, "I gotta say that we see literally thousands of acts, but when you walked around the corner, we all remember you. You are blind, certifiably blind. How is your eyesight since the last time we saw you?" When Benjamin explained that he'd lost more vision, Mandel, like many of the other judges and audience members, appeared genuinely upset at the news.

Benjamin has put a human face to a cause that often does not get the visibility it deserves, and he's made us all care and want to know and—hopefully, do—more. Moved to tears and awed smiles, the judges gave him the thumbs-up. Mandel voiced the prevailing sentiment when he said, "It's so uplifting and it's heartbreaking. You can't see what we get to see, but we are so lucky that we are able to see it."

Benjamin joined six other acts to make it through to the final rounds at NYC's Radio City Music Hall. Whether or not he goes on to win *AGT*, he has already won in far more meaningful ways. He is a winner who refuses to be limited or defined by his disability. His heart has a clear vision of his dreams and what he can accomplish. "I had this thing in myself—dance. Don't stop dancing; don't stop dancing," he explained in a YouTube video. "You can follow your dream, no matter what, because it comes from your heart. It doesn't come from anything else. It just comes from your heart."

It is by taking a similar leap of courage and commitment that we in the art and disability communities can help others to perceive themselves in terms of their abilities, rather than their disabilities, giving them the tools—through education, programs, and advocacy—to enable them to pursue the opportunities to shine on the center stage of public consciousness. It is by educating people of all abilities about accessibility issues in the arts and the diversity of abilities among people who create art that we will move past a society that perceives and limits individuals by their disabilities to instead celebrate their talents. It is by using art of any kind as a tool to help enhance daily living skills and helping to increase accessibility in dance/art schools, museums, and other cultural institutions, that we will foster, cultivate, and highlight the abilities of artists with disabilities.

Limitations disappear as emotions and thoughts find graceful expression in the liberating art form of dance. The freedom of movement allows us all to expand our world—physically, emotionally, educationally, and spiritually. Many people with disabilities who have experienced the benefits of dance are emboldened to extend this newfound confidence and sense of accomplishment and mobility into other areas of their lives. Master a jeté, a break-dance move, or a jazz step, and perhaps you'll feel empowered to navigate a new subway route. Learn to listen to and express your body's inner rhythm and maybe you'll also find your voice to be a self advocate in mainstream society. Exercise your dance muscles and you'll likely stretch your mental and social power as well.

We gain confidence and a feeling of worth and capability. We are no longer the shy wallflowers sitting in the corner; we are the joyous, proud, and confident movers and shakers taking center stage to proudly proclaim, "Don't look at my disabilities; focus on my abilities as I soar."

As a dancer practices, practices, then practices some more in a studio, so too must we in the dance and disability communities continue our hard work to ensure that accessibility and inclusion are integral steps in the process. Dance spaces and groups must be more sensitive and open to working in step with one another. Starting early through collaborative opportunities with public schools and private and dance schools, and among socioeconomically diverse participants and audiences, is pivotal to individuals with disabilities who might seek to explore and pursue the educational and professional aspects of the artistic world of dance. Yet we must take equal care to include and welcome other groups as well. Just because you don't want to make a career of dance doesn't mean you can't benefit from it. When it comes to dance—and, indeed, art and culture of any kind—a person with a disability shouldn't think in terms of "can't" but rather "why not me too?"

By creating awareness and putting our voices—and talents—out there, we help to redefine the perception of who is a dancer, who is a painter, who is a person with a disability. Using Benjamin Yonattan as an example, that's how, one step and success at a time, we revive the rebirth of interest in dance among people with disabilities, and we make the societal switch from public perception of someone with a disability as an "unusual novelty act" to "artist," with the only distinction being the caliber of his artistry, not the quality of his vision.

APPENDICES

Disability. Dance. Artistry. Program Schedule—July 8, 2015

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York

**11:00 a.m. Welcome from Lane Harwell, Executive Director, Dance/NYC,
Victor Calise, Commissioner, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities**

11:15 a.m. Keynote: Simi Linton, Disability/Arts Consultancy

12:15 p.m. Session I: Dance Makers on Disability

- Deborah Jowitt, Dance Critic and Author (moderator)
- Sidiki Conde, Founder, Tokounou Dance Company
- Heidi Latsky, Founder and Artistic Director, Heidi Latsky Dance
- Kitty Lunn, Founder and Artistic Director, Infinity Dance Theater
- Alice Sheppard, Dance Artist and Choreographer

The day's discussions lead off with a focus on the artistry and creation of work by disabled dance makers. Panelists will address how we can expand opportunities for dance making with and by disabled artists, and will also explore what are the opportunities that work with disabled artists open up for dance, artistry, excellence, and impact. Questions to be explored include: Will new understandings and hoped-for new creation help generate new meaning not only of disability but also of dance and of dancer? How can those be achieved? What are the biggest challenges, and how can the dance community help remove them? What does the dance community need to learn, and what action should they take? Panel discussion will be followed by a Q&A session.

1:15 p.m. Lunch Break

1:45 p.m. Session II: Presenting Disability, Dance, and Artistry

- Mario Garcia Durham, President and CEO, Association of Performing Arts Presenters (moderator)
- Jerron Herman, Writer and Dancer, Heidi Latsky Dance
- Heidi Latsky, Founder and Artistic Director, Heidi Latsky Dance
- Jedediah Wheeler, Executive Director for Arts & Culture, Montclair State University

Dance makers and their presenters will explore the dynamics around presenting physically integrated dance, exploring opportunities that deeper engagement with disabled artists open up for presenters and their audiences. Panelists will be encouraged to address barriers to presenting disabled artists and how can they be removed. Participants will explore such questions as: For both artists and presenters, what makes your relationship work? What have you learned by working together about the nexus of disability and dance? What are the opportunities you see for the presenting community and dance audiences? What are the biggest challenges, and how can the dance community help remove them? Panel discussion will be followed by a Q&A session.

3:00 p.m. Address: Tom Finkelpearl, Commissioner, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs

3:15 p.m. Session III: Developing Artists: Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces

- Beth Bienvenu, Director, Office of Accessibility, NEA (moderator)
- Cora Cahan, President, New 42nd Street Studios
- John McEwen, Executive Director, NJ Theater Alliance and Cultural Access Network of NJ
- Nicholas Viselli, Artistic Director, Theater Breaking Through Barriers
- Alexandria Wailes, Actor, Dancer, Teaching Artist

Many opportunities exist for the development and nurturing of dance makers. This session explores how space for the creation of dance and the training and development of dancers figure in. Participants will discuss how dance spaces (centers, residencies, studios) can better support the training and development of professional disabled artists and their work.

Our panelists will address such questions as: What are the opportunities you see for dance spaces to support the training and development of professional dance artists and their work? What are the biggest challenges and how can the dance community help? Panel discussion will be followed by a Q&A session.

4:15 p.m. Break

4:30 p.m. Session IV: Creating Disabled Artists:

Dance Education in the NYC Public Schools

- Stephen Yaffe, Chair, Arts in Special Education Consortium (moderator)
- Paul King, Executive Director, Office of Arts & Special Projects, NYC Department of Education
- Zazel-Chavah O'Garra, Artistic Director, ZCO/Dance Project
- Ana Inés Rubinstein, Dance Teacher, Manhattan School For Children PS 333
- Sandra Stratton Gonzales, Dance Specialist, The Children's School PS 372

Rounding out the day's discussions, this session explores the intersection of dance and disabled public schoolchildren, investigating solutions-oriented frameworks. Participants will address how dance instruction in the public schools can support the development of disabled and diverse students who may pursue lives as artists. Panelists will be encouraged to suggest the mechanisms by which the public schools can nurture the education and development of artistry, transferable learning, and dance appreciation with disabled young people so that they can explore pathways to being professional artists as well as becoming lifelong dance learners and audiences. The panel will explore such questions as: What potential for teacher development exist and where? Where can collaborations with the dance community advance access, learning, and artistry among disabled students? Panel discussion will be followed by a Q&A session.

Key Biographies

All biographies provided by featured speakers, in their own words.

Keynote Speaker: Simi Linton, Disability/Arts Consultancy

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 City University of New York faculty 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 PhD from New York University. Linton 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, Calise sustained a spinal cord injury that left him in a wheelchair and without the use of his legs. Calise 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, Calise took on a new challenge, joining the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation as Americans with Disabilities Act (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 ADA. While at Parks, Calise coordinated an effort, worked on by staff at all levels, to

improve compliance with the ADA agency-wide. Additionally, Calise 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 Calise as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD). Calise 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, Calise'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. Calise 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 and 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. 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 first received recognition dancing for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company (1987–1993). Commissions have included Cannes International Dance Festival, American Dance Festival, Whitney Museum of Art, and Joyce Theater. Latsky headed the Movement Department at the School for Film and Television (1998–2005), is on faculty at Steps NYC and regularly guests at NYU and Rutgers. Her outreach program includes programs for NYC public schools, and she is a renowned advocate for diversity in the arts as a speaker (Harvard, Barnard,

Chicago Humanities Festival, New York Academy of Medicine, APAP|2015). She has a BA in Psychology with honors, is a founding member of Dance/NYC's Disability and Dance Task Force and was honored to be the first participant in Dance for Film on Location at Montclair State University, underwritten by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, through which her first film, *Soliloquy*, premiered in April 2015.

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, she began The GIMP Project, a body of work that includes dancers with and without disabilities. These works have been presented nationally (Peak Performances at the Alexander Kasser Theater, Dance Center at Columbia College/Chicago, American Dance Festival, Abrons Arts Center, August Wilson Center, Chicago Humanities Festival, Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, TEDxWomen, Alverno Presents, Lied Center, Flynn Theater) and internationally (Nepal, Germany, Ireland, England) and are the subject of an Emmy-nominated news feature; an AP multimedia piece; features on CNN, NET and NPR; and Richard Move's documentary short (Lincoln Center premiere, 2014). Artist residencies and foundation support include Baryshnikov Arts Center, JCC Manhattan, American Music Center, Creative Capital, Harkness Foundation, and Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation; Kessler Foundation; Jerome Robbins Foundation; New York City DCA; Mid Atlantic Foundation; Stanley H. and Rita J. Kaplan Fund of UJA-Federation.

In July 2015, in partnership with the Mayor's Office, Gibney Dance and Dance/NYC, HLD performed at Brooklyn Bridge Park, Whitney Museum of Art, and at various NYC sites like Lincoln Center Out of Doors, Times Square, Chinatown, and the High Line to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Upcoming venues include the David Rubenstein Atrium and NYU Skirball. Upcoming commissions include University of Wisconsin-Madison, Ten Hairy Legs, and Cleveland's Dancing Wheels. heidilatskydance.com

Panelist: Kitty Lunn, Founder and Artistic Director, Infinity Dance Theater

Almost 30 years ago, Kitty Lunn 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, Dance Artist and Choreographer

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 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.

Presenting Disability, Dance, and Artistry

**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 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 and 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

See biography above.

Panelist: Jedediah 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 multidisciplinary 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, and 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: Opportunities for NYC Dance Spaces

**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 MA 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, cofounding 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, Cahan was recruited to become President of THE NEW 42ND STREET, a nonprofit 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 initiated and supervised the transformation of the remaining theaters and designed, built, and operates the NEW 42ND STREET STUDIOS, a \$34.7 million facility that houses rehearsal studios, offices, and a 199-seat black box theater, thus creating a permanent workplace for performing artists and the creative process on 42nd Street.

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 the Bessie Awards Steering Committee; and is 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 has 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 the New Jersey Theatre Alliance since 2001. Prior to the Alliance, McEwan 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, McEwan served as the Director of Development for Paper Mill Playhouse, where he oversaw all fundraising activities, long-range planning, and board development. McEwan provided the leadership for Paper Mill's successful \$10 million capital campaign.

McEwan 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. McEwan serves as Vice President of ArtPRIDE NJ, and he is a trustee of the Farleigh Dickinson Nonprofit Leadership Program and the New Jersey Fund for the Blind. McEwan has served as an adjunct professor in arts management at Seton Hall University, Drew University, and New York University.

McEwan 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. McEwan 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 McEwan is not attending the theatre, he enjoys cooking, collecting glass art, and anything to do with the water—boating, sunbathing, swimming.

Panelist: Nicholas Viselli, Artistic Director, Theater Breaking Through Barriers

Nicholas Viselli is the Artistic 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, Dancer, Teaching Artist

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 in the 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.

Yaffe 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). Yaffe is a founding member and Chair of the Arts in Special Education Consortium. A graduate of the Yale School of Drama, Yaffe'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, King served for four years as the Department of Education's Director of Theater Programs. King 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, 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. King has served as an artist educator for various opera companies and theaters, with more than twelve years' experience in high school, middle school, and elementary school instruction. Additionally, 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. King was the recipient of the 2015 Arts Education Focus Award from Magic Box Productions and 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. King holds a BA in Theater from the Colorado College and a MFA in Performing Arts Management from Brooklyn College.

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

Zazel-Chavah O'Garra attended the University of Michigan and SUNY Empire State College, where she received a BA in dance performance. A Presidential Arts Scholar, she performed with Mark Dendy Dance Company and Alvin Ailey wksp II, choreographed fashion shows, and conducted master classes in modern, jazz, and African dance in the United States and Europe. O'Garra also performed in numerous stage productions Off-Broadway and in Europe. Her modeling credits include the covers of two issues of *Essence* magazine, as well as several catalogue and runway jobs. She also appeared in national and regional commercials as well as numerous industrials, and supplied voice-overs for a number of ads. O'Garra also served as a movement coach for the soap opera *As the World Turns*.

O'Garra received the John F. Kennedy Center (VSA) Very Special Arts—National Teaching Artist Fellowship. Wanting to share her story she performs *Inside/Out... Voices of the Disability Community*, directed by Ping Chong nationwide and most recently at Lincoln Center.

O'Garra performed at the first Black History Month program on disability at the White House. She has just released a DVD titled *Dancing Beyond Disability* for individuals with mixed abilities. She is the Artistic Director of ZCO/DANCE PROJECT, which consists of dancers who are "Dancing Beyond Disability." She is represented by Cunningham, Escott, Slevin, and Dipene talent agents. She holds a Master's degree in social work from Fordham University. zcodanceproject.com

**Panelist: Ana Ines Rubinstein, 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. Rubinstein 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: Sandra Stratton-Gonzalez, MA, Dance Specialist,
Children's School**

Sandra Stratton-Gonzalez 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. Sandra is coauthor (with Katherine Gallant and 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 2015. Sandra was the founding Artistic Director of Soundance Repertory Company (1985–2000). Her choreography has been presented at venues throughout the Northeast.

Additional participants:

Essayist: Elisabeth Axel, President and Creative Director, Art Beyond Sight

Elisabeth Salzhauer Axel provides executive oversight for Art Beyond Sight (ABS) and collaborates with project leadership to ensure high-quality, innovative, and creative products and services that benefit ABS stakeholders. With more than 25 years of experience working with cultural institutions, she has lectured on accessibility at museums and conferences internationally; designed and implemented staff and docent training for numerous cultural institutions; and helped raise public awareness of the benefits of art education and art making for children with disabilities on radio and television, including appearances on *The Today Show*, *CBS Morning News*, and *Good Morning America*. For 15 years, she served as senior lecturer and curriculum designer at the Whitney Museum of American Art, during which she founded ABS. Salzhauer Axel is a past member of the Advisory Committee of the NYC Mayor's Office for the Handicapped (now the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities). She served as Editor in Chief of ABS's *Art History Through Touch and Sound* multisensory encyclopedia and Co-Editor of *Art Beyond Sight Resource Guide to Art and Visual Impairment*. She graduated from Tufts University with a degree in Art History and pursued graduate studies at Harvard University.

Essayist: Christine Bruno, Disability Advocate, Inclusion in the Arts

Christine Bruno comes to Inclusion in the Arts with a varied background as an actor, director and coach. She has represented the organization across the country and internationally at symposiums, forums, panels, film and arts festivals, and on television and radio. A proud member of AEA and SAG-AFTRA, Christine is the Chair of the NY Local SAG-AFTRA PWD Committee and a member of the SAG-AFTRA National PWD and AEA's EEO Committees. She holds an MFA in Acting and Directing from the New School and is a member of the Actors Studio. As an actor, Christine has worked nationally and internationally in theatre, film and television, including *Law & Order* and Jose Rivera's adaptation of Genet's *The Maids*.

Essayist: Diane Duggan, Licensed Psychologist—Board-Certified Dance/Movement Therapist

Diane Duggan, Ph.D., ADTR, is a Registered Dance Therapist and Licensed Psychologist. She provides psychological counseling and conducts a therapeutic dance program at a special education high school in the South Bronx. She has created and presented numerous professional development workshops for New York City Department of Education staff members on Positive Behavior Supports (PBS), including a three-day workshop in PBS for Dance Educators. She is certified as a Senior Trainer of Life Space Crisis Intervention and a Trainer of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention. She joined the New York University Dance Education faculty in 1994 where she teaches the course Dance for the Special Child. She has taught extensively at the graduate level, including the Hunter Dance Therapy M.S. program, NYU's Special Education program, and Hofstra University. She has published journal articles, book chapters and a book *Out Here By Ourselves: The Stories of Young People Whose Mothers Have AIDS*. She served on the Board of Directors of the American Dance Therapy Association and was an Executive Producer for the film *Dance Therapy: The Power of Movement*. Dr. Duggan received her Ph.D. in School/Child Psychology from NYU and M.S. in Dance Therapy from Hunter College.

Dance. Disability. Artistry. Post-Event Survey Form

Greetings from Dance/NYC! While your memory is fresh, we hope you will take a few minutes to give us feedback on your experience on July 8th. Your feedback will help us refine and improve our events programming overall, and inform our equity and inclusion work. We expect this feedback survey to take no more than five minutes to complete. All feedback is anonymous, so please be candid. Additionally, beyond your opinions about the event and the program, we ask you to provide some very basic demographic information. We hope you will answer these as well, as it helps us learn more about the composition and nature of our constituency and how we might serve you better. Thank you.

Dance/NYC is interested in collecting demographic data on its event attendees to better understand the diversity of the community it serves. Please consider providing your demographic data here; all demographic questions are optional. Your full responses will remain confidential and will only be reviewed by Dance/NYC staff members. Demographic data will be compiled for research purposes only, and personally identifying data will be removed prior to sharing the demographic data with third parties. In each section below, please indicate which of the categories you most closely identify with.

Required questions are noted with an asterisk (*).

PLEASE HELP US UNDERSTAND YOUR
ROLE IN DANCE.*

Dancer

Choreographer

Arts Administrator

Presenter

Service Organization

Funder

Policy maker

Other

DISABILITY

Disabled person

Non disabled person

Decline to state

ETHNIC AND RACIAL GROUPS

Asian/Asian American

Black/African American

Hispanic/Latino/Latina

Middle-Eastern

Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native/
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

White

Multi-racial or multi-ethnic (2+ ethnicities/races)

Decline to state

GENDER

Female

Male

Transgender

Intersex

Decline to state

SEXUAL IDENTITY

Bisexual

Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian

Heterosexual

Asexual

Decline to state

AGE

Enter year born

GEOGRAPHY

ZIP code

DO YOU SEE A ROLE FOR DANCE MAKERS TO
NURTURE AND DEVELOP THE ARTISTRY OF
DISABLED PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY
YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

DO YOU SEE A ROLE FOR DANCE
PRESENTERS TO NURTURE AND DEVELOP
THE ARTISTRY OF DISABLED PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY
YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

DO YOU A SEE A ROLE FOR DANCE STUDIOS,
RESIDENCIES, ETC., TO NURTURE AND
DEVELOP THE ARTISTRY OF DISABLED
PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY
YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

DO YOU SEE A ROLE FOR THE CITY'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO NURTURE AND DEVELOP THE ARTISTRY OF DISABLED YOUNG PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

IS THERE A ROLE FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS TO NURTURE AND DEVELOP THE ARTISTRY OF DISABLED PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

IS THERE A ROLE FOR PRIVATE FUNDERS TO NURTURE AND DEVELOP THE ARTISTRY OF DISABLED PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

IS THERE A ROLE FOR PUBLIC FUNDERS TO NURTURE AND DEVELOP THE ARTISTRY OF DISABLED PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

IS THERE A ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT TO DEVELOP POLICIES THAT WILL SUPPORT THE NURTURING AND DEVELOPMENT OF ARTISTRY FOR DISABLED PEOPLE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WILL YOU GIVE US MORE DETAIL ON WHY YOU'VE ANSWERED THIS WAY?

—

SHOULD THE CITY MAKE ACCESS TO THE ARTS FOR DISABLED PEOPLE A PRIORITY IN THE UPCOMING CULTURAL PLAN?

Yes

No

Not sure

PLEASE SHARE WITH US YOUR BIGGEST LEARNING FROM THE DAY:

—

WE WELCOME ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND HOPE YOU'LL USE THIS SECTION TO PROVIDE THOUGHTS, FEEDBACK, AND COMMENTS.

—

WAS THIS YOUR FIRST DANCE/NYC EVENT EXPERIENCE?

Yes

No

Not sure

MY OVERALL EXPERIENCE AT DISABILITY. DANCE. ARTISTRY. WAS:

Extremely positive

Somewhat positive

Moderate

Somewhat negative

Extremely negative

Please add any additional comments:

PLEASE RATE ASPECTS OF THE EVENT (PLEASE CHECK ONE RESPONSE PER TOPIC):

Location

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Accessibility

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Date and Time of Event

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Registration Process

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Food and Beverage

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Programming/Panels

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Learning Opportunities

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Networking Opportunities

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Staff & Volunteers

Excellent Good Fair Poor N/A

Additional comments:

BASED ON YOUR EXPERIENCE, WOULD YOU RECOMMEND DANCE/NYC EVENTS AND PROGRAMS TO A FRIEND OR COLLEAGUE?

Yes

No

Not sure

WHAT, IF ANY, RECOMMENDATIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR IMPROVING THE ACCESSIBILITY OF DANCE/NYC EVENTS?

—

Participant Demographics

Disability. Dance. Artistry. July 8th Convening Registrant Data 272 Total Registrants

FIGURE A: Registrants' Reported Disability Status—in Percentages

Source: Dance/NYC, Convening Registration Form, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays *Disability. Dance. Artistry.* convening attendees' reported disability status in percentages, with 18.8% identifying as disabled, 71.0% identifying as nondisabled, and 10.2% declining to state.

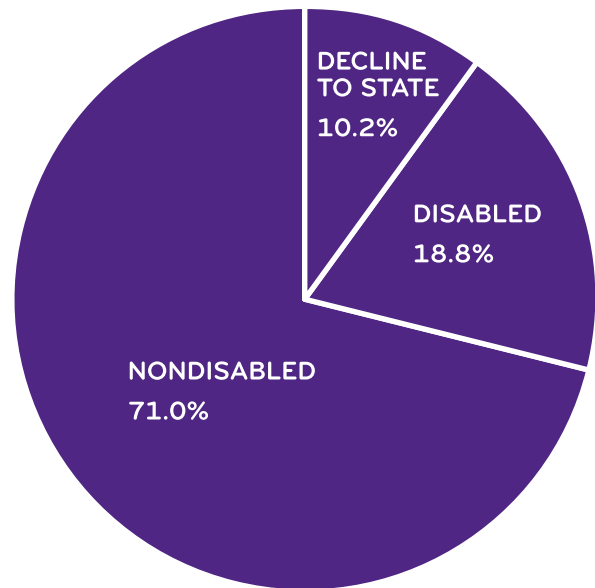
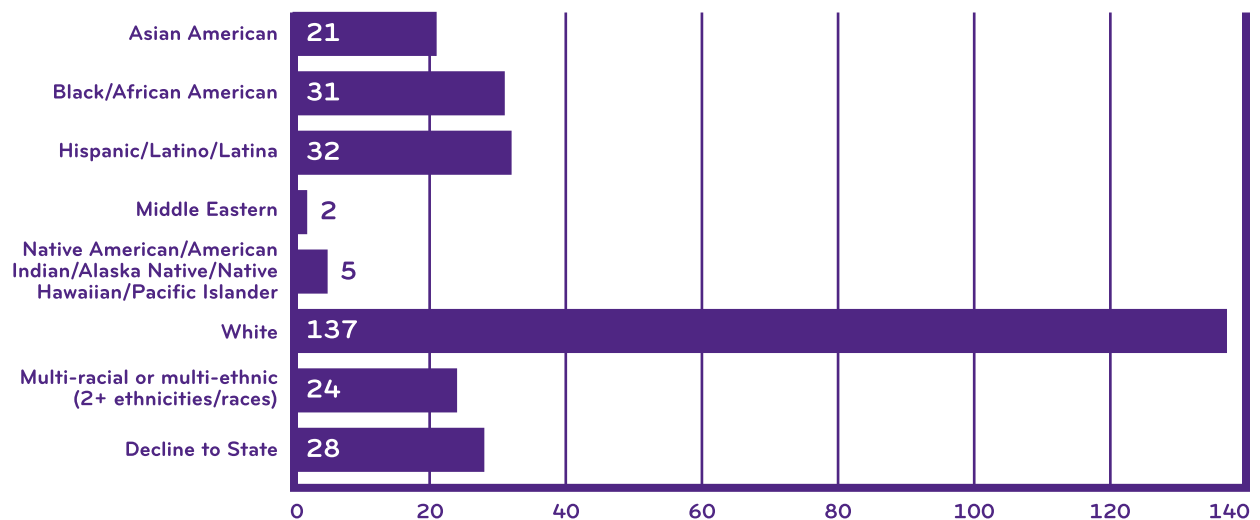


FIGURE B: Registrants' Responses Reported Race/Ethnicity—in Raw Numbers



Source: Dance/NYC, Convening Registration Form, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays registrants' reported racial and ethnic groups: Asian American (21), Black/African American (31), Hispanic/Latino/Latina (32), Middle Eastern (2), Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (5), White (137), Multi-racial or multi-ethnic (2+ ethnicities/races) (24), and those who declined to state (28). Respondents were able to select more than one category.

FIGURE C: Registrants' Reported Gender Identity—in Percentages

Source: Dance/NYC, Convening Registration Form, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays registrants' reported gender identities, in percentages: female (78.1%), male (14.0%), transgender (0.4%), intersex (0.0%), and those who declined to state (7.6%).

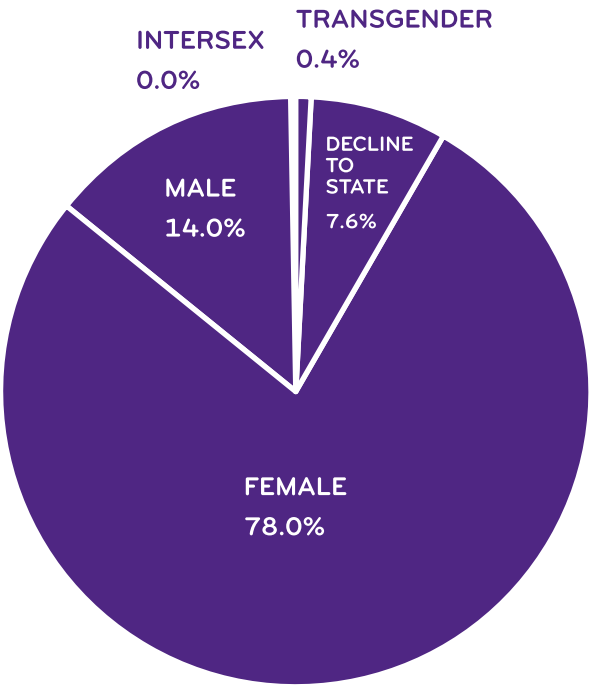
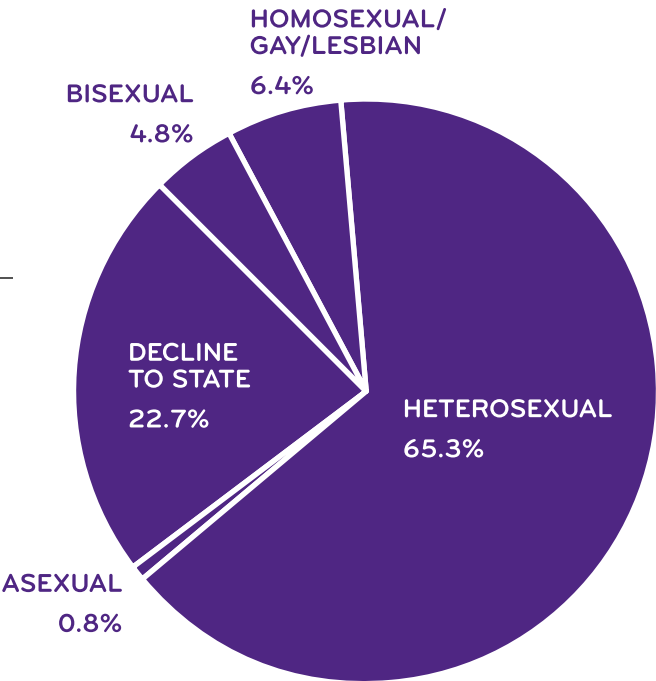


FIGURE D: Registrants' Reported Sexual Identity—in Percentages

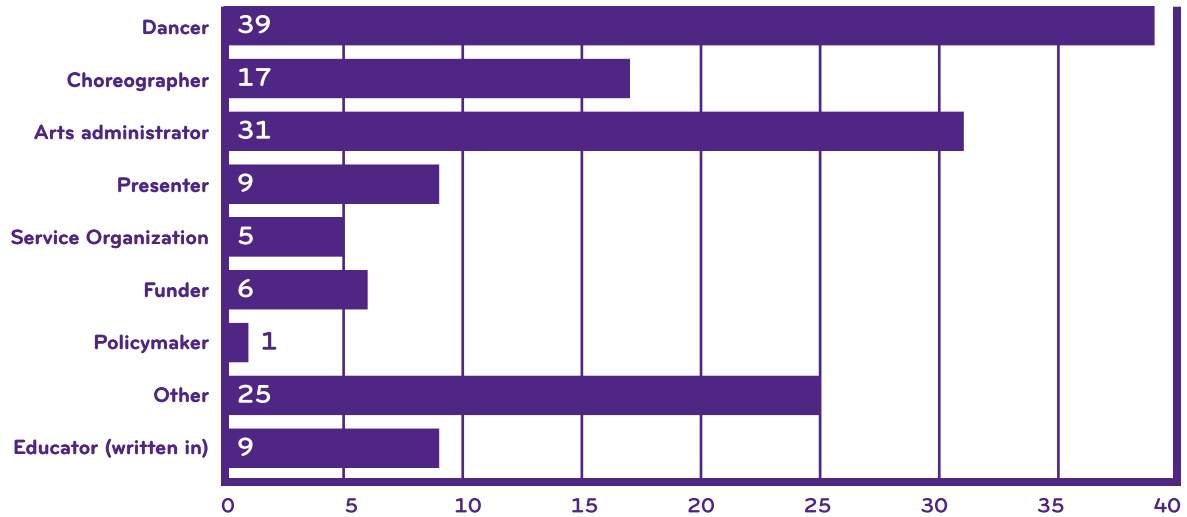
Source: Dance/NYC, Convening Registration Form, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays registrants' reported sexual identities, in percentages: bisexual (4.8%), homosexual/gay/lesbian (6.4%), heterosexual (65.3%), asexual (0.8%), decline to state (22.7%).



Post-Event Survey Respondent Data 88 Total Respondents

FIGURE E: Respondents' Reported Role in Dance—in Raw Numbers



Source: Dance/NYC, Post-Event Survey, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays post-event survey respondents' role in dance in raw numbers: Dancer (39), Choreographer (17), Arts administrator (31), Presenter (9), Service Organization (5), Funder (6), Policymaker (1), Other (25), and Educator (9), which multiple respondents wrote in the optional text box. Respondents were able to select more than one category.

FIGURE F: Respondents' Reported Disability Status—in Percentages

Source: Dance/NYC, Post-Event Survey, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays post-event survey respondents' reported disability status in percentages: Disabled (20.7%), Nondisabled (74.7%), Decline to state (4.6%).

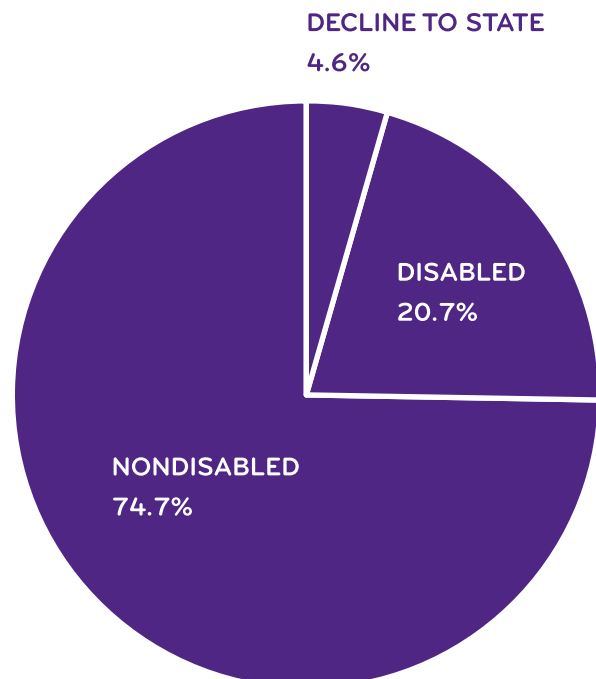
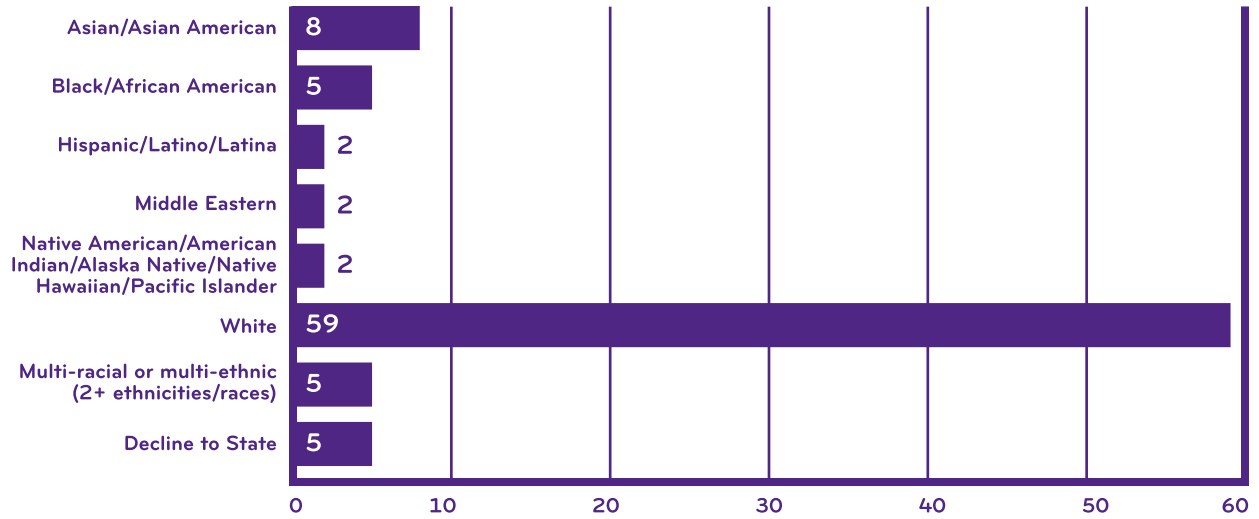


FIGURE G: Respondents' Reported Race/Ethnicity—in Raw Numbers



Source: Dance/NYC, Post-Event Survey, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays post-event survey respondents' reported racial and ethnic identities in raw numbers: Asian/Asian-American (8), Black/African-American (5), Hispanic/Latino/Latina (2), Middle-Eastern (2), Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (2), White (59), Multi-racial or multi-ethnic (5), and Decline to state (5). Respondents were able to select more than one category.

FIGURE H: Respondents' Reported Gender Identity—in Percentages

Source: Dance/NYC, Post-Event Survey, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays post-event survey respondents' reported gender identities in percentages: Female (83.9%), Male (12.6%), Transgender (0%), Intersex (0%), and Decline to state (3.5%).

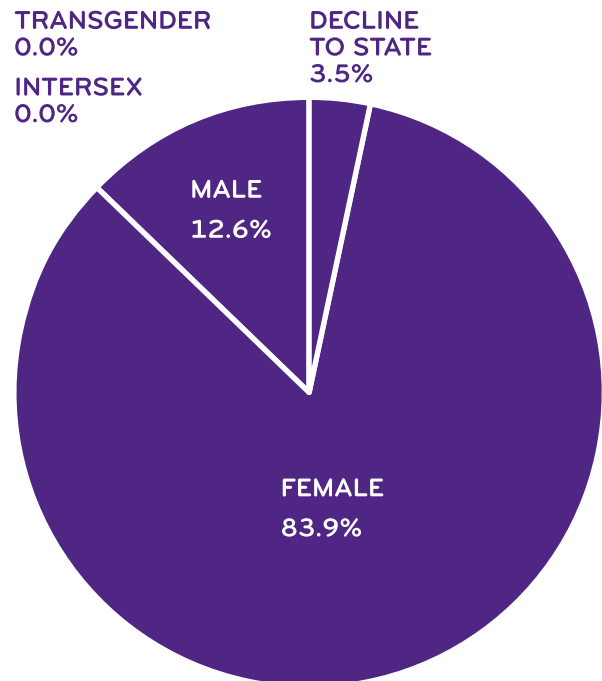
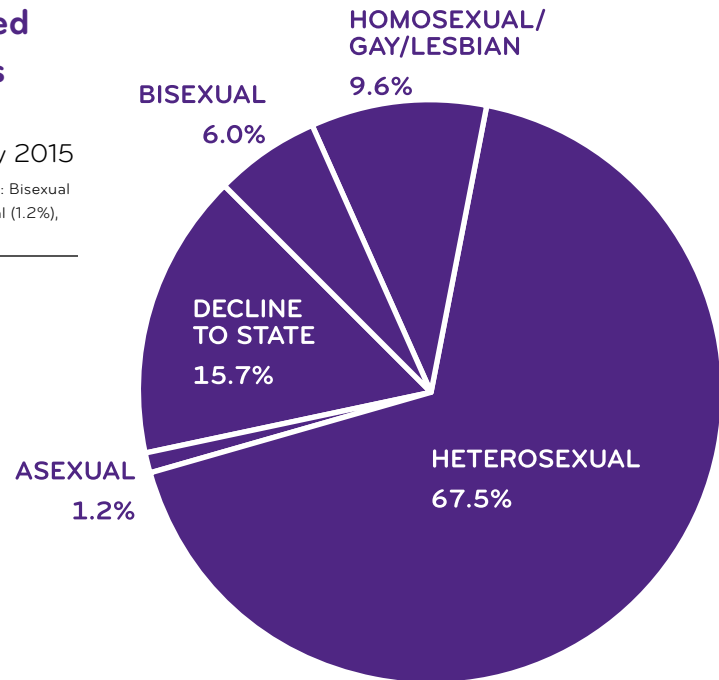


FIGURE 1: Respondents' Reported Sexual Identity—in Percentages

Source: Dance/NYC, Post-Event Survey, July 2015

Alt text: Figure displays post-event survey respondents' in percentages: Bisexual (6.0%), Homosexual/Gay/Lesbian (9.6%), Heterosexual (67.5%), Asexual (1.2%), Decline to state (15.7%).





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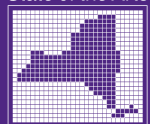
MELLON
FOUNDATION

ADA 25 **NYC**
AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT



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