

Press-Kit

“I believe DanceAbility goes beyond movement and exploration and is for many people their first opportunity to define themselves in their own terms and see that this dance form, like their lives, has many options and possibilities.”

Susan Sygall

Mobility International, USA



“We came with our sneakers, our canes, our wheelchairs, our two left feet, our bodies we see as too short, too fat, too something-and we danced. By God every sub-atomic particle of us danced in ways we could not have believed.”

Bjo Ashwill, dancer with a disability

“During the workshop we formed a truly diverse learning community dedicated to unlocking the mysteries of movement.”

Nancy Meltzoff, Ph.D., DanceAbility Teacher Certification participant

“Their work reveals the paralyzed attitudes of able bodied people toward people with disabilities.”

Australian Reviewer

“It is so important for young children to have the opportunity to meet differently abled people in a setting that encourages their questions and wonder .”

Ali Nice, Principal

Harrison Elementary, Oregon

DanceAbility is a unique dance method founded in 1987 by Alito Alessi and Karen Nelson and has been under the sole leadership of Alito since 1989. DanceAbility uses improvisational dance to promote artistic expression and exploration between people with and without disabilities. Through experiencing movement together, misconceptions and/or prejudices that able- bodied or disabled people might have about themselves and each other are uprooted.

The mission of DanceAbility International (DAI) is to encourage the evolution of mixed-abilities dance by cultivating a common ground for creative expression for all people regardless of abilities, economic

status, age or race. The mission is accomplished through performance, educational programs, teacher training and workshops.

DAI performs and teaches throughout North, Central, and South America, Europe and Asia, receiving local, national and international recognition. Artistic Director Alito Alessi has choreographed pieces for and performed and/or taught at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.), at the International VSA Arts Festival, the Governor's Arts Awards in Eugene, Portland's "Artquake" and at many festivals, schools, universities and other venues around the world, including Dance Umbrella in Boston, Jacob's Pillow (U.S.A.), Vienna International Dance Festival, International Festival of New Dance (Brasilia), Bern Tanz Tage Dance Festival (Germany), "Festival of Freaks" (Switzerland), and Contact Arte (Italy). Other recent commissions to create performance pieces have been completed at SESC in São Paulo, Brazil, Chemeketa Community College, Amstelrade in the Netherlands, and Theater Marie of Switzerland.

DanceAbility International conducts both private and public workshops to allow people the opportunity to experience mixed-abilities dance and to train people in the method. In the 1990's, DAI held annual gatherings of inclusive dance in Eugene, Oregon, and in 1997, the first Teacher Certification course was produced. Since that time, DanceAbility Teacher Certification courses have been held in Eugene (Oregon), Buenos Aires, Milan, Amsterdam, Trier (Germany) and Vienna (at the Vienna International Dance Festival, also known as ImPulsTanz). More than 300 dance artists, people with disabilities, and those interested in working with people with disabilities have attended, coming from 18 different countries to attend the teacher trainings in the above locations. Many have continued teaching inclusive dance in their home communities with DAI acting as consultant, co-teacher and choreographer as needed.

In addition to DanceAbility workshops, the work of DAI has spread through educational events, award winning videos and award winning performance pieces. The Youth Outreach program was created in 1995 to educate youth about art and the potential of people with disabilities. Tens of thousands of children in the state of Oregon and beyond have benefited from these inspiring performances and educational events. Common Ground, a documentary about a DanceAbility workshop, won a Silver Apple Award in the National Educational Film and Video Festival and was a finalist in the American Film and Video Association Festival.

In 1996, the first Street Performance Parade was created in Hanover, Germany. Street Performance Parades have continued through the years and are a unique aspect of DanceAbility International's programming. These publicly-sited performances with people with and without disabilities have been performed at the Duomo and the Galleria (Milan, Italy), in Wan Chai (Hong Kong), the Museums Quarter (Vienna, Austria) and in many other locations around the world including Eugene, Germany, Brazil and the Netherlands.

In 2007, DanceAbility International received a large donation from Eugene resident Marisa de Leon (1911-2008) to spread inclusive dance throughout Latin America. Marisa grew up in Montevideo, Uruguay. The center of this work is at the school that Marisa founded in 1941 for children with disabilities in Montevideo, called Escuela Franklin D. Roosevelt. Marisa's funding has allowed DanceAbility workshops to be held at no or low cost to participants in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Puerto Madryn, São Paulo, Montevideo, and beyond.

DanceAbility International continues to pursue its vision of using art as a means to change people's preconceived ideas about disabilities through workshops, performances, workshops, educational programs, teacher training and choreography in the U.S. and throughout the world.

Awards

DanceAbility has won international acclaim both for its artistic contributions to the evolution of contemporary dance and its unique ability to change attitudes about disability.

- Fulbright Senior Specialist, 2007
- Asian Cultural Council Fellowship, 2006
- Guggenheim Fellowship, 2005
- Fentress Endowment Award, Eugene Arts and Letters Award, 2005
- National Endowment for the Arts Choreographer's Fellowship, 1995 - 1996
- National Endowment for the Arts 2-year Choreographer's Fellowship, 1992-1994
- Oregon Arts Commission Choreographer's Fellowship, 1990-1991
- National Educational Film & Video Festival, Silver Apple Award, and American Film & Video Association Festival, Finalist, for "Common Ground: Dance and Disability" (co-producer, teacher of workshop documented), 1991
- Oregon Governor's Arts Awards, Guest Choreographer, 1991
- Metropolitan Arts Commission Award, 1989-1990
- Tides Foundation Award, 1988-1989
- Common Foundation Artist in Community Award, 1987-1988
- University of Oregon Kole Cup Award and Joseph Kinsman Starr scholarship for outstanding community contributions, 1974

Biographies

Alito Alessi

Alito is the Artistic Director of DanceAbility International and co-founder of DanceAbility. Alessi has been involved with the evolution of contemporary dance for

the past 30 years, and is internationally known as a pioneering teacher and choreographer in the fields of contact improvisation, and dance and disability.

Alessi began training teachers in DanceAbility in 1997 and has conducted these month-long DanceAbility Teacher Certification Workshops in Eugene (Oregon), Buenos Aires, Milan, Amsterdam, Trier (Germany) and Vienna (at the Vienna International Dance Festival, also known as ImPulsTanz).

Alessi also performs throughout North, Central, and South America, Europe and Asia, receiving local, national and international recognition. He has choreographed pieces for and performed and/or taught at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.), at the International VSA Arts Festival, the Governor's Arts Awards in Eugene, Portland's "Artquake" and at many festivals, schools, universities and other venues around the world, including Dance Umbrella in Boston, Jacob's Pillow (U.S.A.), Vienna International Dance Festival, International Festival of New Dance (Brasilia), Bern Tanz Tage Dance Festival (Germany), "Festival of Freaks" (Switzerland), and Contact Arte (Italy). Residencies include Mexico's National Academy of Dance, New Mexico School of the Deaf, the New Dance Lab of Minneapolis, and New Territories Performance Festival in Scotland. Other recent commissions for Alessi to create performance pieces have been completed at SESC in São Paulo, Brazil, Chemeketa Community College, Amstelveen in the Netherlands, and Theatre Marie of Switzerland.

Additionally, Alessi has overseen the production of three documentaries of his work: "Common Ground," a video of a DanceAbility workshop, which won a Silver Apple in the 1991 National Educational Film and Video Festival and was a finalist in the 1991 American Film & Video Association Festival; "All Bodies Speak," showing performance pieces with disabled & non-disabled performers; and "Joy Lab Research," a documentary of rehearsals and performances on-stage and in a Street Parade in São Paulo, Brazil. His writing on dance has appeared in Contact Quarterly magazine, and he is currently authoring a book about the DanceAbility method.

Emery Blackwell, Principal Dancer

Emery is a dancer, choreographer, musician, composer, and teacher. He has cerebral palsy, and has been involved in promoting civil and human rights for many years. He was one of the first children with cerebral palsy to be mainstreamed into the Oregon public school system.

Emery has studied under Alito Alessi and has been dancing with him since 1989, and says of his performance work, "I have reached more people through dance than I ever did through lobbying at the legislature."

In addition to performing dance, Emery has choreographed dance pieces and composed music for some of these performances. Emery has taught DanceAbility

workshops throughout the US, Europe and Latin America. Within the US, he has taught in Vermont, Minnesota, New Mexico, California, Washington and Oregon. The foreign countries include Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Brazil, Argentina and Wales.

The Work of DanceAbility International

DanceAbility Workshops

DanceAbility workshops vary in length depending on the needs and interests of groups and communities, ranging from one hour to multiple days or weeks. The DanceAbility Teacher Certification workshop is 4 weeks long, and an abbreviated teacher orientation can be taught in 6 days.

Choreography

Under the Artistic Direction of Alito Alessi, DanceAbility International offers a full range of choreography services. DanceAbility International has choreographed pieces for and performed at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.), at the International VSA Arts Festival, the Governor's Arts Awards in Eugene, Portland's "Artquake" and at many festivals, schools, universities and other venues around the world, including Dance Umbrella in Boston, Jacob's Pillow (U.S.A.), Vienna International Dance Festival, International Festival of New Dance (Brasilia), Bern Tanz Tage Dance Festival (Germany), "Festival of Freaks" (Switzerland), and Contact Arte (Italy). Other recent commissions for Alessi and DAI to create performance pieces have been completed at SESC in São Paulo, Brazil, Chemeketa Community College, Amstelrade in the Netherlands, and Theatre Marie of Switzerland.

Young Audience Performances

DanceAbility International offers educational performance events for schools in the state of Oregon and beyond. The intention of these lively, entertaining performances is to educate teachers and young people about disabilities. All school assemblies include time to answer questions from the young audience. We also have extensive curriculum material available for teachers to reinforce the learning back in the class room. DAI has performed for more than 100,000 people around the world.

To learn more about DanceAbility International, please visit our web site at www.danceability.com.