

# Workshop teaches dance to all People of all ability levels to participate

By Stephanie Mencimer  
Emerald Reporter

The Joint Forces Dance Company will conduct DanceAbility, an instructional workshop in contact improvisational dance movement for disabled and non-disabled people, March 9-11 as part of the New Dance Festival 1990.

Contact improvisation is a dance form based on two or more people moving in physical contact, following a point of contact between them and the spontaneous movement of their bodies. The dancing can range from simple to complex, depending on the people involved.

Joint Forces artistic director Alito Alessi says the DanceAbility workshop is "really about cultivating a unique form of artistic expression — finding common ground between disabled and non-disabled people."

The workshop will be sign-interpreted and wheelchair accessible. Classes will include simple warm-ups involving breathing, stretching and conditioning, and then move into partner and group work dealing with the skills of contact improvisation.

Relaxing, sensing gravity and counter-balancing are a few of the skills designed to provide greater access to individual and artistic expression to people of all physical abilities.

Alessi said the dance form is

based on touch and non-verbal communication through movement. He says the dance helps bridge the gap between disabled and non-disabled people and builds a sense of self-confidence in people at all levels of physical ability.

"We (non-disabled people) take our abilities for granted," he said.

Although the workshop could be considered a form of therapy, Alessi said it was not designed as such. "The intention was to create a place for people to express themselves, to bring people together and to have fun."

Alessi said the workshop is a little scary at first for some people, but "we're all just human beings," he said. "There are a lot of barriers between people, but we are given the opportunity to move through these barriers through dance."

Most participants have found the experience to be very uplifting and say that it contributes to their spiritual growth, Alessi said. "It's a holistic experience."

As an artistic director, Alessi said working with people with different physical abilities has forced him to find new and rich ways of movement and to expand his vocabulary of the art form itself.

Alessi said the project has been so well received that Joint Forces is creating a documentary called "Common Ground" that will be sold to universities

to help teach other people how to do the work.

Now in its third year, the Eugene project was the first of its kind to bring disabled and non-disabled people together for contact improvisational dance. The dance was first used with disabled people in an institution in England.

Joint Forces brought the British pioneers of contact improvisation, Louise Richards and Kevin Finnan, from England to help create DanceAbility.

In the Winter 1988 issue of the dance journal *Contact Quarterly*, Richards and Finnan wrote:

"A dance with somebody who is paralyzed would appear to be a contradiction. How can you dance if you can't 'move'? The study of contact teaches that there is always movement in the body, the continual falling with gravity, and for somebody prostrate there is always the movement of the breath. Where there is movement, no matter how small, there is the possibility of a dance."

Next month's workshop will be conducted by Karen Nelson and Alessi, both dancers and choreographers who have directed Joint Forces since 1979. Joint Forces is an international dance company which spends half the year or more touring throughout the world. The company will be traveling to Zurich in May to do a work-

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