



VANESSA MARTIN (FRONT) WITH XCAPE DANCE COMPANY

LOVE! IS ALL YOU NEED

With company premiere, Xcape Dance Director Vanessa Martin brings a healing grace to the Hult

Lots of little kids take a dance class or two, but most won't make a career of it. Sometimes, however, a special child comes along who has the talent and drive, along with the family support needed, to keep investing in dance for a lifetime. Choreographer Vanessa Martin was one of those lucky kids, who had big aspirations and a parent to back her up. "When I was three, I told my mom I wanted to be a tap

dancer," Martin says. Her mom encouraged her, and this past year, Martin started her own dance studio in the same space where she learned her first time step, 26 years ago. A native Eugenean, Martin danced at South Eugene High School, and at the UO and LCC. She's been choreographing professionally ever since.

"My mom just always pushed for me to dance, and to follow my dreams in that way," Martin says.

Now, with Martin's Xcape Dance Company heading towards its Hult Center premiere, she misses her mom acutely.

This September, Martin's mother, Cindy Kieffer, the department director for the American English Institute at the UO, succumbed to a massive infection, leaving Martin, a mother of two small children herself, emotionally devastated and wondering how to move forward, let alone finish her artistic work.

"The show was in-progress before she passed away," Martin says. "Since she passed, it's been difficult to keep pressing on. But there have been a lot of people who've put in a lot of input."

The adage says "The show must go on," and it was Martin's company members that helped to revive her spirits. In rehearsal, the Xcape dancers provided artistic contributions while buoying Martin with support and good cheer.

"This group is positive, uplifting," Martin says. "And talented."

The show, *Love!*, premieres at the Hult Center Saturday, Nov. 15, and will feature the 21 Xcape dancers, along with guest artists, including Work Dance Company, Kings Krew, Flex Studios, Duck Street Dance Crew, Dance Northwest, ZAPP Academy of Dance and the UO Jam Squad. The performance is a benefit for DanceAbility International.

Martin has pulled together this diverse crowd to create a unique narrative and a strong artistic statement. "I thrive on street-style dance, old school hip-hop and energy-based dance," she says. "I'm really about good, big energy!"

Love! is dedicated to Martin's mom.

"In the original idea, I was going for serious," Martin says. "But it's ended up a fun, life-affirming show instead." ■

Love! shows for one night only 7:30 pm Saturday, Nov. 15, at the Hult Center's Soren Theater; \$20, student and youth discounts available.

SAVE THE LAST DANCE FOR EMERY BLACKWELL

Emery Blackwell, 55, dancer, choreographer, musician, composer and teacher, retires from 25 years with DanceAbility International this fall. A giant figure in the local dance scene and a representative of disability rights around the globe, Blackwell will perform onstage one last time with his longtime dance partner Alito Alessi, as part of Vanessa Martin's Xcape Dance Company's premiere piece, *Love!*

Blackwell's journey hasn't been easy. Born with cerebral palsy, a disability that affects the motor control centers of the brain, Blackwell never expected as a child that one day he'd be a dancer. "Other people put limits onto me," he says.

A world traveler, Blackwell has shared his gifts, as a teacher and an artist, with people with and without disabilities all around the globe. Blackwell says he's motivated to help people find and develop their talents and abilities, the way he found his.

In his 25 years working as a dancer with DanceAbility International, Blackwell has challenged audiences "to see in a different way," he says. "To think in a different way."

As a teacher and mentor, Blackwell offers sage advice: "Just be who you are," he says. "And don't worry about other people."

Looking back over his career, Blackwell says the spark that has kept him going, that continually motivates him, is "when I see people find their own power."

And when asked what's next after retirement, Blackwell is upbeat: "I don't know what is next," he says. "Change, and I will see."

DanceAbility International hosts a retirement party for Emery Blackwell 6 to 7 pm Saturday, Nov. 15, in the Hult Center lobby; free. — Rachael Carnes

EMERY BLACKWELL



FINAL OUTDOOR MARKET

Saturday Market

Join us for one more Market day in the great outdoors at 8th & Oak. Saturday Market is open for business on Saturday, November 15! See you there...

Local Crafts, Food & Music • Every Saturday • 10 AM-5 PM • 8th & Oak
www.eugen Saturdaymarket.org

Great Harvest Bread Co.

THIS THANKSGIVING
 BUTTER ROLLS, POTATO FENNEL,
 CRANBERRY ORANGE, HONEY & DAKOTA

10% OFF ALL ADVANCE ORDERS
ORDERS MUST BE PLACED BY NOVEMBER 22, 2014 FOR DISCOUNT

2564 WILLAMETTE ST • 541-345-5398 • EUGENEBREAD.COM