



DANCING WHEELS

COMPANY

2023-2024 PROMOTIONAL PACKET



The Dancing Wheels Company & School
3030 Euclid Ave. ♦ Suite 100 ♦ Cleveland, OH ♦ 44115 ♦ dancingwheels.org ♦ 216-432-0306



A UNIFYING EXPRESSION OF MOVEMENT FOR ALL.

If dance is an expression of the human spirit, then it is best expressed by people of all abilities. That is the fundamental belief behind the Dancing Wheels Company & School. Considered one of the premier arts and disabilities organizations in the U.S., Dancing Wheels is a professional, physically integrated dance company uniting the talents of dancers both with and without disabilities.

Mary Verdi-Fletcher, the first professional wheelchair dancer in the U.S., founded the Dancing Wheels Company in Cleveland in 1980. Born with spina bifida, Mary wanted to offer others with disabilities full and equal access into the world of dance. An almost unimaginable concept at the time, Mary's vision and passion have since helped to revolutionize our very notion of dance – as well as what defines a dancer.

Furthering the mission of inclusive arts and recreating opportunities for all, the School of Dancing Wheels proudly opened its doors in 1990. Its state-of-the-art studios were soon regarded as a world-class training center for dancers, choreographers, and educators. That same year, a partnership with the Cleveland Ballet created the ground-breaking Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels which went on to delight audiences for nearly a decade.

To date, the Dancing Wheels Company's inspirational mission has touched over 6 million people through performances, school assemblies, residencies, and workshops. Millions more have enjoyed their artistry via appearances on CNN, Good Morning America, 20/20, and the TV special "Christopher Reeve: A Celebration of Hope."

Dancing Wheels travels the globe advocating disability awareness and entertaining 30,000-50,000 people each year. With a repertory of over 85 works from nationally-esteemed choreographers and a message of inclusion and accessibility, the Company continually expands the reach of artistic possibilities while celebrating the universal spirit of dance.

Mission & Purpose:

The Dancing Wheels Company & School is an organization of artists with and without disabilities that educates, entertains and advocates through inclusive dance worldwide. The purpose of the organization is to provide artistic opportunities inclusively, which involves several principles and goals:

Enhance integration and diversity in the arts with works uniting people of all abilities.

Provide successful, independent and creative role models for those with disabilities.

Erase negative stereotypes about people with disabilities in professional careers, primarily in the arts.

Instill greater understanding and professionalism in individuals of all ability levels.

Dancing Wheels is organized under Professional Flair, Inc., a 501(c) arts and disabilities organization.





PERFORMANCE OFFERINGS

For over four decades, The Dancing Wheels Company has offered performances recognized for their artistry, diversity, and infusion of eclectic works from renowned choreographers. This skilled ensemble of stand-up and sit-down dancers has reached over six million people worldwide with innovative mainstage performances, school assembly programs, guest appearances, master classes, and varied outreach activities.

From live to virtual streamed performances in typical theater venues, site-specific locations, hospitals, universities, festivals, and private events, our company presents enlightening and entertaining works from contemporary pieces to classical story ballets.

Guest Appearances

The 10-35 minute special performance is an ideal addition to entertain guests at galas, dinners, and corporate or private gatherings. Performances can be tailored to highlight event themes.

Keynote Speaking

Dancing Wheels founder, Mary Verdi-Fletcher, is a tireless advocate for the arts and disabilities rights. She pioneered the creation of physically integrated professional dance companies. As someone who has forever changed the way society views the artistry and talents of people with disabilities, she is an inspiring keynote speaker.

Mini-Mainstage Performances: Mixed Repertory or Story Ballet

A 60-minute performance featuring 6-8 dancers in fully costumed excerpts from any of the mainstage repertory and/or story ballets. Perfect for high school or college performances. In a theater, this concert is designed for student matinee performances or to accommodate when full production requirements or time availability is not possible.

Mainstage Performances: Mixed Repertory or Story Ballet

This 70-90 minute, full Company concert-style performance requires full technical and production facilities. Typically a ticketed event for the general public, these performances may feature one of the Company's extensive repertory selections or one of its enchanting story ballets.

For a list of performances, see the repertory page at Dancingwheels.org.

**The Dancing Wheels Company
is represented by KMP Artists.**

For booking inquiries, contact
KMP at **+1.312.342.7898**
Email info@kmpartists.com

Or visit

[http://kmpartists.com/artists/
dancing-wheels-company/](http://kmpartists.com/artists/dancing-wheels-company/)



For more information and to select
the performance of your choice,
please visit dancingwheels.org.

Or, contact our Tour Manager at:

216.432.0306 or
touring@dancingwheels.org





MAKING MEMORIES: A JOURNEY THROUGH DEMENTIA

The Dancing Wheels Company's newest production, *Making Memories: A Journey through Dementia*, is an immersive program that combines performance art with dementia education.

The Dancing Wheels Company & School joined forces with hospitals, memory care facilities, facilities for aging adults, and individual caregivers and created *Making Memories: A Journey through Dementia* (*MMJTD*) to increase the understanding and recognition of diseases related to dementia and Alzheimer's. *MMJTD* is an evening-length program composed of two dance works choreographed by Mark Tomasic ("Proof" and "Three 4 Ann"); video documentary featuring interviews of people living with dementia, caregivers, and dementia/Alzheimer's health care professionals/specialists; plus, audience discussion. The performance/presentation premiered in January 2023 and, with support from the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) National Dance Project (NDP) Production Grant, is ready to tour NOW!

For more information on NEFA's NDP grant, click here—<https://www.nefa.org/grants/find-grant/national-dance-project-presentation-grant>



Please check out these media/press resources about our program:

- NEFA: [40 New Dance Projects Move Forward as National Dance Project Finalists](#)
- WKYC's HeartStrings: [Cleveland's Dancing Wheels Honors Families Affected by Dementia](#)
- Dementia Spring's Dementia Arts Spotlight: [Dancing Wheels' 'Making Memories: A Journey through Dementia' by The Dancing Wheels Company & School](#)

Video excerpts of the presentation are here—<https://youtu.be/64wtujAFfnQ>

Access photos of the presentation here—

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/hu5dzm09dows7ur5swasr/h?rlkey=6dvxyg434mdw9qfqqd2v9mq66&dl=0>





EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Featuring dancers representing a spectrum of age, ethnicity, gender, and physical abilities, The Dancing Wheels Company has the unique ability to connect on a personal level with children and adults of all abilities. Fine Arts Content Standards and general content standards are met in all educational programs. Available in-person and remote virtual learning options are shown below.

*Please contact our Director of Outreach for details at 216.432.0306
or email outreach@dancingwheels.org.*

STANDARD ASSEMBLY-BASED PROGRAMS

Perfect for K-College, these 45-60 minute programs combine dance and dialogue to educate kids about disability-related issues in an entertaining and informative manner.

After a series of energetic dance excerpts, audience members hear the story of a dancer with a disability who has lived out their dreams despite societal obstacles, emphasizing the important aspects of accessibility. Dancers demonstrate the language of dance through adaptive translation using methods like sign language, shadowing, and audio description. The final message relates to the founder's dream to dance despite her disability, and to make the arts accessible and available to people of all abilities.

Components of an assembly-based program may include:

Assembly-Based with Story Ballet Theme: These are abbreviated versions of mainstage concerts for in-school performances with the full Company:

- **Alice in Wonderland, Like You've Never Seen Before.** A contemporary production that's both edgy and family-friendly using imagery and characters to take a kaleidoscopic trip through Wonderland.
- **Daring to Be DUMBO!** A reimagined story set in a contemporary junior high school, where Dumbo is a bullied 13-year-old girl who exemplifies turning differences into strengths.
- **Helen Keller: A Tribute to My Teacher.** Honoring the 2006 Cleveland Sight Center centennial, this story ballet showcases Keller as a pioneering force for women, people with disabilities, and the civil rights movement.
- **The Snowman** brings to life the captivating, and heartwarming children's book and video, *The Snowman*, by Raymond Briggs.

Programming Basics:

The Dancing Wheels Company & School has reached over 6 million people through our educational outreach and professional performances.

Our company performs in schools, universities, concert halls, libraries, community centers, and hospitals across the nation.

Lecture Performance Costs vary depending on the program selected, the number of dancer-instructors assigned, travel and accommodation expenses incurred. We tailor programming to the interests and budget of host schools.

Types of Programs:

- ❖ General one-hour assembly
- ❖ Themed one-hour assemblies based on story ballets, current social issues, history, or science
- ❖ Residencies
- ❖ Workshops
- ❖ Master Classes

Assembly-Based and Residency Programs include curriculum and study guides for teachers and students.

In-person and remote virtual learning options now available!





Assembly-Based with Historical Topic: Featuring 4-6 dancers:

- **Far East of the Blues.** World-renowned choreographer Donald McKayle captures the mood and imagery evoked in the great jazz legend Duke Ellington’s “Far East Suite.”
- **Sweet Radio Radicals** features the music of female singers and songwriters whose music changed society.
- **Unconquered Warriors** infuses traditional Chinese dance with modern dance and is based on the Asian culture of the Chinese Warriors.
- **Walking on Clouds.** Using stories of equality/Rosa Parks, this piece mixes words and movement to explore humanity and the boundaries of differences and equality, both emotional and historical-between people with disabilities and people of color.

Assembly-Based with Science Topic: Perfect for secondary education students, this 45-minute to 1-hour program, including a question-and-answer session, presents information about dance, disability-related issues, and science in a fun and informative manner.

- **Science: A Catalyst for Art in Motion** is an interactive assembly program with dance, disability awareness, and curriculum-based subject matter centered on Newton’s Three Laws of Motion. The program demonstrates such factors as force, acceleration, and opposing reactions using the Dancing Wheels Company’s highly technical wheelchairs used for everyday mobility and dance. The program also touches on the science behind wheelchair construction, development, and the technologies that go into the composition of the chair’s metals, wheel circumference, and design elements. The main objectives of our Art in Motion and other assembly programs are to inspire, entertain, and educate.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops provide participants an in-depth look at physically integrated dance through adaptive translation, integrated partnering techniques, and the opportunity to try dancing in a wheelchair. Multiple instructors are involved to assist study in small groups. A workshop may be tailored to the specific needs of your organization and lasts between 1-3 hours.

MASTER CLASSES

An instructor from The Dancing Wheels Company & School teaches a Master Class in various genres of dance such as modern, ballet, or jazz for participants of mixed abilities or specifically for disabled or non-disabled groups.





RESIDENCIES

Residencies of 3-5 days can conclude with a lecture performance with the Dancing Wheels Company. Students will have the opportunity to learn the Dancing Wheels technique while expanding on one of the following topics:

- ***Catalyst in Motion*** Put an interactive take on Newton's Three Laws of Motion with this residency program! The residency demonstrates such factors as force, acceleration, and opposing reactions through the use of the Dancing Wheels Company's highly technical wheelchairs used for everyday mobility and dance. The program also touches on disability awareness, dance, the science behind wheelchair construction, development, and the technologies that go into the composition of the chair's metals, wheel circumference, and design elements. Curriculum Connection: Science. Recommended Grade Levels: 4th–8th Grades.
- ***Daring to be Dumbo*** Using Dancing Wheels' reimagined version of the original Dumbo story, students will learn how to turn differences from weakness into strength through the love of family, friends, and ultimately oneself. Using dance and music in a fun way, students will explore relationships, work on self-management and awareness, as well as discuss social issues such as anti-bullying within their community and school. Curriculum Connection: English Language Arts, Social Emotional Learning. Recommended Grade Levels: K–4th Grades.
- ***Distinguished Differentials: Beyond Our Skin*** is a program for students in Grades K-12 to consider and learn about the similarities and differences of human bodies beyond what is perceived by looking at a person. Through a scientific lens and by using dance and movement, visual art, language arts, and technology, students will discover components of the body such as bones, muscles, and organs; will explore wheelchair mechanics and composition (for primary grade bands to study shapes, lines, and circles and for secondary grade bands to study angles, circumference, velocity, and wheelchair design, for example); and will be able to share aspects of their own stories to validate their unique contributions to diversity. Curriculum Connection: Fine Arts, English Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Social Emotional Learning, Physical Education. Recommended Grade Levels: K–12th Grades.
- ***Helen Keller: A Tribute to Her Teacher*** This residency highlights the life of Helen Keller, a pioneering force for women and people with disabilities. Students will have the opportunity to learn historical facts about the accomplishments in the lives of Helen and her teacher Annie Sullivan, aspects of communication for a person who is hard of hearing/ deaf or visually impaired/blind, and a dance representing Anne & Helen's touring performances on Vaudeville stages. Curriculum Connection: English Language Arts, Social Studies, Fine Arts. Recommended Grade Levels: 3rd–5th Grades.



- ***Making A Difference*** Want to introduce the concept of equality in the arts and integrated dance to students? This residency concentrates on introducing influences in dance, disability, relationships, and communication (both visual and oral). Students will discuss and explore the history and importance of integrated dance, partnering using a dance-specific wheelchair, and experiencing being both a “stand-up” and “sit-down” dancer. Can be a one-day workshop or a more in-depth weeklong residency. Curriculum Connection: Fine Arts, Social Studies, Social Emotional Learning. Recommended Grade Levels: K–12th Grades.
- **NEW! *Minds in Motion*** is a program for students in Grades K-12 to engage in body and brain movement and learning. Based on dance educator Anne Green Gilbert’s “BrainDance,” eight developmental movement patterns which incorporate breath, tactile sensation, and body movements in relation to the spine are used to integrate the brain and the body in sensory-motor development and lifelong learning activities. Using dance concepts, music, and written text, students will experience activities that strengthen neuronal connections and improve memory. Expanding the definition of normal and acceptable, we connect students of all backgrounds to address disability, diversity, individuality, and inclusion. Curriculum Connection: Fine Arts, English Language Arts, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies, Social Emotional Learning, Physical Education. Recommended Grade Levels: PK–12th Grades.
- ***Walking on Clouds*** There is a strong parallel between the Civil Rights movement and the Disability Rights movement. Using dance, choreography, and historical references, this interactive residency incorporates lessons on the parallels between the fight for equality of these two groups. Curriculum Connection: English Language Arts, Social Studies (American History), Fine Arts. Recommended Grade Levels: 3rd–8th Grades.
- **And other programs previously described including:** [Alice in Wonderland, Like You’ve Never Seen Before](#) | [Helen Keller: A Tribute to My Teacher](#) | [The Snowman](#)





THE DEDICATED TEAM THAT KEEPS OUR WHEELS IN MOTION

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Mary Verdi-Fletcher, President/Founding Artistic Director

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Mary Ann Grof-Neiman, Operations & Administration Manager

Sara Lawrence-Sucato, Director of Education, Marketing Manager

Marissa Thomas, Tour Manager

Morgan Walker, Rehearsal Director, Wardrobe Manager

Company Members

McKenzie Beaverson

Angelina DiFranco

Mayhugh Fox*

Willow Freed*

Cody Krause

Brian Murphy**

Lasana Murphy*

Craig Sams III**

DeMarco Sleeper

Mary Verdi-Fletcher

Morgan Walker

**Apprentice*

***Guest Dancer*

The School of Dancing Wheels Teaching Artists

L. Taylor Ashton-Beil

Sara Lawrence-Sucato

Dominique Patton

Franklin Polk

If dance is an expression of the human spirit, then it is best expressed by people of all abilities.





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