MCC

Artist News

Dawn Lane, Choreographer & Dancer: Breaking Boundaries Through Dance

At home in Great Barrington, Mass., dancer Dawn Lane is working on choreographing a new piece for the Community Access to the Arts (CATA) gala this spring at Shakespeare & Co's Founders Theatre in Lenox. Lane has been involved with CATA and its arts programs for people with disabilities since 1995, first as a teaching artist and now as program director, and has produced works for the annual gala for many years. But, the past two performances have been particularly meaningful, as they've showcased her work with friend and artistic collaborator Marissa Yudkin.

Yudkin is a former professional dancer from Brooklyn, New York who is in the middle stages of Huntington's Disease. When Yudkin moved to the Berkshires in 2002 to enter a residential treatment center for Huntington's Disease, she didn't know if she would ever dance again. Yudkin had entered a stage in the degenerative disease where she was suffering from chorea, sporadic involuntary movements. However, a friend recommended she get in touch with CATA, and there she met Lane.

"We had an immediate connection," says Lane. "Not only do we physically resemble one another, we also share a similar sense of humor. We started working right away."

This connection has enabled Lane to work with Yudkin on two different pieces of choreography. The first, "Moving Chronicle," played upon Lane and Yudkin's physical resemblance. Lane harnessed herself to Yudkin to ensure Yudkin's stability. Mirroring one another's movements, the women's dance represented two aspects of one character, strong and weak, helping to support each other. The second piece Lane and Yudkin created again used a prop to ensure Yudkin's safety. Yudkin was positioned on an inflatable mattress. She rose and fell as the mattress inflated and deflated. Lane danced around her as a videographer filmed and projected live video on a screen behind them. Both works were also performed at Jacob's Pillow.

Lane was not new to the task of working with a partner with Yudkin's disabilities. She worked with connecting the elderly with youth through movement and is director of The Moving Company, a dance group comprised of talented individuals with developmental disabilities. This past summer, Lane, Yudkin, and members of The Moving Company visited Tewksbury Hospital's Huntington's Disease ward. They worked with caregivers and patients to show how basic movement can be integrated into care. The two-day workshop culminated with a performance by Lane, The Moving Company and Yudkin. Staff and patients were inspired and enthused by the movement exploration.

Yudkin now spends most of her time in a wheelchair. Lane hopes that Yudkin will be able to participate in this spring's gala. This time, to perform with Lane, Moving Company dancers, and professional dancers. If Yudkin is able to perform she will be seated in a chair.

"This work is constantly changing my definitions about art and about what we as humans are capable of accomplishing," says Lane.

Filmmaker John Whalen has documented Lane's working relationship with Yudkin. The documentary, "Too Much to Stop" will be premiered on Feb. 14 and 15 at the Triplex Cinema in Great Barrington. Whalen hopes to place the film in festivals this spring.

The MCC has been involved in the arts and healthcare movement for nearly a decade, beginning with the Elder Arts training programs and now with the Arts and Healing Initiative. Some of the artists who participated in the initial trainings, including Lane, comprise the MCC's Arts and Healing Roster. The Roster is designed to present information about highly qualified, experienced artists to institutional service providers such as hospitals, senior centers, nursing homes, and other healthcare facilities. The MCC has recently launched an arts-in-healthcare list-serve to help provide support and resources for interested artists, healthcare staff and arts administrators. Additional information about the Arts and Healing Roster is available online.

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