



Everything Michigan

Company demonstrates that there is no such thing as a disability when it comes to dance

Published: Tuesday, February 01, 2011, 12:13 PM



By Kristin Austin

Dancing is an expression of the human spirit.

With that in mind, dancer Mary Verdi-Fletcher founded the Dancing Wheels Company thirty years ago to allow representation for dancers of all abilities. The professional dance troupe was the first in America to bring dancers with and without disabilities together to perform.

The company comes to Hope College this month in partnership with Disability Network Lakeshore to entertain as well as educate and advocate for people with disabilities. The performance will star ten dancers, three of whom use wheelchairs.



Susan DeGraw

Chairs in motion: Dancing Wheels

"The audience can expect a wide range of music and diversity in our dances," said Verdi-Fletcher, who was born with spina bifida and went on to become the first professional wheelchair dancer in the nation and one of the first in the world. "They will see stand up and sit down (wheelchair) accomplished dancers who represent a spectrum of society in age, gender, physical abilities, and race. We represent diversity in all its forms."

The company's current repertoire includes excerpts from "Walking on Clouds" with music by Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald, and more, which draws a parallel between the Civil Rights Movement and the Disability Rights Movement, said Sara Lawrence-Sucato, the company's tour manager and member. Also featured are "Taking the 'A' Train," "Half the Fun," and "Far East of the Blues" with music by Duke Ellington.

Lucia Rios, an accessibility specialist for Disability Network Lakeshore, said the organization is bringing Dancing Wheels to the area as a conclusion to its yearlong celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"We were hoping that bringing an inclusive dance company to our community would help people see that disability does not have to define who you are or what you do," she said. "We wanted to show that inclusiveness can exist, and this dancing troupe helps break those stereotypes about people with disabilities.

"Think of it, people with and without disabilities dancing together!"

*Dancing Wheels will perform at 7:30 p.m. **February 4** at Hope's DeWitt Cultural Center Main Theatre in Holland. Tickets are \$15, \$12/seniors and students. Call the box office at 395-7890.*

© 2011 MLive.com. All rights reserved.