DANCING WHEELS COMPANY

2026-2027 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 that unites the talents of dancers 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 to 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.

To further the mission of inclusive arts and create opportunities for all, the School of Dancing Wheels proudly opened its doors in 1990. Its state-of-the-art studios soon became a world-class training center for dancers, choreographers, and educators. That same year, a partnership with the Cleveland Ballet created the groundbreaking Cleveland Ballet Dancing Wheels, which delighted audiences for nearly a decade.

To date, the Dancing Wheels Company's inspirational mission has touched nearly 7 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 repertoire of over 100 works from nationally esteemed choreographers and a message of inclusion and accessibility, the Company continually expands 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.

DANCING WHEELS COMPANY



PERFORMANCE OFFERINGS

For over four decades, The Dancing Wheels Company has delivered performances recognized for their artistry, diversity, and eclectic works from renowned choreographers. This skilled ensemble of stand-up and sit-down dancers has reached nearly 7 million people worldwide with innovative mainstage performances, school assembly programs, guest appearances, master classes, and varied outreach activities.

We present live and virtual performances in theaters, site-specific locations, hospitals, universities, festivals, and private events, 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 disability rights. She pioneered physically integrated professional dance companies. Having forever changed how society views the artistry and talent 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 situations when full production requirements or time availability are 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 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

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

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Examples of Performances



Title: ***Rodeo Reimagined***
Type: Mixed Repertory Concert
Length: 60 minutes, no intermission

Description: Dance has a rich history of iconic artists and dance makers whose vision and artistry have tested the course of time. In that same pioneering spirit, The Dancing Wheels Company's "Rodeo Reimagined" production reimagines a masterwork with a modern take on Agnes de Mille's iconic Western tale, choreographed by internationally acclaimed artist Amy Hall Garner. The performance features a new score by the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra's Paul Ferguson, incorporating jazz, hip-hop, folk, and ballet elements, all designed for physically integrated dance. The program also features "Little Sure Shot," a 2025 premiere by Catherine Meredith about the life and times of Annie Oakley set to western-style music. This production reminds audiences of the trail-blazing women who used their artistry and ingenuity to bring revolutionary, long-lasting memories of days gone by to the stage.

Tech Rider: Dancing Wheels Mainstage Technical Rider >
Options: This performance can include a collaborative opportunity with local musicians/jazz band/orchestra. Please ask for more information.

Photos: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/7e6qh5rpivbleyaa8jjky/AAYq5gO5FRlpQdXa5_mfi6w?rlkey=ryhl9eewxx3ov0gjscswo2b3k&dl=0 >
Videos:

- "Rodeo Reimagined" Promo: https://vimeo.com/1226805794/93e7201357?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci >
- "Little Sure Shot" Promo: https://vimeo.com/1198094815?fl=ip&fe=ec >



Title: ***Legendary Ladies of Jazz***
Type: Mixed Repertory Concert
Length: 60 minutes, no intermission

Description: In *Legendary Ladies of* Jazz, The Dancing Wheels Company sets the stage ablaze with a plethora of music, song, and dance as they bring to life the passion and dynamic work of women of color who revolutionized the 1920s–1950s jazz era, changing the tenor and tone of the genre and paving the way for female vocal and musical artists throughout history. This concert features works by Catherine Meredith, Staycee Pearl, and Laura Ann Smyth—female choreographers who, through their inventive choreography, tell the amazing stories of historical women jazz vocalists and musicians.

Tech Rider: Dancing Wheels Mainstage Technical Rider >
Options: This performance can include a collaborative opportunity with local musicians/jazz band/orchestra. Please ask for more information.

Photos: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/clcuffhyxcae07slp0e7l/AAl9RAaDHPgfexGIEJzR7Ig?rlkey=6hnxufhybhfh979gwxsi61j79&dl=0 >
Videos:

- "Legendary Ladies of Jazz" Promo: https://vimeo.com/1105224481/b2da34d26e >





Title: ***Making Memories: A Journey through Dementia***
Type: Evening-length lecture presentation
Length: 60 minutes + 15-minute audience discussion, no intermission
Description: The Dancing Wheels Company's *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* (MMAJTD) to increase understanding and recognition of dementia- and Alzheimer's-related diseases. MMAJTD is an evening-length program featuring two dance works choreographed by Mark Tomasic ("Proof" and "Three 4 Ann"); a video documentary with interviews with people living with dementia, caregivers, and dementia/Alzheimer's health care professionals/specialists; and an audience discussion. The performance/presentation premiered in January 2023 with support from the New England Foundation for the Arts (NEFA) National Dance Project (NDP) Production Grant.

Tech Rider: **DW mainstage MMAJTD tech rider >**
Options: This performance can include a collaborative opportunity with local dementia/Alzheimer's health care professionals/specialists. Please ask for more information.

Photos: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/hu5dzm09dows7ur5swasr/h?rlkey=6dvxyg434mdw9qfqqd2v9mq66&st=rd6cs6xl&dl=0 >
Videos:

- "Making Memories: A Journey Through Dementia" Excerpts: https://youtu.be/64wtujAFfnQ?si=TTQL30Rk2NqDOG8i >
- "Making Memories: A Journey Through Dementia" Full Premiere: https://youtu.be/WUs8qWaUbcE?si=O5TNFI0JxBxCFWCA >

Title: ***With and For All People***
Type: Mixed Repertory Concert
Length: 60 minutes + 15-minute intermission



Description: If dance is an expression of the human spirit, then it is best expressed by people of all abilities. With a composition of dancers representing a spectrum of age, ethnicity, gender, and physical abilities, the Dancing Wheels Company can connect with children and adults, with and without disabilities, on a deeply personal level. "With and For All People" is a mixed repertory concert that explores the themes of diversity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Tech Rider: Dancing Wheels Mainstage Technical Rider >
Options: The Company's repertoire features over 100 pieces created by nationally esteemed choreographers, and this performance can include the Presenter's selection. Please find the Company's full repertory list here >.

Photos: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/zbzi4sopy5s9ejtny6jyu/AKE9BjiRk43_Z8MwckUVVF8?rlkey=vczg6uwrn4u0yk06ngr9u3z00&dl=0 >
Videos:

- Dancing Wheels Promo Reel: https://vimeo.com/377609020?fl=pl&fe=sh >





"Once, quite by chance, there was an extraordinary old universe. And it was filled with matter and magnificence; with worlds and wonder; with moons and magic. And moving through this universe was a familiar old world of cities and streets, of trees and cars. There, in an ordinary house, on an ordinary chair, was a [child]. And in the [child's] head was locked an untold story which was as extraordinary as anything that old universe had ever seen or heard."
— Romeo Muller, *Puff the Magic Dragon,* New York, New York, AVON BOOKS, 1979

Title: ***Puff, the Magic Dragon***
Type: Evening-length story ballet
Length: 60 minutes

Description: This endearing story of a lonely child who transcends his fears and doubts by creating a "magical" friend, Puff! Puff, an imaginary dragon, creates a world of adventure and fun-loving antics as he and Jackie visit fantastical places where they make new friends who are quite unique. Jackie learns how, despite their differences, they accept and love each other. Sadly, as Jackie grows up, his magical journey with Puff fades, but he never forgets the life lessons of accepting others and true friendship.

Tech Rider: PUFF DW mainstage tech rider >

Photos: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/2emt7hxm09nop49sixp5q/AG960aJYF-gwhrK8VVEjRmc?rlkey=l2f336zjhx61s7jqfr4rhjul6&dl=0 >
Videos:

- "Puff the Magic Dragon" promo reel: https://vimeo.com/1198094816 >
- "Puff the Magic Dragon" Full Premiere: https://vimeo.com/1172464483/438f613e66?fl=pl&fe=sh >

Title: ***Ladies of the '80s!***
Type: Mixed Repertory Concert
Length: 40 minutes or shorter, if excerpted



Description: The 1980s marked a vibrant era for music, with numerous iconic female singers and vocalists rising to prominence. In "Ladies of the '80s!", The Dancing Wheels Company proudly honors these fierce female artists who transformed the landscape of equal rights through fearless dedication and remarkable artistry. The program features choreography by renowned artist Dianne McIntyre, alongside works by Annette Ellis and Angelina DiFranco. Set to iconic songs by 1980s female artists, the performance captures the era's bold energy and spirit. Audiences will experience the Dancing Wheels Company's artistry in a powerful tribute to legacy and creativity.

Tech Rider: Dancing Wheels Mainstage Technical Rider >

Photos: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/2emt7hxm09nop49sixp5q/AG960aJYF-gwhrK8VVEjRmc?rlkey=l2f336zjhx61s7jqfr4rhjul6&dl=0 >
Videos:

- "Ladies of the '80s!" promo reel: https://vimeo.com/1234464844/cef50b338c?share=copy&fl=sv&fe=ci >



EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

Featuring dancers representing a spectrum of ages, ethnicities, genders, and physical abilities, The Dancing Wheels Company can connect on a personal level with children and adults of all abilities. All educational programs meet Fine Arts Content Standards and general content standards. In-person and remote virtual learning options are shown below.

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

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, highlighting key aspects of accessibility. Dancers demonstrate the language of dance through adaptive translation using methods like sign language, shadowing, and audio description. The final message reflects the founder's dream to dance despite her disability and to make the arts accessible 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, heartwarming children's book and video The Snowman by Raymond Briggs.

Programming Basics:

The Dancing Wheels Company & School has reached nearly 7 million people through our educational outreach and professional performances. Our company performs in schools, universities, concert halls, libraries, community centers, and hospitals nationwide.

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

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 are available!

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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 draws on the culture of 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, informative way.

- **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 concepts such as force, acceleration, and opposing reactions using the Dancing Wheels Company's highly technical wheelchairs for everyday mobility and dance. The program also touches on the science behind wheelchair construction and development, including the materials used in 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.



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RESIDENCIES

Residencies of 2–12 days/weeks 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* —** An interactive take on Newton's Three Laws of Motion with this residency program! The residency demonstrates concepts such as force, acceleration, and opposing reactions through the Dancing Wheels Company's highly technical wheelchairs used for everyday mobility and dance. The program also touches on disability awareness, dance, and the science behind wheelchair construction, development, and the technologies that shape the chair's metals, wheel circumference, and design elements. **Curriculum Connection:** Science. **Recommended Grade Levels:** 4–8

- ***Daring to be Dumbo*** — Using Dancing Wheels' reimagined version of the original Dumbo story, students will learn to turn differences from weakness into strength through love for family, friends, and ultimately themselves. Using dance and music in a fun way, students will explore relationships, build self-management and awareness, and discuss social issues such as anti-bullying within their community and school. **Curriculum Connection:** English Language Arts, Social Emotional Learning. **Recommended Grade Levels:** K–4

- ***Distinguished Differentials: Beyond Our Skin*** is a program for students in Grades K-12 to explore the similarities and differences in human bodies beyond what we see at a glance. 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–12

- ***Every Body Can Dance* —** If dance is an expression of the human spirit, it is best expressed by all abilities. This is the fundamental belief behind the Dancing Wheels Company & School and the theme *Every Body Can Dance.* Through dance and disability-awareness activities, and using the updated Universal Design for Learning Guidelines 3.0, students with and without disabilities will explore adaptations that make it possible for anyone to try dancing. The Dancing Wheels methodology of physically integrated dance utilizes translations as movement adaptations between sit-down and stand-up dancers. Other adaptations include sensory and learning adaptations such as verbal, visual, and tactile. By normalizing disability as a naturally occurring variation of human beings and using an arts-integrative approach, our program connects students of all backgrounds to address diversity, individuality, and inclusion. **Curriculum Connection:** English Language Arts, Social Studies, Fine Arts. **Recommended Grade Levels:** 3–5

- ***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 learn historical facts about the accomplishments of Helen and her teacher, Annie Sullivan; explore communication for people who are hard of hearing/deaf or visually impaired/blind; and watch a dance representing Anne & Helen's touring performances on Vaudeville stages. **Curriculum Connection:** English Language Arts, Social Studies, Fine Arts. **Recommended Grade Levels:** 3–5



- **[NEW!]** ***Imagination Island*** — Set sail for Imagination Island, where creativity, storytelling, and individuality inspire movement! In this interactive dance residency, students will discover how their imaginations, personal experiences, and unique ways of moving can become the building blocks for choreography. Through improvisation, creative movement, and storytelling, participants will explore how individual differences can inspire new ideas and ways of expressing themselves through dance.

  Throughout the residency, students will use personally meaningful props as creative tools to explore movement quality, character, expression, and storytelling. Individual movement phrases will grow into collaborative choreography as students learn to build upon one another's ideas and create movement together. Participants will also learn and refine choreography translated from *Puff the Magic Dragon*, a Dancing Wheels Company story ballet centered on the idea of "dreaming differently."

  The residency encourages students to focus less on technical perfection and more on the joy of creating, collaborating, and discovering what makes their movement unique. Students will have opportunities to reflect, share discoveries, provide constructive feedback, and consider how their creative work might contribute to future educational performances and lecture-demonstrations.

  Curriculum Connection: Fine Arts, English Language Arts, Social-Emotional Learning, Physical Education
  Recommended Grade Levels: K–12

- ***Making A Difference* —** Want to introduce students to the concept of equality in the arts and integrated dance? This residency focuses on influences in dance, disability, and relationships. 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. This 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–12

- ***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," the program uses eight developmental movement patterns that incorporate breath, tactile sensation, and body movements in relation to the spine to integrate the brain and 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. We expand the definition of normal and acceptable and 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–12

- **Walking on Clouds** — The Civil Rights movement and the Disability Rights movement share strong parallels. 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:** 3–8

And other programs previously described including: *Alice in Wonderland...* Like You've Never Seen Before | *Helen Keller: A Tribute to My Teacher* | *The Snowman*

DANCING WHEELS COMPANY



THE DEDICATED TEAM THAT KEEPS OUR WHEELS IN MOTION

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Sara Lawrence-Sucato, Director of Education, Marketing Manager

Marissa Thomas, Tour Manager

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Zach Biggs, Rehearsal Director

Angelina DiFranco, Assistant Rehearsal Director

Kylie Karam, Wardrobe Manager

Emilyann Dustman, Social Media Manager

Ruth Rachel Przybojewski, Administrative Assistant

Company Members

Zach Biggs

Angelina DiFranco

Emilyann Dustman

Kylie Karam

Alexandra Martinez*

Brian Murphy*

DeMarco Sleeper

Nehemiah "Neemo" Spencer

Mary Verdi-Fletcher

*indicates Guest Artist

Dancing Wheels Company & School Teaching Artists

L.Taylor Ashton-Beil

Zach Biggs

Angelina DiFranco

Emilyann Dustman

Dominique Gross

Kylie Karam

Sara Lawrence-Sucato

DeMarco Sleeper

Nehemiah "Neemo" Spencer

Aaron "Kooky" Williams

Mary Verdi-Fletcher

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

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