



PHOTO: AMANDA BILLING

HUNTERS AND GATHERERS, SENIORS DANCE

Creating opportunities to **AGE CREATIVELY**

BY CARLENE NEWALL DE JESUS

In this article, Carlene Newall de Jesus provides some insight and perspectives from artists/companies working with seniors, or mature dancers, to create and present work.

The opportunity to engage in creating and performing dance work has become increasingly available to older adults in Aotearoa New Zealand. Perceptions of dance being a pursuit of the young are changing and the contribution of dance to well-being are increasingly recognised. With this increased range of dance for older people come opportunities to engage in the creative processes of developing and performing dance work.

Orquidea Tamayo Mortera, Group Diversional Therapist at Selwyn Village in Auckland, has coordinated a range of dance activities facilitated for older residents by dance professionals including regular creative dance sessions and public performances from residents. She explains that participation in these activities gives a sense of meaningful purpose to the people involved; “It has helped a lot of the elders that I work with to get out of their shell, to actually find meaning and purpose and set up a goal like looking forward to having a flash mob when you are 105”.

Within her wider work with older adults, Orquidea promotes the idea of lifelong learning and values dance projects that provide older participants with ways to create and contribute to the work being made. “It’s creating in the moment and ‘your opinion is important, and I want to know what you have to say through movement to me, teach me’. So, they feel validated, they feel like they still have an opinion, they feel respected.”

These ideas of the importance of meaningful contribution to choreography are echoed by experienced dance practitioner Kerry-Ann Stanton. Kerry-Ann leads a weekly Open Floor dance session in Auckland for all ages including older adults, integrating guided inquiry and self-directed movement. She also leads a senior’s creative contemporary class as part of The New Zealand Dance Company’s Feisty Feet programme. Kerry-Ann’s work integrates the opportunity for older people to create together and contribute to movement. “My current performance dancers are excited to be at their edge, to be

encouraged to reflect in depth on the nature and purpose of our dance and to co-create our dance. They revel in doing this in community and bearing witness to each other.”

A recent New Zealand Dance Company project developed a collaborative performance work from the older dancers from the Feisty Feet programme and younger students from the Winter Youth School. Kerry-Ann witnessed the great deal of respect between the two groups and the significance of the work to the dancers and audience.

OLDER DANCERS WANT TO BE A CREATIVE CONTRIBUTION TO OUR SOCIETY. AND IT WORKS FOR OUR AUDIENCES TO EXPERIENCE THE MATURITY OF EXPRESSION THAT ELDERS BRING TO THE DANCE.

Kathleen Curwen-Walker, principal and founder of The Auckland Academy of Adult Ballet, believes in the importance of creating appropriate spaces and contexts for older adults to participate in dance. Her studio includes a weekly programme of Senior Swans, adapted ballet classes for older adults, which offers participants opportunities to take class and engage with optional performance opportunities. She shares the importance of accessibility to classes for adults that are not just ‘tacked on’ to programmes for younger dancers and the importance that older dancers “feel it’s their space, not just that they are being accommodated”.

Rebound Dance Company in Christchurch was created 10 years ago, not simply to give older people opportunities to make and perform dance but, to give older dance practitioners opportunities to keep developing as artists, performers and choreographers. Their work aims to find a balance between celebrating the artists as maturing dancers and being relevant within the wider contemporary dance industry. Founding member and Artistic Advisor Fleur de Thier explains: “For me contemporary dance is the ideal way to capture our true spirit. We don’t want to impose movement on our bodies. To dance with integrity, we need to understand our bodies and own our movement. We are often tasked to create movement. We are always challenging ourselves to be true to who we are as dancers and keep exploring what makes us different from younger dancers and special.”

Dance veteran Susan Jordan’s SeniorsDANCE programme also offers creative performance opportunities for older dancers as part of a larger programme that provides weekly dance sessions specifically developed for older people. A recent work presented six older dancers, dancing in supermarkets



PHOTO: JESSE DETHIER-HUNT



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REBOUND DANCE COMPANY

Seniors
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DANCE FOR OLDER ADULTS
www.seniorsdance.nz



SELWYN VILLAGE

PHOTO: UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

around Auckland. As a highly experienced practitioner, Susan is able to draw from her wealth of skills, experiences and insights to make work that is suitable for older dancers, that develops the performance skill of participants and also allows Susan to express her own creative artistry as an older choreographer.

OUR BODIES CAN DETERIORATE BUT THE JOY OF DANCE CAN COME BACK TO OLDER PEOPLE.

SUSAN JORDAN

As our dance industry shifts and grows in Aotearoa New Zealand, the opportunity for older dancers to participate in creative work should be recognised for the unique creative offerings from its participants and for what it offers to performers and audiences alike. As Fleur de Thier so beautifully shares:

THAT'S ABOUT NOT BEING GOOD BECAUSE WE ARE A COMPANY OF AGEING DANCERS, BUT GREAT BECAUSE WE MAKE WORK THAT CELEBRATES THAT WE ARE AGEING DANCERS. ■

Rebound Dance Company presents:

Born out of Curiosity

featuring 'Tipping the Balance' by Fleur de Thier
'Stuffed' by Andrew Shepherd
'MOR' by Tracy Scott

Arts Festival Dunedin
25 & 26 September 7:30pm

www.artsfestivaldunedin.co.nz
post-show forum 25 September

Hannah Playhouse Wellington
6 October 7:30pm

www.hannahplayhouse.org.nz
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