

# Newsletter

## Fall 98



### AXIS Dance Company

Christine de Leon  
Bonnie Lewkowitz  
Stephanie McGlynn  
Nicole Richter  
Megan Schirle  
Uli Schmitz  
Judith Smith

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Geneva Clay  
Elliot Halpern  
Juliana Recio  
Miguel De Torres



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Newsletter design by Stephanie McGlynn.  
All articles written by AXIS dancers.

*Greetings!* 1998 has been another incredible year for AXIS. Last Fall, the company began a process of “revisioning” which required us to look at our history, our organization and our way of operating. Following some changes in personnel, we decided that the most important thing for us to do was to grow and improve artistically, both as individuals and a company. To that end, we agreed that commissioning choreography from outside our company would be a very important step in the right direction. In order to support this effort, we instituted a *New Works Fund* which has already received enthusiastic support. The company held its first open audition, with a response that was truly gratifying and overwhelming. Our community outreach and education program has been revamped and renamed *Dance Access*.

Organizationally, AXIS has grown and expanded. The company is now officially “co-directed” by one person with a disability and one without, namely Judith Smith and Nicole Richter. We added Lela Davia, Development Consultant; Iva Walton, Production Manager; Mary Smith, Financial Manager, and Christine de Leon, dancer, to our dedicated and talented staff. Three new Board members joined us: Elliot Halpern, Geneva Clay and Juliana Recio. John Killacky, Executive Director of Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and Jeremy Alliger, Artistic Director of Dance Umbrella in Boston, joined our Advisory Board. And last but very important, AXIS is pleased to be working with a wonderful Marketing Consultant, Alisa Ahlstone, through the support of Business Volunteers for the Arts.

On top of all this, the company’s schedule remained busy, challenging and rewarding with events taking place locally and nationally. We’ll be participating in major national and international events in ’99, including the National Dance Association Conference, National Dance Week, Accessible Theater Association Conference, Very Special Arts International Festival and Dance Umbrella’s First International Festival of Aerial Dance. Every year we receive an incredible array of requests for performances, activities and information from individuals and groups in our local community and around the world. All of this adds up to the fact that we still have a tremendous amount of work to do and dance to create!

## *New works & new direction*

As usual, AXIS has been busy creating new work! The company produced a new repertory work, *Ta Kala*, which was directed by Stephanie McGlynn and Nicole Richter with an original sound score by Mimi Fox. The usage of 7-foot long bamboo poles inspired this new work and with it many new movement possibilities. *Ta Kala* premiered in Summerfest/dance ’98 at Theater Artaud, receiving great feedback from our audience, other dancers, choreographers and critics. (For a review check out the AXIS website.)

This past year has been a turning point in AXIS’ artistic development. For the first time in its 11-year history, AXIS is commissioning new works from choreographers outside the company. We are very fortunate to be working with Sonya Delwaide, of the Compagnie de Danse L’Astragale, based in Quebec; Joe Goode of Joe Goode Performance Group; and Joanna Haigood of ZACCHO. We wanted to work with these particular artists because we respect them and the integrity of their work. We felt they would work well with AXIS and would push us to explore new directions and possibilities in our movement, both as individual dancers and as a group. Having never worked with dancers in wheelchairs, these choreographers find the experience is interesting, challenging and provocative.

Currently, we are finishing up Sonya’s piece, *Chuchottements*, a trio. Sonya was inspired to create this piece by the music of Telemann and the images of the Baroque period:

powdered wigs, politeness, strong dress codes and mannerisms, and the proper social behavior. These images become a wonderful metaphor for our present preoccupation to be politically correct. There is some very interesting costuming in this piece, possibly including a rather large hoop skirt! The piece will premiere in Sonya’s show at ODC in San Francisco, February 26–28.

We are in the beginning stages of working on a piece by Joe Goode, in which all six AXIS dancers will be performing. We are particularly enjoying Joe’s process-oriented approach to creating work, which utilizes spoken word and personal material. Like Sonya, Joe is also toying with some very interesting costuming ideas, which may have particularly stunning ramifications for Uli, our lone male dancer!

We will begin working with Joanna Haigood in November. This piece will contain some element of aerial work, for which Joanna is quite well known. The piece will premiere at Dance Umbrella’s First International Festival of Aerial Dance in Boston and possibly Jacob’s Pillow in June ’99. Additionally, with support from the National Endowment for the Arts, Jeremy Alliger of Dance Umbrella has commissioned Bill T. Jones to choreograph a new repertory piece for AXIS in ’99. AXIS dancers had a wonderful initial meeting with Bill and Bjorn Amelan in October and are currently negotiating schedules, as Mr. Jones is in extremely high demand.

## Upcoming Events

OCT. 13–DEC. 3	<i>Dance Access</i> Workshop Series II 8 <sup>th</sup> Street Studio, Berkeley, CA Tuesdays, 7:30–9:30 PM, Thursdays, 12:30–2:00 PM Taught by Nicole Richter and Judith Smith.	Info: (510) 287–5792
(This <i>Dance Access</i> series is offered FREE OF CHARGE! Spaces are limited however, so please call early to register.)		
NOV. 7	Adaptive PE Conference, Santa Rosa, CA (Keynote Address/Workshop)	Info: (510) 287-5792
NOV./DATE TBA	UC Berkeley, CA (Lecture/Demonstration with excerpts from repertory)	Info: (510) 287-5792
JAN. 25–30	University of Puget Sound, Tacoma, WA (Residency/Performance with Light Motion of Seattle)	Info: (510) 287-5792
FEB. 26–27	Premiers of Sonya Delwaide, ODC Theater, San Francisco, CA (Performances by Sonya Delwaide, Frank Shawl, and AXIS)	Info: (415) 863-9833
MARCH/DATE TBA	Mills College, Oakland, CA (Lecture Demonstration/Workshop)	Info: (510) 287-5792
MARCH/DATE TBA	Sacramento Ballett (Lecture Demonstration/Workshop)	Info: (510) 287-5792
APRIL 20–21	National Dance Association Conference, Boston, MA (Symposium/Performance on “Integrated Dance” and creating Dance Curriculum for dancers with disabilities)	Info: (706) 542-4415
APRIL 26–MAY 3	National Dance Week, Bay Area, CA (Watch for various events including “Open Studios,” performance.)	Info: (510) 287-5792
MAY 27–30	Accessible Theater Association, National Conference, Los Angeles, CA (Conference/Symposium/Performance)	Info: (310) 788-9013
MAY 28–JUNE 2	Arts & Souls, Very Special Arts International Festival, Los Angeles, CA (Conference/Symposium/Performance)	Info: (714) 835-8867
JUNE 9–19	Dance Umbrella’s First International Aerial Dance Festival, Boston, MA (Residency/Performance)	Info: (617) 482-7570

Ongoing Dance Workshops in Oakland, Berkeley, San Francisco, Marin, Sonoma, Northern California locations.

For information or to bring AXIS to your community call (510) 287-5792 or visit the website at <http://www.axisdance.org>

## CAC Artists-in Residence Grant

AXIS is inordinately proud of its co-directors Nicole Richter and Judith Smith for having been awarded a prestigious Artists-in-Residence grant from the California Arts Council (CAC). This program, funded in part by the NEA, will enable Judy and Nicole to offer a nine-month program of classes to adults, youth, and children in the Bay Area as part of AXIS Dance Company’s continuing *Dance Access* educational and outreach program. Judy and Nicole begin teaching dance classes for children with and without disabilities in Oakland schools in October; we later plan to expand classes to Berkeley and other East Bay districts as well.

AXIS has also re-launched our adult and youth *Dance Access* series that met with such enthusiasm last Spring. The classes, led by Judy and Nicole as well as guest teachers from the Bay Area dance community, explore the application of specific dance disciplines to “integrated” dance: dance for people with and without disabilities. Heady with our CAC success, we have added classes—including a daytime slot!—and changed the times, so if you’re a returning student make sure you note the changes carefully on the AXIS calendar enclosed. If you are an “oldtimer” you will also be especially pleased to note: all CAC Artist-in-Residence classes are *free!*

AXIS is proud to be an active member of the Bay Area dance scene since 1987—no small accomplishment for a small independent dance company with lofty visions and ideals. However, in today's world of ever-shrinking arts funding, to continue, expand, and as ever strive to improve our work is more costly than ever. It is undoubtable that we could not have gotten this far without the generous support of individual donors from amongst our pool of AXIS fans. This year we are introducing several funds which allow you to direct your donation in the manner in which you see most fit.

#### NEW WORKS FUND

The New Works Fund provides a pool of resources for AXIS to continue to develop its cutting-edge choreography and to present quality performances to local, national, and international audiences. Not only does the fund allow us to realise our new policy of supporting AXIS choreographers while soliciting high-profile commissions, but it often provides for the "hidden" costs of mounting any production—music, costuming, sets, lighting design, production and touring costs.

#### DANCE ACCESS EDUCATIONAL AND OUTREACH FUND

AXIS believes that providing dance opportunities to all people regardless of background serves the important functions of enriching the community, educating about the arts and about disability, and generating interest and participa-

tion in the growing field of "integrated" dance. Whether we are providing weekly dance classes throughout the Bay Area, workshops for dancers, out-of-state residencies, performance labs, lecture/demonstrations, or an AXIS Summer School (one of our goals for the next millenium!), AXIS maintains a strict policy that no one is turned away for the inability to pay. Your donation to the *Dance Access Fund* guarantees that our outreach work continues to grow in such a way that no one is denied access to a quality program of dance education.

#### GENERAL OPERATIONS

The nuts-and-bolts operations costs of running a successful dance company are high and often the very area in which AXIS most needs support that arts organizations or foundation grants do not cover. We never could have achieved half of all we've accomplished if our dancers had not been so generous as to volunteer their time for rehearsals in the past (in addition to the countless hours they spend in meetings, buying costumes, designing the website, etc!) One of our goals for '99 is that our dancers should be compensated fairly for their work. Your donation to the *General Operations Fund* will help us achieve that goal.

#### GREATEST NEED

By specifying "Greatest Need," you grant those of us at AXIS the discretion to apply your donation towards the area of our work which most needs support at that time.

## Thank You's

AXIS Dance Company is generously supported by the City of Oakland's Cultural Arts Division, California Arts Council, True North Foundation, Judith Stronach Fund of Vanguard Public Foundation, Business Volunteers for the Arts, the Arts Management Institute, San Jose Office of Cultural Affairs' Artist Fee Support Program and Esther S.Akiba, Sue Anderson, Helen R.Betenbaugh, Susan Blanchard, Celia Bloom, Wendy E.T. Bolker, Susan Bowman, Joan L.Brevis, Letitia Upton Brown, Mary Ann Buchholz, Carrie Anderson Butler, Mary Byrne, Carolyn Cornia, Allan M.Daley Jr., Kim Epifano, Jonathan Frieman, Elliot Halpern, Lelia Da Via, Dan and Jan Garrett, Thanh Tieu Huynh, Sondra Jensen, Hannah Joyce, Elias Katz, Jennifer Kern, Donna Krohn, Suzanne Lacy, David L. Landes, J.Dougal MacKinnon, Jeffrey S.Mandel, Deborah Morawski, Jean Morrison, Wynn Newhouse, Robert J.Powers, Pauline Richter, Joann Schirle, Andrea B.Sherwin, Micah Schwabero, Lois Silverstein, Jack V.Simons, Beth Alper Slepian, Charles W.Smith, Mary E.Smith, Susan L.Stone, Miguel D.De Torres, Michelle Weingarten, Lisa B.Wild, and Winifred Yen Wood.

AXIS' *New Works Fund* is supported by Zellerbach Family Fund, Rod Lathim and ACCESS Theater Association, Alameda County Arts Commission and generous supporters including Ramona Arellano, Kate Arterberry, Judith Baker, Sima Belmar, Ruth Bossieux, Jeannie Bunker and family, Paul Church, Geneva Clay, Cynthia I. Cleary, Merrill Collett, Margaret Cotts, Gil Daley, Sonya Delwaide and Alex Nichols, Tim Dreher, Mary C.Dunlap, Patricia Dunne, Mickey Duxbury, Vivienne Feyer, Robert Fiese, Sonja Franeta, Sam and Ann Cupolo Freeman, Dolly Gattozzi, Tova A.Green, Anne Greene, Nancy Henderson, Rachel and Lee Hollowell, Margaret Jacobson, Hannah Joyce, Tobie Kaplan/Anne Busse, Ray Kotrozo, Wende Kumara, Susan Lamb, Joan Leon, Cloe Lipton, Simi Linton, Jean Nandi, Rogalio Nunez, Susan Oshser, Patty Overland, Burr Overstreet, Michael Perrault, Mary Porter Chase, David G.Roche, Maylie Scott, Uli Schmitz and Cathy Greene, Alan Senauke and family, Frank Shawl, Petra Slieger, Sondra Thaler, Lori Thompson, Cecilia Weeks, Nonnie Welch, Kate Wheeler, Peter Wood and Eddy Ytuarte.

*Dance Access* is supported by VISA Corporation, and the National Endowment for the Arts/California Arts Council Artist in Residency Program.

A very special thanks to Iva Walton, Darryl Stephens and Leon Setti for technical support; Mimi Fox, Sonya Delwaide, Joe Goode and Joanna Haigood for their artistic genius; Lyn Goldfarb, Tony Molatore, Brenda Prager, Almudena Ortiz, Amy Snyder and Marty Sohl for helping us to replace our photo and video archive; to Sondra Jensen and Hannah Joyce for ongoing administrative support; Sondra and Paul for puppysitting; to Rachel Wolfe, Dan Garrett, Debra Valov and Helen Miller for computer help; to Jeanette Hodge, Stafford, Tom Metz, Matt and Stephanie McGlynn for graphics; to Ted Helminsky, Austin Forbord and Shelly Trott of RAPT Films, John Parulis, and Michael Council for video work; Jim Beatty, our studio partner; Jenny Kern and Jack Porter, Richard Richter, Thomas Packard, Lela Davia, Joy Clinton, Susan O'Hara, Wheelchairs of Berkeley, Chrys Goodell, Cheryl Wade, Paul Longmore, Tom Donahue for all sorts of stuff!; to Jeremy Alliger, Ella Baff and John Killacky for their knowledge, wisdom and encouragement; and to our Board of Directors and Advisory Board for their leadership, commitment, dedication and continuous support. We greatly appreciate all the support we've received this past year and in the previous years! We certainly couldn't do what we do without all of you!

## Benefit Performance

On May 16 at Eighth Street Studio, we presented a preview of our newest work, *Ta Kala*, directed by Stephanie McGlynn and Nicole Richter, to a sold-out crowd. As well as to generate feedback about the piece, the performance was also a benefit to support our *New Works Fund*. Sonya Delwaide, our first commissioned choreographer, generously offered to perform a solo. The event was a huge success; we raised over \$1,000 and received encouraging reviews of the piece. Thanks to the incredible efforts of our Board and other volunteers, we had a feast after the show. Many thanks to our donors: Hoopers Chocolates, A.G. Ferrari catering, Semi-Freddies, Trader Joe's, Just Desserts, Zand Market, La Mediterraena, and Ann Marks of *Conscious Life Magazine*.

## Residencies

### AXIS/BILL SHANNON AT YERBA BUENA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

The Artists-in-Residence project at Yerba Buena will be remembered by AXIS members as the major activity which launched both a new year and a new artistic phase for the company. We were drawn to multi-disciplinary artist Bill Shannon's impeccably crafted street-performance-meets-physical-theatre style for the completely new direction it would provide us to explore. Bill was also the first outside artist AXIS had invited in to direct a piece, and though AXIS dancers Nicole Richter and Judy Smith may have swallowed hard at the beginning of the process, in the end the success of the resulting trio proved any risks taken were more than worthwhile! The performance at Yerba Buena Forum met with great response from the near-capacity crowd that stayed for a Q&A session co-presented by Intersection for the Arts. Encouraged by this response, we are currently in the process of seeking funding to develop this successful work-in-progress into a fully realised piece. In the meantime, Judy and Nicole are so enamored of the piece that they have been known to perform a duo version of it!

Other elements of the residency were no less groundbreaking or important. Judy, Nicole and Bill led adult workshops at the Yerba Buena Forum as well as youth classes at San Francisco schools. We also got to switch roles and become students (a rare treat for AXIS dancers!), as well-known Bay Area choreographers Joe Goode and Keith Hennessy each taught an intensive workshop for us all. We all agreed that the best part of the whole experience was working in the absolute fishbowl that is the Yerba Buena Forum—smack dab in the middle of San Francisco's downtown arts complex, and completely panelled on two sides with glass windows.

### AXIS/KESHET DANCE COMPANY IN ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Having recently expanded their free children's dance classes to include kids with physical disabilities, Shira Greenberg's Keshet Dance Company invited AXIS members Judy Smith and Nicole Richter to spend a week exchanging teaching tips and dance experiences.

Judy and Nicole taught daily classes for children ages 4–12, led adult dance classes and teacher training in-services at Carrie Tinguely Hospital, and taught a workshop for adults with and without developmental disabilities hosted by Very Special Arts New Mexico. By the end of the week, the AXIS/Keshet residency had been featured on the front page of the *Albuquerque Journal* as well as the local news station, and had charmed an enthusiastic audience with a performance which included pieces by AXIS, Keshet, an AXIS/Keshet collaboration, and a demonstration by our children's class. All in all, the residency was so successful and fulfilling for all that an expanded two-week version is being planned for the end of July, 1999.

## Axis auditions & welcomes new dancer!

In a year of firsts, this was a biggie: after eleven years, AXIS held its first-ever open audition! Even though the position we sought to fill was rife with the usual dance-world disclaimers

Be sure to visit AXIS' award-winning website at its new address: <http://www.axisdance.org>

("seeking an apprentice/understudy who after a 'trial period' may join as a full

member"), the response was so overwhelming we regretfully had to turn people away. On the fateful day, September 16<sup>th</sup>, eighteen intrepid auditionees endured three hours of AXIS members putting them through some extremely varied paces (from Contact Improv to dance theatre to modern technique). In the end, from an indescribably varied and gifted field, one especially talented dancer was chosen.

So—we are thrilled and excited to introduce Christine de Leon to our AXIS friends and followers. A recent transplant to the Bay Area, Chris has studied and danced in Canada, England, and the Philippines, among other places. In addition to her strong technical background and arresting performance presence, we were drawn to Chris because of her training in community dance and her experience in teaching dance. In short, we feel that the addition of a dancer of this caliber to AXIS' roster more than makes up for the inevitable headaches that come along with holding an open audition (!)—and we look forward to introducing Chris to you on stage or in the classroom very soon.

(photo © 1996 Amy Snyder)



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FREE MATTER FOR  
THE BLIND AND  
HANDICAPPED

## 10<sup>th</sup> West Coast Contact Improvisation Festival

During the past year, the majority of AXIS dancers joined forces for a renewed effort to broaden and diversify the scope of teaching mixed-ability dance in the Bay Area and beyond. Unlike earlier years, all teaching activities were carried through by a team consisting of an able-bodied and a disabled dancer.

On the July 4<sup>th</sup> weekend, we took the team-teaching approach to the 10<sup>th</sup> West Coast Contact Improvisation Festival (WCCIF), at which disabled Axis member Uli Schmitz had been teaching for a number of years. The WCCIF is a unique event committed to the improvisational dance form of Contact Improvisation and draws people from all over the country and from abroad.

The dance form of Contact Improvisation has been around for over 25 years and has become an established technique used by many dancers to build athletic and improvisational skills at the same time. Contact Improvisation does not involve a discrete vocabulary of movement, but relies on the instinctual and authentic movement qualities of the dancers. For most AXIS dancers, the form has been influential and a steady source of inspiration.

This year, Nicole Richter and Uli Schmitz were on the faculty of the WCCIF where they taught a beginners class and also performed excerpts of the latest AXIS dance piece, *Ta Kala*. The Saturday morning class, geared towards a mixed student body was well attended and feedback was great. Somewhat disappointing, however, was the low enrollment of disabled students in our class and the festival in general, and this despite the efforts of the organizing committee to make the festival more suitable for disabled dance students.

The almost complete absence of disabled participants throughout most parts of the 5-day festival was certainly noticed by organizers and teachers and led to discussions around issues of inclusiveness. We hope that next year's festival will have a more accommodating and flexible structure in that the accessible classes will be placed more conveniently in the festival and that it will be possible to take only selected classes. The West Coast Contact Improvisation Festival is indeed a great opportunity to learn from a diverse body of teachers and to dance with an even more colorful group of students. So, it would be wonderful if we saw some of you next year at the festival pouring your sweat over the dancefloor.