



Karen Peterson and Dancers, Inc.

"inclusive contemporary dance"

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2013-2015



An Unusual Event: Karen Peterson and Dancers

Mixed-Ability Dancers Have True Grit

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Support #1

Tuesday, May 20, 2014

By Marj O'Neill-Butler



Photographer: Luis Olazabal
Shawn Buller and Lize Lotte Pitlo in GRIT

I had to look up the word Grit, the title of the recent piece presented by Karen Peterson and Dancers. It's not that I didn't know what the word meant, but wondered how it was to be put to use in a dance piece. Struggle, the fight for a place in the world and fear were all played out in this one hour dance.

For those of you who don't know, Karen Peterson and Dancers have been presenting integrated dance for 25 years in South Florida. Her company consists of trained dancers and dance artists (those with mixed ability). Peterson refers to all her dancers as Dance Artists. Lest you think that being in a wheelchair means you can't dance, I've got news for you.



Photographer: Luis Olazabal
Bernardette Salgado and John Beauregard in GRIT

John Beauregard and Shawn Buller are both confined to wheelchairs. They are daring and aggressive and fierce as they career around the stage. There is beauty in their upper bodies as they fend off other dancers. Leaning and swerving, their movement is as interesting as the able bodied dancers. When Beauregard is thrown out of his wheelchair, you hold your breath until he moves

again, by rolling across the floor and into the wings.

There was a duet with Beauregard and one of the dancers. She flew at him and landed upside down in an arm stand, then into his lap and then she balanced on the wheel chair in opposition to him.



Photographer: Luis Olazabal
Lize Lotte Pitlo and John Beauregard in GRIT

In another section, two women fought on a mat seemingly as gorillas, a daring heartfelt piece about standing ones ground.

The lighting by Gary Lund gave focus to the various movement sections, highlighting each piece. The sound score was interesting as well: some recorded sounds and some live, like the use of sandpaper as a threat by the dancers.

The multimedia work by Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez that was projected on the back wall was less effective and sometimes took focus from the dance pieces. Much of it didn't seem to fit the title Grit and some of the pictures were even out of focus.

This company has toured world wide with their integrated dance and their mix-ability dancers. The next time they have a performance, take a look at them. Their work is impressive.

www.karenpetersondancers.org



Karen Peterson's *GRIT* Pushes Limits on Mixed-Abilities Dance

By Artburst Miami

Published Tue., May 13 2014 at 12:00 PM



Photos by Luis Olazabal

Months in the making, Karen Peterson and Dancers' latest work, *GRIT*, debuts in its entirety this Thursday and Friday at the [Miami-Dade County Auditorium](#).

The defining piece touches on the human experience, and is intended to showcase the strength of the renowned mixed-abilities company, which is comprised of a host of able-bodied, formally trained dancers and, yes, wheelchair-bound dancers.

With nearly 25 years in mixed-abilities dance, Peterson, a long-time Miami choreographer, says *GRIT* symbolizes the company's transition into a more physically complex repertoire. The various themes explored -- struggle, desperation, fear, and the fight for power and dominance -- are derived from the dancers' own experiences and perspectives.

Known for integrating multimedia, Peterson superimposes images against a luminous backdrop to tell the story of *GRIT*. Excerpts were introduced months back in Belgrade, Serbia, and then in Miami. But it took Peterson and co-choreographer Katrina Weaver considerable reworking to shape the final product.

"This work has been in the creative process since September 2013, with several different adaptations along the way," says Peterson.

Weaver says this piece requires dancers to have an "openness, curiosity, and willingness to be vulnerable." Dancers also pushed beyond their comfort zones. "This particular work and many other works Karen has choreographed previously have come from a place of exploration through improvisation, so you need dancers who are willing to go to a deeper, more internal and authentic place," explains Weaver. "For me this work has been about the process and a great deal of my time outside the studio has been spent processing the work through journaling and writing, constantly posing questions to myself and taking the time to process these questions for myself."

Peterson went into more detail about the latest performance with us.



Wednesday, February 05, 2014

Support
#3



Miami's media bureau for the arts.

Karen Peterson's New Work Redefines Mixed-Ability Dance, Worlds Away

2/5/14

By [Kai T. Hill](#) | [No comments](#)

Categories: [Article Type](#), [Artist](#), [Contemporary](#), [Dance Company](#), [Feature](#), [Genre](#), [Interview](#), [Karen Peterson](#), [Preview](#)



If there's any one dance company that embodies grit, it's Karen Peterson and Dancers.

The 12-member troupe is comprised of several wheelchair-bound dancers who notably hold their own with formally trained company members. And KPD's founder, long-time Miami choreographer Karen Peterson, has her work cut out for her. Never mind making sure that choreography goes off without a hitch, try touring overseas with a mixed-ability ensemble and the airline loses a wheelchair. Access ramps are never a guarantee. And yet, the show must go on.

For this 23-year dance institution, grit is what the company was built on. It is also the title of Peterson's latest choreography in development, which recently debuted at the Off Frame Festival in Belgrade, Serbia. Two able-bodied and two dancers in wheelchairs performed the aggressive, athletic piece on a rainy, cold night and received a double encore from the packed audience.

It's that time of the year. South Florida's dance scene is revving up and the annual Daniel Lewis Miami Dance Sampler returns once more to give the community a glimpse into just how varied and rich an array of dancing is available to us to choose from this season.

The sampling includes mini-performances of eight minutes or less from nine South Florida based professional dance companies.

We spoke with sampler organizer, South Florida dancer, and Dance NOW! Director Hannah Baumgarten about what to expect from this year's event.

See also: *Dance Sampler: A Preview of Miami's Active Dance Life*

New Times Just how inclusive is your sampler?

Hannah Baumgarten: We are presenting a wide range of companies. Although many of them are considered "contemporary," the evening will include flamenco with Ballet Flamenco La Rosa, and even classical Russian ballet with the Arts Ballet Theatre of Florida. But even if the sampler only included "contemporary" -- well, almost nobody can agree on a definition of "contemporary." That genre alone offers a huge mix.

Let's just say, I love to host a party. I want those to come to our sampler to begin the evening with an aperitif and not to leave until they have dessert and coffee.



↑ Karen Peterson + Dancers

Karen Peterson and dancer

Karime Arabia

We hear the sampler will include some new faces this year?

Audiences that have attended previous samplers will find many of their favorites dancing again, but yes, indeed, there will be some extraordinary new faces as well.

Which of those new faces are you most pleased to present?

All of them. You knew I was going to say that, but it happens to be true. The GodoyPradera Projects is one. Miami's newest dynamic duo will be performing after wowing audiences all over Europe. Their work is multi-dimensional, edgy, well-crafted.

The TOC Project will be performing as well. Its director, Lara Tinari, danced with Twyla Tharp. Lara's especially interested in dance and feminism. One of her signature works is an

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The Big Story

AP PHOTOS: Miami dance troupe has disabled members

By [LYNNE SLADKY](#)

— Mar. 6, 2014 9:55 AM EST

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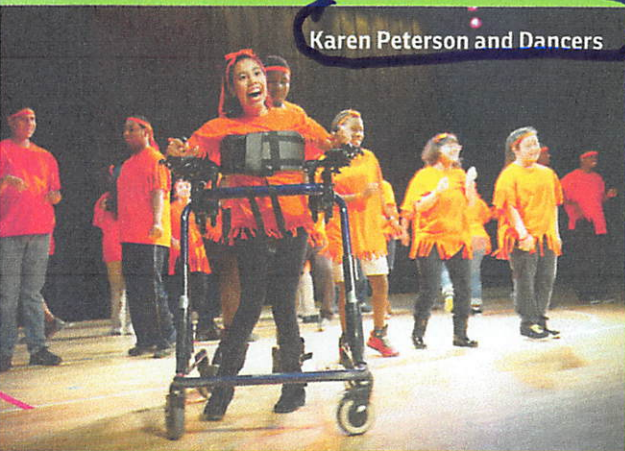
In this Saturday, Jan. 25, 2014 photo, dancers with Karen Peterson and Dancers rehearse a dance titled "Dance (4) 8" in Miami. The Miami-based company uses dancers who are disabled to enhance their performances. (AP Photo/Lynne Sladl)

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MIAMI (AP) — Professional dance is normally an activity for the able-bodied in tip-top shape, but a Miami-based dance troupe incorporates disabled dancers into its repertoires as a way to enhance performances.

Youth Programs Provide Guidance and Outlets for Expression

THE CHILDREN'S TRUST ANNUAL REPORT 2014



Karen Peterson and Dancers

performance. They got to see the impact of their practices and working together as a group. They saw how everyone could contribute in some way," said Nancy Beim, whose students with disabilities at Booker T. Washington High participated in **Karen Peterson and Dancers Inclusive Dance for All** showcase.

Cultural Affairs, prompted by The Trust, has strengthened its reporting and monitoring process in recent years to better ensure Trust dollars are

In 2014, The Children's Trust invested \$5.1 million in youth development programs that supported mentoring, music, dance, theater, physical fitness, and vocational training for teens and pre-teens. In total, 38 programs benefited nearly 9,700 young people through training in the areas of advocacy, leadership, and civic engagement; the arts; academic support; independent living, college and job prep; mentoring; social skills, and other areas.

The arts add immeasurable value to learning and to life – and provide a constructive and creative outlet for young peoples' abundant energy. The Trust supports arts development in adolescents both through the direct funding of a host of arts-based programs and also through its continued support – nearly \$1 million again last year – to the **Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs**. The department in turn funds an array of unique arts programs, many particularly inclusive of children and youth with special needs. Trust funding to the Youth Arts Enrichment Grants program supported 39 projects expected to reach some 87,000 children and youth around the county.

"At the conclusion of the 15 weeks, the students were really proud of their

generating expected results and outcomes. Participants in these programs reported overwhelmingly that they improved arts/science proficiency and peer relations – the major outcomes sought by these arts-based programs.

The Trust also directly funds many arts-focused organizations, such as **The Greater Miami Youth Symphony (GMYS)**, supported both as a youth enrichment program, and also as an after-school program and summer camp.

Families such as the Salazars, with three children – Valentina, 11; Cristian, 9; and Michelle, 8 – enrolled in GMYS, celebrate the opportunity to participate.

"As a family, we're so grateful, not only for the children to have the privilege of playing an instrument, but also for the opportunity for their future – to apply for and earn scholarships," said Thais Salazar,

the children's mother. "Playing music is really a part of their daily lives, and it's so wonderful to have them dedicated to playing an instrument instead of video games."

Programs such as **Abundant Citichurch's Higher Ground** fuse art and vocation. This unique program teaches culinary arts skills that open a career path.

Chef Alan Hughes, a restaurateur for many years, serves as an instructor for the program. At a September public hearing, Higher Ground members served an exquisite dessert they had prepared for board members.

"Some kids come to the program and they learn that this field is not for them – that's good because then they can cross it off their list of possible careers. Others get interested – and some are just brilliant," Hughes told the board.

Many Trust-funded youth development programs provide critical supports for marginalized youth, such as those being raised in foster care, or others challenged because of

The Salazar Family



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FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

Awards honor the outstanding

BY CHRISTINA MAYO
Special to the Miami Herald

Nearly 300 community leaders attended the 22nd annual Sara Hopkins Woodruff Spectrum Awards For Women to honor outstanding leaders in our community. The American Red Cross South Florida Region is the sponsor of this prestigious ceremony.

Swanee DiMare was honorary chair; Penny Stamps philanthropic chair. Romero Britto donated his original artwork, *American Woman*, for the Spectrum Awards held at Ritz-Carlton Coconut Grove.

Spectrum Awards honorees represent the mission and humanitarian principles of American Red Cross, including Humanity, Impartiality, Independence, Unity, Neutrality and Voluntary Service.

"We are honored to recognize the remarkable achievements of these women," said Phillis Oeters, president of the Council of Chairmen of the Spectrum Awards in a news release. "Their dedicated work to improving our community and helping others is making an extraordinary impact in South Florida and in medical research throughout the world."

Emmy-winning TV journalist Ileana Bravo hosted the awards presentation. Alfred Sanchez, executive director of the American Red Cross Greater Miami & The Keys Chapter, addressed the crowd.

The 2015 honorees: Tracey Berkowitz, Florida Blue Philanthropy Award; Becky Cooper Matkov, Trish and Dan Bell Chairmen's Award; Marianna K. Baum, Servera Real Estate Am-



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Award:
Karen Peterson Co-rash, Bank of America Cultural Award;
Virginia

Emmons, Royal Caribbean International Education Award; Laura Kozelouzek, Mercantil Commercebank Entrepreneurial Award; Dr. Tina Carroll-Scott, Baptist Health South Florida Healthcare Award; Carolyn Cauceglia, White & Case LLP Hospitality Award; Diana Brooks, Ethel and W. George Kennedy Family Foundation Volunteerism Award; Elena Luca, Barbara Nelson Red Cross Service Award; Stephanie Sayfie Aagaard, Margaret and Rick Tonkinson Community Service Award; and Maite Iribarren, Swanee and Paul DiMare Youth Award.

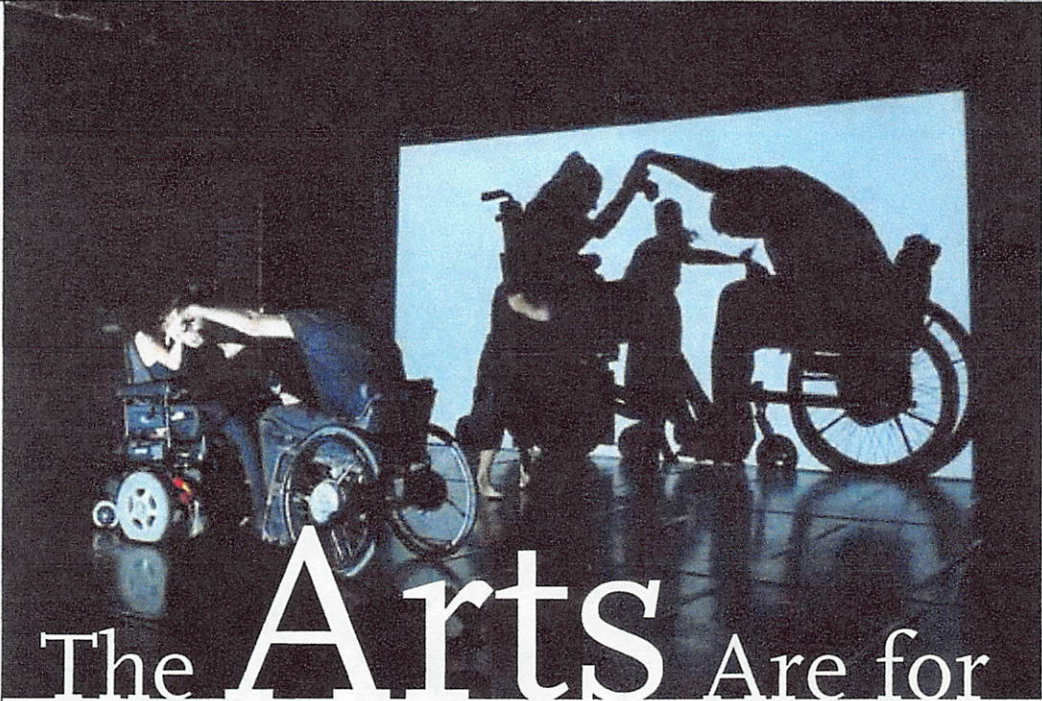


AT GALA: Nicole Rousseau, Georgette Kuch, Jessi Berrin and Mary Snow at the 22nd annual Sara Hopkins Woodruff Spectrum Awards For Women.

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"WE WILL BE REMEMBERED NOT FOR OUR VICTORIES OR DEFEATS IN BATTLE OR IN POLITICS, BUT FOR OUR CONTRIBUTION TO THE HUMAN SPIRIT."

—JOHN F. KENNEDY

In the U.S., roughly one in five people have a disability—that's more than 56 million men, women and children according to the National Organization for Disability. In the spirit of President Kennedy's words, two Boston Conservatory alumni have made it their mission to bring the performing arts to disability communities that might not have the opportunity otherwise.

On Creating with the Disabled

Karen Peterson (B.F.A. '76, dance) is an impassioned advocate who not only brings performing arts to persons with disabilities, but also includes them in the creative process.

Her Miami-based organization, Karen Peterson & Dancers, choreographs integrated "mixed ability" dance works for both those with and without disabilities. Her non-profit also works with hundreds of special needs students each year from the Miami-Dade County Public Schools.

"This type of integrated dance is unlike traditional physical therapies, in that it's not just exercise—rather, it's something that is motivated from within each individual," Peterson explained.

Peterson first realized the importance of integrated dance after meeting a woman with multiple sclerosis who wanted to perform. Her compelling life story inspired a truly unique dance work that debuted in 1990 with tremendous success. Since then, Peterson has had dancers of every kind show up at her door, ready to create art.

"With each new piece I choreographed, I moved further away from traditional dance technique and developed a new approach," said Peterson. "Throughout the years, my dance organization and the disability communities have grown together, and I have learned so much about them through the hands-on work we do here in the studio."

Peterson's work serves as a role model for what can be accomplished. Karen Peterson & Dancers is often touted

Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences

"GRIT"



Performance & Master Class

Wednesday, October 29

Don Taft University Center | Performance Theatre

Karen Peterson and Dancers is a dance company that features adult dancers with and without disabilities who create and perform "mixed-ability" dance as an inclusive art. Their production of "Grit" is a video dance collaboration that explores the physical, social, and emotional context of grit in today's world. "Grit" was created by video artist Dinorah de Jesus Rodriguez and choreographers Karen Peterson and Katrina Weaver.

Master Class for NSU students of all abilities: 9:15–10:30 a.m.

Performance of "Grit" (open to the public): noon

For more information, contact Augusto Soledade, M.F.A., associate professor at the Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences, at asoledade@nova.edu or (954) 262-8274.

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KPD kicks off its Silver Anniversary Season on October 18th and 19th at the Little Haiti Cultural Arts Center for the Daniel Lewis Dance Sampler. The cast for 2014 - 2015 Season includes; John Beauregard, Shawn Buller, Jenn Jones, Lize-Lotte Pitlo, Juan Maria Seller and Katrina Weaver. During the upcoming

12-2013

VSA UPDATE

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COLLABORATIONS IN INCLUSIVE DANCE

Artistic collaborations often bring about exciting results, and the field of inclusive or mixed-ability dance is no different. Whether the partnership is across national borders or across town, collaborations are a great way to reach new audiences, engage with different program participants, and challenge one's own artistic perspective.

German dance company [DIN A 13](#) (pictured at top of Update) has been working with artists with and without disabilities since 1995. For the past eight years, founding choreographer Gerda König and production director Gustavo Fijalkow have taken the group's work around the world, always with the goal of establishing new mixed-ability, contemporary dance companies, or making existing companies more visible.



DIN A 13's [UPHEAVAL](#) program explores similar emotional states in places that are socially, historically, and geographically far from each other. Fijalkow says they look for collaborators in countries that are currently experiencing or have recently gone through dynamic changes. The UPHEAVAL program has created new work in Sri Lanka, Venezuela, and Israel, engaging dancers with disabilities in an intensive, full-time creative process for eight to nine weeks. The resulting dance productions have been performed throughout both each partner's country and Germany.

Over the past 12 years, Miami, Florida-based inclusive dance company [Karen Peterson and Dancers](#) (KPD) has created projects in seven countries outside the United States. Through the support of a Miami-Dade Department of Cultural Affairs International Cultural Exchange Grant, KPD has had the opportunity to perform, create, and teach integrated dance to thousands of people in Brazil, Scotland, Italy, Montenegro, Bosnia, Guatemala, and Serbia.

During its 2013 cultural exchange trip to Guatemala City, KPD had the opportunity to collaborate with [Artes Muy Especiales Guatemala](#) VSA arts. Sonya de Peter, director of Artes Muy Especiales Guatemala VSA arts, invited Karen Peterson to teach an intensive master class to their dance group (pictured above). Peterson was impressed by the way the 16 Guatemalan dancers "...moved in and out of their [wheel]chairs with abandonment," calling them "fearless." She went on to say that they made a strong connection and hopes to continue their collaboration, possibly with a future performance in Miami.

While not international, [VSA Texas](#) boasts a successful dance program through its collaboration with choreographer Allison Orr, artistic director of [Forklift Danceworks](#) in Austin,