

DISABILITIES AND THE ARTS

# I use a wheelchair and I'm still dancing in front of audiences



BY MARC BREW  
AXIS Dance Company

Although I use a wheelchair, dance is an essential part of who I am. I communicate and express myself through movement to tell stories about being human, about who we are.

I have always felt a need to dance and create work for dancers and that need has taken me all over the world, including Miami next week.

My ensemble, AXIS Dance Company, will be part of the Forward Motion Physically Integrated Dance Festival & Conference here in Miami that runs from Sept. 26-29.

Yes, it's a unique dance company of disabled and non-disabled dancers, but it's an example that disabled people have unique stories to tell and a different perspective on the world because they have lived experiences and challenges.

This influences our creative process, the how and why we

make our work. It's honest, it's real, it's diverse, it's not pretending, and people relate to the work on a human level.

Having grown up in Jerilderie, a small country town in New South Wales, Australia with a population of 900 people, there were limited opportunities for the only boy in the village who wanted to dance.

My supportive single parent mother put me into dance class, but I was teased and bullied by a majority of the village kids and adults as I was different, and wasn't interested in playing sports like football and cricket.

Leaving home at age 11 to go to boarding school I first studied as a professional dancer with the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School, and the Australian Ballet School and performing with The Australian Ballet in Melbourne and the State Theatre Ballet Company of South Africa.

But then my life and the direction of my career changed and deepened in a sudden turn of events — a car accident left me with a serious spinal cord injury.

I was told that I would never walk again and was paralyzed from the chest down. Giving up was not for me. I pushed myself through extensive rehabilitation, having been used to injury as a dancer, taking this on as a chal-

lenge. My changed circumstances forced me to develop a new philosophy and aesthetics for dance.

Although I couldn't walk, stand, leap, or even point my feet anymore, I still felt I was a dancer.

Although my body had changed, the dancer was still within me. It was then when I realized I had to alter my own perception of what a dancer was, and what it meant for me to dance.

I could still express myself through movement, share my artistry through dance, I just had to find other ways to explore my physicality and what I could do.

I started to look at finding solutions, rather than focus on the problems, and to use the idea of restriction to create new and interesting possibilities for movement.

This included how I could move with my changed form, how I used my wheelchair, and also getting out of the chair on the floor, or being partnered and dancing with others.

My career has amazingly flourished in a new direction since the accident. I spent time in New York studying with Kitty Lunn and dancing with her company Infinity Dance Theater and I was invited to join the London-based Candoco Dance Company, one



SIMON SOONG

A performance from last year's Forward Motion Physically Integrated Dance Festival and Conference in Miami.

of the world's top contemporary companies that includes disabled and non-disabled dancers.

After six years with Candoco, I dedicated time to my own choreography with Marc Brew Company and working with numerous ballet and contemporary dance companies around the world.

Since then, I have become the artistic director in AXIS Dance Company in Oakland, California, a leader in physically integrated dance in the U.S. People with disabilities are often shunted aside by the societies in which we live — ignored, discriminated against, or barely tolerated.

Today though many of us have forged new movements, new ways of living, finding in our commonalities and our differences a strength that begins to change the world.

That has been my experience, and in my work as a dancer and a choreographer, I have tried to

express the best of who I am, of who we are, and find the beauty in the challenges we face.

Marc Brew and his ensemble, AXIS Dance Company, will be part of the Forward Motion Physically Integrated Dance Festival & Conference in Miami from Sept. 26-29.

## Performance schedule:

What: AXIS Dance Company + REVolutions Dance + Karen Peterson & Dancers  
Time: 8 p.m.  
When: Saturday, Sept. 29  
Where: Miami Dade County Auditorium  
Tickets: \$20 to \$25

For a schedule of performances, workshops and conference activities visit [www.ForwardMotionMiami.com](http://www.ForwardMotionMiami.com).

## OPEN MIC

### BUCKLE UP, KIDS!

Every 33 seconds in 2016, a child under the age of 13 was involved in a traffic accident. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimates that more than one-third of the children who lost their lives in these crashes could have survived if they had been properly restrained in a car seat, booster seat or seat belt.

To raise awareness during National Child Passenger Safety Week, the Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade is calling upon parents and caregivers in our community to ensure that their children are properly buckled up and in the right seat.

According to NHTSA,



## “

I HEARD THAT MEGHAN MARKLE IS COMING OUT WITH A COOKBOOK. SINCE SHE'S A ROYAL, THE COOKBOOK JUST SAYS: "STEP 1: SIT AND WAIT FOR FOOD."

JIMMY FALLON

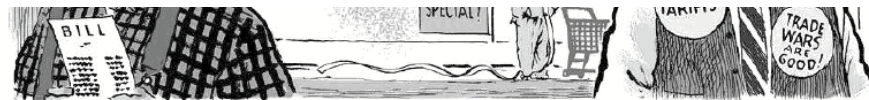
research has shown that when used correctly, car seats decrease the risk of fatal injury by 71 percent for infants and 54 percent for toddlers.

To ensure that your young passengers are riding safely, select a car seat that fits your child's age and size and make sure your child uses it every time he or she is in the vehicle. If you have any doubts about whether the car seat fits properly in your car's backseat, consult the car seat instructions or your vehicle manual.

Additionally, certified child passenger safety technicians at the Healthy Start Coalition can assist with installation, as well as determining whether children are ready to transition from rear-facing to forward-facing car seats. During the last fiscal year, the coalition distributed more than 230 car seats to local parents.

Don't let your child become part of another alarming traffic statistic. Always ensure that they properly buckled into the right type of car seat, every time.

- Manuel Fermin, CEO, Healthy Start Coalition of Miami-Dade



**FLAWED JUDGE**

If Judge Brett Kavanaugh were the sterling, upstanding, scrupulous, man-of-honor his supporters assert him to be, he would demand an FBI background update to exonerate a credible challenge to his reputation. The fact that he has not made such a demand speaks volumes about his morality.

He was picked by the Federalist Society, and questioned by GOP Senators who were likely fed questions from the Society they knew Kavanaugh could answer.

Allowing himself now to be a Supreme Court nominee in what has become a kangaroo-type proceeding that will leave him stained for the rest of his life if he is confirmed suggests his judgment is seriously flawed.

Another Clarence Thomas-type justice blighting the highest court in the land, America does not deserve.

- Jim Crowder, Miami

**DUTY BOUND**

I applaud Celia Kaufman for her Sept. 19 letter to the editor, "Jewish voters," refuting Ira Sheskin's conclusion that "Jewish voters don't place a heavy weight on candidate's views toward Israel."

Her response is an emotional, compelling and historic argument why every Jew has a "moral obligation" to defend "the Stars and Stripes, as well as the Star of David."

- Norma Rosenfeld, Miami Beach

**ISRAEL'S ESSENCE**

Celia Kaufman's Sept. 19 letter, "Jewish voters," recalling the tragic voyage of the St. Louis in 1939, states that Jewish voters should vote for candidates who support Israel. More accurately, she means candidates who unconditionally support Benjamin Netanyahu and the policies of his far-right coalition government.

Well, anyone who closely follows Middle Eastern affairs, including reports by New York Times' Thomas

Friedman and the op-eds of Israeli correspondent Uri Dromi, will recognize that her advice to her fellow Jews — and I am one of them — is tantamount to jingoism.

Worse, it endangers Israel's domestic security by ignoring Netanyahu's lethargic efforts to get negotiations with the Palestinians started, his bending to settler demands, and crucially, his tacit policy of subverting a two-state solution to the Palestinian problem. It has been evident for some years that the central aim of the current Israeli coalition government is to revive the old dream of Menachem Begin and the Likud Party: a Greater Israel stretching from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River.

Friedman and Dromi have regularly pointed out that a Greater Israel, with a population of 6.2 million Jews and about 5.8 million Arabs, a third of whom live in the Gaza Strip, would not be a democratic state. They say it would be an apartheid state.

All political candidates in Florida agree that Israel's body must be kept safe. But Jewish voters should worry about her democratic soul.

- Morris Sunshine, Miami Beach

**SEN. NELSON'S MOVE**

I can't believe that Sen. Bill Nelson does not talk about Rick Scott's involvement with Columbia/HCA in the 1980s and 1990s.

Under Scott's direction as chairman and CEO, the healthcare company overcharged the government and filed false cost reports, fraudulently billing Medicare for home health care and paid kickbacks to doctors.

It's time for Nelson to take the gloves off and get in this campaign!

- Tim Whitaker, Miramar

**ABOVE POLITICS**

In his Sept. 19 letter to the editor, "Tough process," Jerome S. Reich complains about democrats obstructing the confirmation of the "Well-qualified, Republican Judge Kavanaugh."

Well, Reich certainly has his own right to express his opinion, but alas, he has used one too many adjectives.

A judge, especially one being considered for the Supreme Court, must be apolitical or at least keep those thoughts to himself.

I'm sure Reich had a slip of the tongue while writing to the Miami Herald.

- Francisco J. Jiménez, West Kendall

**KAVANAUGH'S PAST**

Are you kidding me? Going back 35 years ago? That's the experiment age of puberty for all.

Those of you who never sinned, throw the first rock.

- Bob Cebrat, Pembroke Pines

**BRAVE WOMAN**

Why would a woman who was attacked in private want to come out and be attacked by the same man in public?

I salute this very brave woman who is sacrificing so much to protect the rest of us from jeopardy.

- Barry Levy, Miami

**Miami Herald**

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