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Have you ever visited a theater and found the only accessible seat was near the lighting crew? Arrived for a rehearsal only to discover that you need to be carried to the stage? You are not alone. Performing arts venues, galleries, museums, and related cultural institutions have not progressed very far in their efforts to accommodate people with disabilities. Why is it that these institutions, the very institutions that are obligated to communicate our culture, leave a huge segment of the population stumbling to participate? Moreover, when we think of access, why do accessibility efforts always place the person with a disability in the audience, rather than on the stage or in the studio – participating in the experience?

Why have we not yet achieved full, total cultural access? Is it a lack of enforcement? Shortage of resources? A dearth of insight? For nearly 30 years, VSA arts has led the effort to open the arts to people of all abilities. One of the greatest frustrations is that we still have such a high demand for this type of advocacy. Our affiliates around the world spend countless hours trying to communicate the need and responsibility for involving people with disabilities in the arts. This issue highlights some of the positive progress that is being made. Within this issue you will find a lot of concepts and terminology related to opening the cultural community to people with disabilities. Cultural Access. Cultural Inclusion. Universal Design. All the terms amount to one thing, allowing you the opportunity.

Yet, our efforts are in vain without the voice of the artist with a disability. By communicating your experience and opinion, you can set the stage for better access in the future. Persist with your desire to be included within our cultural institutions. Offer your time, talents, and perspective. Participate.
Baryshnikov Performs in Inclusive Piece
Shares the Stage with Dancers with Disabilities

“To dance with Baryshnikov” is practically a cliché for “dream come true,” but for two dancers with disabilities, the dream became reality in early December at the Kennedy Center.

The performance was part of a “A Dance Celebration,” a benefit honoring the International Day of the Disabled (December 3rd) and organized by VSA arts and the Center for International Rehabilitation, a nonprofit organization that develops wide-ranging support and rehabilitation programs to improve the lives of people in the poorest countries. The event also focused attention toward the World Bank’s Conference on Disability and Development, and CIR’s International Disability Rights Monitor Project.

Mikhail Baryshnikov volunteered to take part after meeting William Kennedy Smith, CIR’s founder and son of VSA arts founder Jean Kennedy Smith.

The two accomplished dancers who joined Baryshnikov are members of the AXIS Dance Company, a fully integrated company based in Oakland, California.

Baryshnikov mingles at a post-performance benefit.

This was Baryshnikov’s first foray into a fully inclusive dance performance, but the night was like any other for the legendary professional: dancing was paramount. “Both dancers were dedicated young people, and I had a great time dancing with them,” said Baryshnikov. “What more is there to say?”

Davis Robertson of the Joffrey Ballet choreographed the minimalist, modern piece and contacted AXIS Dance for potential dancers. Judy Smith, director of AXIS, sent him a video of Nadia Adamé dancing with Jacques Poulin-Denis, and Robertson decided to use them both.

Unlike most dancers with disabilities, Adamé and Poulin-Denis have formal training in dance, so Smith thought they’d be well-equipped to handle the rigors of learning Robertson’s choreography. Adamé said that the evening was a dream come true. “I was so nervous.

See Baryshnikov, page 13
Life as a Jazz Solo
Lisa Thorson adapts, improvises, and creates

Can all art be culturally accessible? What if you are an artist with a disability, but the music you make is not readily accessible?

For critically acclaimed jazz singer Lisa Thorson, these questions became the genesis of creation. She was never able to successfully present an accessible version of her improvisational jazz performance. Because so much of her singing is without lyrics, it’s almost impossible to interpret for anyone with a hearing impairment.

“I found I had to compromise my music or leave them out in some way because of the improvisational factor of my music,” said Thorson, whose CDs and performances earn raves from music critics nationwide. She finally started recommending other performers—folk singers and storytellers—instead of her own work.

This was a frustration for a longtime advocate for accessibility and universal design. So Thorson decided to create a new kind of performance. She would use all elements that make theatre, dance, or spoken word more accessible in some way, and see if it might all work together.

The result is JazzArtSigns, an ambitious experiment in multimedia performance and accessibility. The show, which will be staged this summer in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, features a performance by Thorson’s jazz quintet, two sign-language interpreters, live audio description, and live captioning. While they perform, an onstage painter paints a piece of art inspired by the music on a giant 6’X12’ canvas.

“Although we know what the components are, there is an element of uncertainty about the show,” said Thorson. She said that the audience has to choose to listen to the music, watch the artist, or watch the interpreter, and that is exactly what she wants.

“It’s my way of attempting to make the improvisational experience accessible.” Thorson is still coming up with ways to bring the audience actively into the show. She is considering instant feedback via computers or tactile murals in the lobby before and after the performance.

“Basically, I’d like for people to get inside other people’s experiences in a different way—in a creative way,” she said.

JazzArtSigns attempts to solve the question of how to make improvisation accessible, and serves a valuable purpose for Thorson as well.

“‘It’s not about the right notes, or the wrong chord. I teach people about a style, about improvisation. I get to open windows.’”

Thorson is “Blessed with a voice that drips pure honey and a fine sense of phrasing,” said critic Willard Jenkins.

Thorson. She said that the audience has to choose to listen to the music, watch the artist, or watch the interpreter, and that is exactly what she wants.

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JazzArtSigns attempts to solve the question of how to make improvisation accessible, and serves a valuable purpose for Thorson as well.

“I felt like I needed to do my music; and my music is my music,” she said. “I needed to be a creative artist first and not be thinking about access all the time. This was liberating for me.”

Opening Windows

Thorson has been a professor at the Berklee College of Music since 1996, and it marks the first time in her 25-year career she is able to support herself entirely from
her work in music. For years, she worked as an advocate for accessibility, working with local government and nonprofit organizations—including VSA arts—to introduce access nationwide.

She admitted that by the time she took the job at Berklee, she was ready to leave her advocacy role. “I don’t have the stomach for it,” she said.

“Unless you have patience and a long, long perspective, it’s hard to see progress. I would say that in the 20 years since my injury, things are just so much more accessible, but on a day-to-day basis, it’s really frustrating.

And it’s not what I intended to do. I wasn’t interested in making that my life’s work.”

Now, she’s adjusting to teaching. “I’m not doing as many concerts, but the ones that I am doing are in quality situations for better money,” said Thorson.

The rewards of her life as a professor in many ways make up for the loss of weekly gigs. She says that she learns as much as she teaches, and is frequently inspired by her work with students.

“A lot of what I teach isn’t quantitative—it’s not about the right notes, or the wrong chord. I teach people about a style, about improvisation,” said Thorson.

“I get to open windows.”

Ironically, much of what makes improvisation successful are the same talents that enable Thorson to live life in a wheelchair.

“It’s all about jumping in. Improvisation really teaches you about adapting. Sometimes I think it’s sort of funny, because as a person with a disability, I’m adapting all the time,” she said. “It’s a constant thing. You can’t get freaked out by every little thing that goes wrong or doesn’t feel right.”

“Life is a jazz solo—well, but not as much fun. So in some ways it’s sort of the perfect art form for me.”

Adapt and Conquer

Adaptability is a vital component of life on the road. The travel schedule, the vocal strain, and the hectic business details of a tour waylay even able-bodied singers. The added rigors of traveling through airports in a wheelchair take their toll on Thorson’s energy, her patience, and her voice.

“The reality of what it takes physically to go on the road is a really big deal,” said Thorson. She is lucky to have a husband who joins her to offer assistance. To hire someone as an assistant would cost her as much as $300 a day.

Thorson doesn’t want to discourage aspiring performers with disabilities, but does think it’s important to be realistic. She recommends that any artist who aspires to professionalism starts out with a clear definition of what “successful” means to them.

“My music is my music. I needed to be a creative artist first and not be thinking about access all the time.”

“You have to know what you have, find people you can trust who can help you nurture it, and develop it,” said Thorson.

She believes higher education is the best place to find the support, tools, and nurturing that artists need to reach their goals. It’s impossible to do it alone.

See Thorson, page 12

Thorson performs at the Ryles Jazz Club in Cambridge, MA, with bassist Marshall Wood.
Imagine a time when the world goes beyond minimum “ADA standards” to actually design places and things that are accessible in every sense of the word.

Paula Terry, director of accessibility for the National Endowment for the Arts’ Office for Accessibility, is working to make that future a reality. For the past several years, she has led an initiative with the Center for Universal Design and other partners to popularize Universal Design and change the way people think about accessibility.

Universal Design is defined as “the design of products and environments to be useable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design.” Universal Design benefits everyone, regardless of age or physical disability. It applies to everything, but Terry is most interested in its application to public arts venues.

For so long, being accessible for most public venues meant adhering to minimal standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Install a ramp to an existing building, and you’re finished. If you’re drawing the blueprints for a new structure, worry about the ADA specifics at the last second and slap on some revisions. Universal Design takes a decidedly more proactive and progressive approach.

“Universal Design doesn’t just focus on disabilities. It focuses on the entire public. It raises standards,” said Terry.

The heart of the cause is the Center for Universal Design (CUD) at North Carolina State University. CUD was created by the founder of Universal Design, architect Ron Mace. Mace had a physical disability, and pursued architecture in part to combat the inaccessibility and non-intuitive design he grappled with in his day-to-day life. And Mace inspired Adaptive Environments, a nonprofit organization dedicated to Universal Design, to publish Building a World Fit for People: Designers with Disabilities at Work, a book that encourages more people with disabilities to pursue careers in design. For an online version of the book, visit www.AdaptiveEnvironments.org/accessdesign.

For the past several years, the NEA has funded organizations and projects that work to advance Universal Design. The NEA’s Office for Accessibility’s most recent grants went to a program in Kansas public

See Universal Design, page 13

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**Principles of Universal Design***

1. **Equitable Use:** The design does not disadvantage or stigmatize any group of users.

2. **Flexibility in Use:** The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.

3. **Simple, Intuitive Use:** Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.

4. **Perceptible Information:** The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.

5. **Tolerance for Error:** The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.

6. **Low Physical Effort:** The design can be used efficiently and comfortably, and with a minimum of fatigue.

7. **Size and Space for Approach & Use:** Appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use, regardless of the user’s body size, posture, or mobility.

VSA arts has updated *Access and Opportunities: A Guide to Disability Awareness*, and it is available for free online and in a printed version.

The Guide is the perfect tool as you reach out to arts organizations in your community. If you intend to sit on an access advisory committee, or if you’re just making a gallery visit, the Guide can help you orient arts professionals with the fundamentals of access.

The Guide is available online at www.vsarts.org/bestpractices/dag/index.html

The innovative design of the printed version makes it easy for users to flip right to the section most relevant to their needs: from blindness and visual impairments to hidden disabilities, every aspect of the disability community is touched upon (including the Disability Movement as a political force).

For orders of more than 10 copies, the 11th copy onwards is priced at $2.50, plus shipping and handling. For additional information on this topic, please contact us at info@vsarts.org.

This November, the New York Foundation for the Arts (NYFA) started giving artists, arts organizations, and the general public free online access to *NYFA Source*, an extensive databank of grants, residencies, publications, and sources of information and assistance for all artists.

“Until now, there has never been one central location for artists to access all of the potential grants and resources available to them,” said Theodore S. Berger, executive director of NYFA.

Accessible via www.NYFA.org, *NYFA Source* identifies more than 2,600 awards programs, 2,000 services, and 700 publications for artists in the dance, music, folk/traditional, theater, performance art, visual, design, media, and literary arts. It also includes opportunities for Special Opportunities Stipends or S.O.S., small grants to help complete projects.

An easy-to-use search engine will allow users to narrow queries by discipline, location, gender, age group, application deadline, and more. Searches can be as general – cash grants for dancers; (239 opportunities yielded) – or specific – female ballet choreographer in Minnesota (1 opportunity yielded) – as desired.

*The Spotlight* has a brand new look. We want it to be interesting, innovative, and edgy, but also easy to read and functional. kaze design, a team of Washington, D.C., graphic designers, partnered with VSA arts on this project.

What do you think of the new design? Let us know—Call VSA arts at 800.933.8721, or email us at gallery@vsarts.org.
resources for artists

Get, then Give Back
www.creative-capital.org
Creative Capital Foundation supports artists pursuing innovative approaches to form and content in the arts. Funded artists agree to share a small percentage of any profits generated by their projects with Creative Capital, which applies these funds toward new grants.

Get Help Writing Grants
www.moneyforart.com
Moneyforart.com is a personalized one-year program designed to help artists acquire grant money. It provides one-on-one assistance, researches funders, and offers other services to maximize an artist’s chances of receiving funding. This is not a free service, but it might be a worthwhile investment.

Musicmakers' Money Tree
www.musiciansfoundation.org
The Musicians Foundation, Inc., aims to foster the interests and advance the conditions and social welfare of professional musicians and their families. Based in New York City, the Foundation provides financial assistance to musicians who need help in meeting current living, medical and allied expenses.

New Technology for Musicians with Disabilities
www.drakemusicproject.com/main/technology/Escape.cfm
E-Scape, a new software from the London-based Drake Music Project, is said to enable people with any degree of physical disability to compose and perform music unaided. Use the computer to write a piece of music, play it back, or perform it live in several ways. E-Scape can also be controlled from the computer keyboard, trackball, joystick or using musical (MIDI) equipment. E-Scape also speaks and can have the menu text size increased, enabling people with some visual impairments to use it. A trial run is available for download for a small donation, and there is a charge for the software. For more information, contact technology@drakemusicproject.org.

Join VSA arts’ Performing Artists Registry
www.vsarts.org
VSA arts is auditioning performers with disabilities for inclusion in the Performing Arts Registry database. Artists from all performing arts genres are invited to submit the following audition materials for review:
• An audio or video recording of at least 5 minutes of performance showing the artist to the best advantage. Recordings of live performances are preferred. Submissions without a recording will not be considered.
• A brief 1-2 page biography
• A listing of performances in the past 18 months, including date and venue
• A list of upcoming performances or events
• An 8" x 10" photo
• Contact information including the group representative’s name, address, telephone, fax, and e-mail information

All submitted material becomes the property of VSA arts. Send materials to Elena Widder, VSA arts Auditions, 1300 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20036. Contact Widder with any questions at elenaw@vsarts.org or 800.933.8721 ext. 3895.

Pass These On
At right are four of the twelve new accessibility symbols, designed by the Graphic Arts Guild. All twelve are available for free at www.gag.org/resources/das.php
Affiliates Create Access, Anywhere
Institutes bring accessibility to America’s small towns

Cultural access needs to happen at the source—in the theatres, galleries, and museums where art exists. Accessibility at the community level is being implemented with the help of the VSA arts network. Innovative access efforts held for arts-related organizations are slowly but surely changing the face of the art community nationwide.

VSA arts of Massachusetts is the leader in this regard, creating the first cultural access initiative 25 years ago, 10 years before the ADA was even passed. Although the concept of accessibility and Universal Design are more prevalent now, VSA arts of Massachusetts Executive Director Charlie Washburn said that in some ways, achieving accessibility is even more difficult.

“The economic environment being what it is—this is as tough a time as I’ve seen,” said Washburn. “Everyone is in survival mode.”

Cultural Access Institutes continue to push forward, despite the dire economic picture. Massachusetts’ founding institute has seeded new programs in other states. The institutes show attendees how to evaluate accessibility in their programs, and provide strategies to enhance the programmatic and cultural accessibility for the future. Attendees are then encouraged to take what they’ve learned back to their communities to teach others.

VSA arts of Massachusetts will be staging Jazz Arts Signs, a multimedia entertainment event intended to interpret jazz improvisation and apply Universal Design concepts, produced by Lisa Thorson & Company (see related story, page 4). It will be held in June with VSA arts of New Hampshire.

New Hampshire is largely rural, and so they are working with VSA arts of Vermont to adapt the cultural access institute to suit their community’s needs.

“In rural areas, we can’t work the same ways as organizations that have more money and more staff,” said Rebecca Bruns, director of cultural access for VSA arts of New Hampshire. Many of the organizations in New Hampshire have only one person on staff.

In a series of three visits, Bruns familiarizes herself with the arts organization and venue, then does a full site evaluation. Finally, she creates a report with accessibility recommendations and works with the staff to create an access plan.

“We’re not an enforcement agency, but we offer creative solutions,” said Bruns.

Many groups are already overextended and just don’t even approach the issue of accessibility because the assumption is that it is too expensive, or too much work.

“I tell them to be honest with themselves, and the public. Create a reasonable access plan, and give yourself some breathing room,” said Bruns. “With creative solutions, it doesn’t necessarily have to be an expensive or labor-intensive process. Just make that effort, no matter how small.”

Creative approaches to cultural access aren’t limited to New England. VSA arts of Texas has taken advantage of the state’s enormity to create regional cultural access initiatives. The all-day workshops cover everything from targeted marketing strategies to demystifying the ADA. They have also published guides for ushers and docents on assisting patrons with disabilities.

VSA arts of Colorado is hosting brown bag lunch accessibility workshops at its accessible gallery. More than 300 arts organizations are invited, and topics include “An Overview of Audio Description in Theaters and Galleries” and “Marketing Your Access.”

For more about cultural access, visit the affiliates via www.vsarts.org or www.accessexpressed.net.
Every year, VSA arts teams up with the MetLife Foundation to present an award to recognize institutions that have identified full access as a priority. Awards go to museums, theatres, and other arts venues that create unique, notable, and enduring arts programming for visitors of all abilities. This year’s recipients are no exception:

**Bethesda Academy for the Performing Arts (BAPA)**
With meaningful opportunities for young people who are deaf or hard of hearing to participate in theatre, The Deaf Access Program at BAPA’s Imagination Stage in Maryland, was a natural for the award. *More Dreams to Sign* uses the performing arts to bridge the communication gap between the Deaf and hearing worlds. Deaf and hearing performers (grade 6 – adult) collaborate in productions that combine the best communication skills of both worlds: voice, sign, music, mime, and dance.

The program not only develops and promotes performers with disabilities, it collects quantitative and qualitative data on the growth of awareness of Deaf culture among general audiences. The accessible performances are attended by a live audience, and seen on the Web, on community cable, and in the news media.

See more about the Imagination Stage at [www.imaginationstage.org](http://www.imaginationstage.org)

**The Dayton Art Institute**
The museum created an online tour of its impressive collection that is accessible to all, regardless of disability. People who are blind can hear the curator’s audio descriptions of the work. People who are deaf can read the transcripts of the text. People with mobility impairments may use keyboard commands or a similar device to manipulate the virtual tour.

The Web site is available to anyone with access to the Internet. It’s Bobby-approved and easy-to-use. Images can be seen in detail with the use of a zoom feature.

Take the accessible tour of the Dayton Art Institute by clicking on the “Access Art” prompt at [www.daytonartinstitute.org](http://www.daytonartinstitute.org)

**Arvada Center for the Arts and Humanities**
This community center for the arts outside Denver makes cultural accessibility a priority in every aspect of the work it does. It excels in the standard marks of a progressively accessible organization—an active access advisory committee, services for visitors with mobility, hearing, and visual impairments—but also goes beyond what’s expected to deliver cultural and programmatic access in refreshing ways too.

Accessibility is a primary goal in its design plans, not an afterthought. The Arvada Center’s imaginative and innovative playground is fully accessible to all children. The main gallery of the Center hosted a visual arts show of works by Colorado artists with disabilities. The children’s theater program is the only one in the state that offers shadowed performances and the Center regularly hosts audio described plays and events.

See the playground and more about the Arvada Center at [www.arvadacenter.org](http://www.arvadacenter.org)

All of these recipients serve as exemplars of accessible arts programming. By recognizing their efforts, *VSA arts* and MetLife hope to increase awareness to the benefits of full inclusion, and make an impact on future arts programming and planning at cultural institutions nationwide.
Dancer with Disability Makes Dance Magazine
Homer Avila Graces Cover of January issue

This January, the most prominent dance publication in the country featured a dancer with a disability on its cover. Homer Avila, a critically acclaimed dancer who lost his hip and leg to cancer, is shown rehearsing “Pas” by Alonzo King with Andrea Flores. A photostory inside the magazine raves about Avila’s dancing.

In the photostory, editor K.C. Patrick wrote, “Recognizing that it is true that we move more with our hearts and minds than with our arms and legs, we knew Homer’s odyssey as our own.” Let’s hope that this signals a new attitude about dancers who may not have the “perfect” dancer’s body.

For an abridged version of the article, visit their Web site at www.dancemagazine.com.

VSA arts names 2003 Young Soloists Awards Recipients

VSA arts has just announced the recipients of this year’s Panasonic Young Soloists Award and the Rosemary Kennedy International Young Soloists Award. The Young Soloists Awards recognize young musicians with disabilities, ages 25 and under, who have exhibited exceptional talents as vocalists or instrumentalists. Award recipients are given scholarship funds and the opportunity to perform at The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in the spring. This year’s concert will be held on May 21, 2003, at the Terrace Theatre of the Kennedy Center.

The two Panasonic Young Soloists are Laura Dodd and Janet Ross. Dodd is a 23-year-old vocalist from Gadsden, Alabama. She was the lead vocalist for the Gadsden State Community College Show Band for four years, has performed at numerous bluegrass festivals, and opened for Maynard Ferguson and Sandy Patty.

Janet Ross is a 22-year-old pianist from Amherst, Massachusetts, who is pursuing a master of music in piano performance at the Indiana University School of Music. She has won numerous music competitions, including Grand Prize in the Young Artists Competition at the Eastman School of Music.

The Rosemary Kennedy International Young Soloists are Nathan Gerardo Meaney Murillo and Sara Bentes. Meaney Murillo is a 23-year-old flautist from Mexico. In 1998, he was named adjunct director, arranger, and flute accompanist for the choir of the Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades de la Universidad.

Sara Bentes is a 20-year-old soprano from Brazil. She has been studying voice since she was 12 at the music conservatory and has won many music awards. Sara has sung with the Brazilian artists Altamiro Carilho, Favio Venturini, and Guilherme Arantes.

For more about the Young Soloists Awards, visit the VSA arts Web site at www.vsarts.org.
“It’s so difficult to get out of the ‘disability trap’ of support services and subsidized rent—always having to justify what you do,” said Thorson. “And if you’re by yourself and you don’t have family or a significant other, then it’s even harder.”

The reality is that most musicians (and artists in general) do not earn their living by their music. Thorson recommends gaining some kind of financial independence while you pursue your artistic dreams. “You’ve got to make enough money to get out of it. Don’t expect that you can be in your studio 10 hours a day to create, and be able to just make it. It’s not going to happen. What can you do? Can you teach? What can you teach? What do you have to offer that is related to your art?”

Thorson spent almost twenty years of her musical career supporting herself with advocacy work in cultural access, so she recommends this duality and patience.

“Know that it may take a long time. I didn’t start making all my money in music until only 7 or 8 years ago, and I’m 45. And my injury was in 1979. That’s a long time. I’d put recordings out and completed thousands of concerts and all that.”

Dedicated work and long efforts aside, Thorson loves what she does.

“Even when I come back and my body is exhausted, if it’s been really satisfying on a teaching level or an artistic level, then that gives me energy.”

At present, Amaryllis is the only theatre company in Philadelphia that provides complete architectural and programmatic accessibility for its audiences and includes professional artists with disabilities in its productions. Amaryllis is an Equity-affiliated theatre company that casts from all over the country and uses award-winning directors and designers. From the beginning, the founders were emphatic about producing high quality competitive professional art to avoid any possibility of audiences and critics mistaking the work as art therapy.

Amaryllis’ first production, Shakespeare’s “Twelfth Night” in American Sign Language and spoken English, was produced in partnership with Peter Novak. Novak developed a new technique for translating Shakespeare into a poetic equivalent in ASL and spent 16 months with the help of many of the country’s best Deaf actors working on the translation. The production received local and national press and highly favorable critical and audience responses. Novak has plans to continue his partnership with Amaryllis and to translate and produce the entire Shakespearean canon.

To find out more about Amaryllis, contact them at amatheater@aol.com, (215) 564.2431, or TTY (215) 564.2431. Visit them online at www.amaryllis-theater.com
He’s been a big idol of mine for a long time. Just to shake his hand was a big honor,” she said.

Despite her nerves, the rehearsals and dancing went smoothly. “He was very relaxed and very supportive. If we couldn’t do something he would just say ‘No problem!’ and we’d figure out a way to fix it.”

AXIS is having auditions in the spring. They are looking for committed, hardworking people with a background in dance, or a strong natural background in movement.

AXIS Dance Company is one of the only fully integrated companies in the nation, and boasts commissioned works from some of the leading choreographers in dance, including Bill T. Jones, Alonzo King, and dancer Homer Avila.

“We don’t say you need previous training because most dancers with disabilities don’t have any,” said Smith.

The company was originally formed by a group of friends, some with physical disabilities and some without. This diversity has been maintained, and provides the company with much of its creative force.

“When you bring in bodies that move differently and apparatus, it brings colors to the movement that haven’t been there before,” said Smith. “It’s a young form of dance, but it’s growing.”

AXIS Dance Company is currently seeking people with physical disabilities, age 20-50, to fill part-time company positions. All persons with previous dance or athletic experience, and a passion for movement are invited to attend a two-day workshop May 31-June 1 in Oakland, California. Participants in the two-day workshop will be considered for permanent company positions.

Workshop tuition is $90 a person. Scholarships are available for those traveling from out of state. Please contact the AXIS office for more information. If you would like to register for the workshop, please contact Mollie Mungan at (510) 625.0110, mollie@axisdance.org.

For more information on AXIS Dance Company, please visit www.axisdance.org.

Audition for AXIS

Universal Design, continued from page 6

schools to introduce Universal Design to high school and college students, and PLAE, Inc.’s transformation of a 185,000 square foot parking lot into a community center, complete with library, gym, café, and a few nonprofit organizations.

“One of our biggest hurdles is getting Universal Design into the mainstream, to get the general public to embrace the concept,” said Terry. “We’ve made it a major focus to start with the youth.”

Despite the work of the NEA, and the growing popularity of Universal Design, public buildings are still being constructed with no concern for accessibility. The Broward Performing Arts Center in Broward County, Florida, was constructed without appropriate accommodations for people with disabilities. The center now needs to raise and spend over $1.3 million for retrofitting.

Terry said it is important that artists with disabilities become actively involved with their local arts communities to try to make Universal Design and true accessibility a reality. She strongly recommends that artists join a cultural organization’s advisory team; provide input on upcoming exhibits, performances, or plans; and speak about the fundamentals of accessibility at conferences or to staff at local museums and theatres.

This level of involvement isn’t right for every artist out there, but if you are compelled to help make a change for a better future, don’t underestimate the authority that you have as an artist entitled to access.”
“President John F. Kennedy once said, “If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.” VSA arts embodies his words: encouraging artists and performers of all ages and all abilities to express themselves in all the glory of the arts so that our society might be a more understanding and inclusive place.”

— Jean Kennedy Smith
Founder, VSA arts