

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo: Shawn Ganely

A Danced Conversation Between Disabled Bodies

by Christina Catanese

Speaking on facilitation, adrienne maree brown writes in *Emergent Strategy*, “There is a conversation in the room that only these people at this moment can have.” The same can be said for a dance studio—there is a dance that can be made only by the people who are there together at that time. *Healing Connections: 2020*, an accessibility-focused online Fringe offering from [Dawn States](#) Company, finds the unique conversation between three dancers with disabilities (Dawn States, Dynah Haubert, and Jamie-Ray Leonetti). Far from reducing disabled people to inspirational tropes, the piece expands my view of the possibilities that emerge from including people of a broader range of abilities in dance.

The video begins in unison, with the dancers’ physical ranges and mobility aids adding variation and nuance to the shared movements. The dancers slowly turn together, whether standing on two feet and a cane or using motorized wheelchairs with two very different turning radiuses. The mobility aids enhance choreographic possibility, giving more lift to States’ jumps or enabling a graceful, gliding entrance from Haubert. The portion that feels the most like a dialogue finds the trio in a triangle, taking turns with short phrases in succession. Mixing outstretched shapes and angular arms, their solos are inimitably their own, yet seem to absorb some of the others’ essence.

The dancers wear face masks and remain six or more feet apart. Though these elements mark the piece definitively in its era of creation, it makes me curious about what might happen when the performers are able to interact more closely. Until then, this piece searches for the healing in connecting togetherness with being apart.

A version of the video is available with [audio description](#) for audience members who are blind or low-vision. As a sighted person with an interest in words, this version of the video helps me see the dancing differently through which movements are described and how so. For a few moments, I close my eyes, listening and imagining the dance as if I'd not seen it, which gives the flavor of a movement score.

Charmingly free of flair and polish, *Healing Connections* feels like a moment in an ongoing investigation. I feel as though I have walked in on a conversation about disabled dancers in performance that I need to catch up on, yet am now a part of.

Homepage image description: Three dancers are in a triangle. The dancer in the back, Dawn States, is using a cane. Dancer Dynah Haubert is using a power wheelchair and dancer Jamie Ray-Leonetti is using a power scooter. All three dancers reach their arms to the side in T.

Article image description: Dancer Dawn States reaches toward Jamie. Dawn is extending a pointed back foot and using their cane. Jamie is in her power scooter.

[Healing Connections: 2020](#), Dawn States Company, 2020 Fringe Festival, Sept. 10 - Oct. 4.

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