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# ACCESSIBLE ARTS PRACTICE: AN INTERVIEW WITH MORGAN JAI-MORINCOME

## PART TWO: BY TIM MCCANN

Morgan Jai-Morincome is an independent community arts worker and educator who draws upon her background in theatre, dance and movement to inform her approach to 'adventurous, explorative, person-centred dance making.' She has been selected to facilitate a workshop entitled 'All bodies dance: A community arts approach to valuing difference through dance' at the inaugural Arts Activated Conference in Sydney in September. In part two of our interview Tim McCann focusses on the Radiance Dance project and asks Morgan about her plans.

**Tim McCann: Are there particular challenges involved in working with people with a wide range of abilities?**

Morgan Jai-Morincome: Yes and No. It isn't hard to be inclusive when you genuinely value difference and are committed to a community reflective of diversity of age, background and ability. Personally, I have found that arts projects, workshops and classes inclusive of diverse abilities are the most exciting, enriching and adventurous creative experiences I have ever been a part of. It's now my preferred choice to work in this way as I have found it the most personally and professionally fulfilling.

It does require a different kind of approach in facilitating to make the experience one that everyone feels actively part of. It can be challenging to balance a wide range of individual and group needs and some people need more support and attention than others. It's a balancing act – at Radiance the person comes first and the dance making process needs to fit in with where people are at which can change from week to week. It's a fluid process and one that requires quick and innovative thinking in order to react to the changing environment.

Inclusive dance is a growing field that aims to teach and create work appropriate for a diverse group of people with a broad range of physical, sensory and cognitive abilities.

Radiance is an integrated group - participants are women with and without disabilities. Some of the women in the group attend with support workers and others attend independently.

Challenges the group faces include memory (cognitive and muscle), mobility, spatial awareness, coordination, communicating ideas in an abstract form (as opposed to literal) and a range of physical, emotional, mental issues that can impact on participants' experiences at Radiance.

The group's strength lies in community dancers who are open, spontaneous, adventurous, honest and uncensored. Radiance participants know and live the most basic and essential human values of kindness, acceptance and love towards one another. This environment gives people permission to be themselves, to take risks and to know that they will be accepted and supported no matter what. It is an awesome experience to witness people who have had little or no exposure to or experience in dance develop into confident and engaging community dancers and performers.

One of the biggest challenges in our case is how to best showcase the Radiance Dance process in the form of a performance. It is critical that Radiance enables and empowers participants and that they can feel proud of their achievements and share this with others. It's equally important that our performances send a positive message – that people with diverse abilities are active and valued contributors to the arts.

The biggest gift I have been given from the Radiance Dance experience is integrity – being true to myself. Radiance Dance offers a non-judgemental space in which to dance and create. Out of this comes the freedom to explore and the confidence to engage in the creative process. Time, patience and trust in the process are needed to allow this process to work its magic.

**TM: How have you developed the structure?**

MJ-M: Our current focus is on dance theatre and draws on Laban based creative dance/ movement and theatre for many of the strategies, activities, structures and methods. All of what we do is inclusive and adapted to suit the needs of individuals and the group as a whole. We predominantly use improvisation as a way to explore movement and dance making

Morgan Jai-Morincome  
Independent Community Arts Worker  
Founder of The Radiance Dance Project

Tel: 6161 1192 or 0400 455 965  
E: [enquiry@expressivearts.com.au](mailto:enquiry@expressivearts.com.au)  
W: [www.expressivearts.com.au](http://www.expressivearts.com.au)

For Arts Activated information go to [www.thespasticcentre.com.au/artsactivated/](http://www.thespasticcentre.com.au/artsactivated/)

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as well as a performative tool. Participants learn and explore fundamental dance theatre concepts and skills, work in solo, partners and groups and are supported to create their own movement material. Each year our approach has varied according to the needs and size of the group.

**TM: Have the participants in the Project expressed an interest in developing a performance piece?**

MJ-M: The Radiance Dance project is a performance-based project. Performance in this case is an extension of the process (our weekly dance theatre sessions) and a way to share with the broader community some of what we do. It also serves as a way to promote inclusive dance making and accessible arts in the broader community as well as an opportunity to challenge and ultimately transform stereotypes about who dancers are, what they look like and what dance is. The challenge is in developing improvisation and short sequences of movement for performance as longer choreographies are beyond the scope of many participants ability to memorise movement.

**TM: What are your plans for the future?**

MJ-M: My big vision is to establish a non-profit organisation to provide a wide range of

accessible community arts projects, courses, workshops, education, outreach and mentoring pathways. I also hope to be able to participate in some of the specialised training intensives overseas for artists working in the accessible arts field and apply that learning in Australia.

Hopefully Radiance Dance will continue to provide community dance experiences for women with and without disabilities in the ACT and be able to expand into other areas such as education and outreach as well as offering pathways for women with disabilities to develop facilitation skills. Any ideas or offers of financial assistance to make sure this happens are most appreciated.

This year we will be participating in Adult Learners Week as well as presenting our end of year performances in local theatres. In September I'll be presenting a workshop based on my work with Radiance at the 1<sup>st</sup> Arts Activated Conference in Sydney. The workshop 'All Bodies Dance: A Community Arts Approach to Valuing Difference' will be a fantastic opportunity to share with others the Radiance Dance journey (challenges and successes) and perhaps inspire others to embark on an inclusive community dance making project in their own communities.

