

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

For When You Can't Reach Out and Touch Someone

Ann Haskins · Wednesday, September 9th, 2020

Some things just take on a life of their own.

What started as a one-time romp for Mother's Day was so successful, **Invertigo Dance Theatre** has extended its *Digital Dance Care Packages* in response to inquiries for something similar for graduations, birthdays or just an expression of caring in the isolated quarantine of the pandemic.

The crux of the *Digital Dance Care Package* is a personalized solo commissioned for the recipient for a stated occasion using three prompts (well, sometimes four). Already Vertigo dancer/choreographers have created care packages with dances set on an empty street, in a Japanese garden, in a field at sunset, and inside a closet, among others that can be sampled on two video previews. One challenge provided the prompts "Shakespeare, wizards, and sushi." Another particular delight for someone on Father's Day had a single prompt "Having the couch to yourself!" And yes, it is set on a couch and captures the sense of one reveling in the space suggested by the donor.



Invertigo Dance Theatre. Photo courtesy of the artists.

This wasn't anything artistic director Laura Karlin expected Invertigo Dance Theater to be doing this year when she returned from maternity leave in mid-March. The company was looking at its first national tour, was scheduled to be part of the LA International Dance Festival, and the company's *Dancing with Parkinson's* project was expanding. Shortly after Karlin sat down at her desk that day, the state of California issued a "shelter in place" order in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the state shut down. Like so many plans for 2020, by the end of the day everything changed—the tour, the festival, in person classes for the company and the Parkinson's community project were all cancelled or suspended indefinitely.

"We were shaken," Karlin recalls, "but then started thinking about how to connect, how to be of service, how to support artists, and how to create content during the shutdown."

Out of those questions Invertigo developed the concept for a Mother's Day "care package."

"The initial instinct was to send someone a care package of hand sanitizer, masks and toilet paper," Karlin chuckled, "but that led to real discussions of sending something that would help break the isolation and give people space to feel which developed into the *Digital Dance Care Package* for

Mother’s Day.”



Invertigo Dance Theatre. Photo courtesy of the artists.

The company announced the project and anticipated two, maybe three responses. As Mother’s Day approached the request total hit 14 which put company dancers to work. Stepping up to respond to the unanticipated surge, Karlin spent the night before her first Mother’s Day finishing videos so all 14 care packages arrived on time.

With that pleasant, hectic, and somewhat unexpected success, the care packages became an ongoing project.



Invertigo Dance Theatre. Photo courtesy of the artists.

Based on the prompts and the occasion, Karlin selects a company member for that *Digital Dance Care Package*. In the video, the dancer/choreographer provides an intro for the recipient that identifies the giver, the occasion, and the prompts before the music and the dancing begin. In addition, the recipient receives video excerpts of Invertigo repertoire, a customized gallery of dance photos, and a card with the donor’s personalized message. The donor gets a copy too.

Dancer/choreographers so far include Corina Kinnear, Keon Saghari, Kyreeana Breelin, Dominique McDougal, Kelsey Ang, Cody Brunelle Potter, Haylee Michele, Jessica Monea Evans, Jessica Dunn, Luke Dakota Zender, Hyosun Choi, Sofia Klass, Heidi Buehler, and Jonathan Bryant.

The requested donation of \$30 goes directly to the dancer/choreographer. Any additional donation above the \$30 helps underwrite Invertigo’s community programs. Those include *Dancing Through Parkinson’s*, the nine year old program considered a model for the possibilities of dance to alleviate that degenerative affliction.



Invertigo Dance Theatre. Photo courtesy of the artists.

The new video project reflects the resilience of this company that had a busy 2019 in both dance and personal terms. Last fall opened with the premiere of Karlin’s full-length *Formulae & Fairy Tales*, a long-simmering consideration of English mathematician Alan Turing that predated the film depiction in *The Imitation Game*. Karlin expanded beyond Turing’s World War II role in decoding the German Enigma machine to draw insights from Turing’s fascination with Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* intertwining his work, his life, his sexuality, and his death. The highly praised opening performances were followed with another premiere, Karlin’s first child, a scheduled 2020 national tour, and participation in the planned LA International Dance Festival, all upended by Covid–19 and replaced by the scramble to adapt.

“Even before the *Digital Dance Care Packages* started, *Dancing Through Parkinson’s* classes remained a priority. We shifted quickly online and had the program going again two weeks after the shutdown,” Karlin explained.



Invertigo Dance Theatre. Photo courtesy of the artists.

The classes and now the *Digital Dance Care Packages* provide an income stream for the dancers and create an innovative way to show someone cares when usual celebrations are too risky. Viewing the preview trailers suggests possible spooky Halloween dances, November turkey trots, and a new kind of holiday card with three seasonal prompts. Would “Happy Thanksgiving” count as one or two prompts?

On Vimeo: [here](#) and [here](#). Info on [Digital Dance Care Packages](#).

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