



Sex is high on the agenda...

Who says disability isn't sexy? Sexuality and disability have definitely been the flavour of the past few months and looks like it will continue to be hot for a few more yet. BRING IT ON I SAY!!

People with a disability have recently been pushing society's long established boundaries around this area. The inclusion of people with a disability in the 2001 Mardi Gras Parade, the opening of a wheelchair accessible room in the Pink Palace Brothel in Melbourne, the ACCSEX project developing guidelines for sex surrogates for people with a disability and a photographic exhibition of people with disabilities in all sorts of interesting poses begs the question – ARE WE AS A SOCIETY READY FOR IT?

Discussion on sexuality in a disability context has always been somewhat taboo. It's been an area that society in general and people in the disability field have tried to deny the existence of for many years. There is currently a shift going on – heads are being removed from the sand and we are acknowledging and embracing the idea that people with a disability are sexual beings, have the same needs, want and desires as everyone else and we are taking proactive steps to ensure these things are achieved.

The ACCSEX project (working towards sexual equality for people with disabilities - run by Yooralla) has been bubbling away for several years now. It was an idea that grew out of collaborations between many different interested parties. The players involved in this project include representatives from key disability organisations, researchers, attendant care providers, support workers and has been primarily driven by people with a disability. At the recent ACCSEX forum, (in a session facilitated by Dr Sally Feelgood,) it was noted that the biggest stumbling block to people with a disability achieving equal footing in the sexuality domain was attitude. And that included not only attitude within the general community, in the medical field, in the media but within people with a disability themselves. The outcome of the discussion was that until people with a disability are able to see themselves as sexual beings with needs, wants and desires that deserve to be met, we are fighting an uphill battle. A team at Yooralla is currently formulating guidelines and training around the use of sex surrogates by people with a disability. This has been a very fuzzy area to date, which has caused many people much angst. The guidelines aim to remove all the guesswork around what the role of a sex surrogate is and to clearly spell out what their

responsibilities are and how they differ from the roles of attendant care staff.

Disability in the gay community is another issue that has come to the fore in recent times. People with a disability have not had much of a presence in this area in the past. At the well-attended "Access All Areas" session, that took place as part of Melbourne's Midsumma Festival, issues were raised around physical access to gay and lesbian venues but it was also acknowledged that attitudinal barriers have existed within this minority group. As a practical outcome of this session it was agreed that a group needed to be established to act as a reference point and that the gay community can consult for advice on making events, venues and functions more accessible to

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Sex is high on the agenda... (continued)

people with a disability. It was also felt that this group could have an advocacy and support role for people with a disability, especially those living in supported accommodation situations, where issues related to their sexual preference are frequently suppressed for fear of the consequences if they were revealed.

Possibly one of the most exciting events that has taken place this year has been the launch of the "Intimate Encounters" Photographic series. This exhibition is a collection of 29 images and one short film that "looks at the exquisite, inextricable yet seldom explored relationship between disability and sexuality." (Belinda Mason-Lovering - Photographer 2000). It has been described as "extending the journey from the subconscious into the community, from the personal to the political, challenging the hidden norms about what is 'sexy' and who among us is allowed to feel that way." The common goal behind all the images in 'Intimate

Encounters' is "to challenge the existing views and perceptions on disability and sexuality" (Lisa Sampson - Producer 2000)

It is hoped that 'Intimate Encounters' will touch down in Melbourne at some stage in 2001 and will then travel throughout the world with new images being added in each country.

So, anyone who doubted that the area of disability and sexuality was "ripe for the taking" at the moment needs to think again! My suggestion to you all is fasten your seat belts, sit back and enjoy the ride... we don't know how big this thing is gonna get!

Caroline Bowditch 2001
Training Coordinator, Arts Access

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Festival of Difference

An exciting new arts event The Festival of Difference will showcase visual and performing arts and celebrate the creativity of people with disabilities. Be there on Saturday 2 June at Gasworks Arts Park, 21 Graham Street, Albert Park from 10am - 5.30pm. For further details call Festival Coordinator, Carey Lai on 9682 7290.

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See page 4 and 5 for details

An audio tape version of Arts Access News is available. Please call the office to arrange your copy.

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From the desk of the Executive Director

Looking after our own – again.

The focus of this newsletter is on body image and identity. We wanted to "keep sex high on the agenda", and to make sure that we all keep talking about how important it is to have good self esteem and a positive self image. So I want to take the opportunity to reemphasize how important it is to look after each other as well, particularly at a work-place level.

An interesting dichotomy that exists in the arts at the moment, I believe, is that there is a strong focus on local communities and local interests, at the same time that individual rights are still being largely ignored. Because we are increasingly knowledgeable about the broader society that we live in, we seem to have less room left in our brains (or is it our hearts?) to look after our colleagues.

Maybe I'm a jaded arts administrator, but I seem to attend more and more focus groups, forums and conferences, all talking about the arts industry, globalisation, market trends and audience development, but not talking about those hoary (but sooo important) personnel issues such as wages, conditions, hours and professional development for artists and arts workers. We need them back on the agenda!

Certainly, one way of achieving some movement around these industrial issues is to lobby government and our funding bodies for recognition and support, and lots of people are doing that, but I'd like to advocate another way. I'd like to suggest that we begin in our own workplaces.

How great would it be, do you think, if everyone working in the arts spent an extra half an hour a week talking to a colleague about that colleague's problems, with the sole aim of making that person feel a bit better about themselves and their work? I know that it sounds incredibly touchy-feely, but I reckon that while the

corporate world has been embracing team building and getting in touch with themselves, the arts world has been busy getting hard-nosed, competitive and economically driven. We could do with a bit of touchy-feely.

The problem, as I see it, is that in an increasingly economically driven environment, we are too concerned about accountability, spending insufficient time on the equally important people management and guidance. Not a good balance for a 'sustainable and innovative' arts industry.

At all levels we need to look out for each other more. We need to value happy staff and invest in them. We need to value healthy partnerships with other arts organisations. We need to make friends with our colleagues and share the load a little.

If we are returning to local communities looking after local issues, can we go a little more local and start looking after our own, again? I'd like that.

Nicole Beyer, April 2001

Executive Director: Nicole Beyer



Any Body Home? Weave Movement Theatre

Weave Movement Theatre is the featured company at this year's Dance Week. Arts Access spoke to **Janice Florence** from Weave who gave us the lowdown on the group, their new show and where you can catch them performing.

Any Body Home? is an unmissable performance by Weave Movement Theatre, an exciting, innovative mixed ability performing ensemble, now in existence for 3 years. The company began life as 'Moveable dance', a project of Arts Access in 1997. Twelve weekly sessions taught by Janice Florence and Martin Hughes of 'State of Flux' served as an introduction to moving and dancing together, culminating in workshops with the visiting UK dance company **CanDo Co** in late '97. The group persisted, survived and some would say, triumphed.

Over the last three years - "Three? It seems we've known each other for decades", says Janice, there has been much developmental work with local dance and performance artists, notably **Sally Chance** of 'Restless Dance Company' in SA and with experienced artists from within the troupe. A close association with Arts Access has continued, with much needed financial and moral support in the early stages. As the group became independent, funding was found from various sources, including income from performing in many settings, some of which could be called bizarre - conferences, parks, public thoroughfares, town halls, theatres, tents. The Myer Foundation enabled Weave to work with several artists, including **Sally Smith**, who is back to direct their current piece, *Any Body Home?* Personnel has changed

somewhat over time. Some of the originals remain and some have arrived at various times over the past 3 years. The company now consists of 12 strong and skilled performers, half with physical disabilities and half without. Many have backgrounds and training in dance, theatre and other performing arts. They have developed a performance style which is an integration of body types and of theatrical forms, with a focus on movement/dance based theatre, characterisation, irony and humour.

Their current project is their most ambitious. "We are ecstatic to have received such generous funding, so that we can have Sally devise a piece with us, plus afford such luxuries as a costume designer and the requisite technical staff, plus a great, accessible venue", says Trevor Dunn, another long time member. The funding for the project has come from the Australia Council for the Arts, The Myer Foundation and the Melbourne City Council. "It's great to have this recognition from the funding bodies and it's so marvellous to have the wonderful performance and rehearsal space at the North Melbourne Town Hall." Sally Smith is a dancer and choreographer, also interested in using spoken word, music and singing. So she is ideal to draw on the many interests and talents to be found among the performers in Weave.

They perform with a sassy mix of physical performance, dance, music, patter, talk, song. A broad streak of quirky humour also informs much of their work. The piece is to be performed as part of Ausdance Dance Week in May. *Any Body Home?* deals with the many ways in which we are at home and not at home: in our bodies, our hearts, our families, the place where we live, familiar places, strange places. Members are also aware of the ironic undertones of the title in relation to disability. There will be three additional new short works on the program, devised by company members, a great opportunity for exposure of their original work. Two public workshops will be offered by artists from Weave at the same venue earlier in Dance Week. There are a number of highly experienced teachers in the troupe.

Weave is excited to play a part in Dance Week, as this year Ausdance has chosen mixed ability dance as their theme. This promotion of a broader view of dance and dancers, challenging long held assumptions, aligns closely with the company's beliefs and mode of operation.

Performances will take place on May 18th (1.00 PM) and 19th (8.00PM) and 20th (6.00 PM), 2001 at the North Melbourne Town Hall, Errol St, North Melbourne.

A day time workshop will take place on Monday May 14th, an evening workshop on Tuesday May 15th.

For bookings call the EASE service at Arts Access on **03 9699 8497** Monday to Friday, business hours. Tickets at the door on the performance weekend. For enquiries, contact **03 9416 9673**. The venue is wheelchair accessible.

Dance Week 12 - 20 May 2001

This year, in Victoria, aside from celebrating the work of Weave Movement Theatre in *Any Body Home?*, Dance Week will have several professional development and networking opportunities for those wishing to or currently working in the disability arts, for general dance educators and other dance and performance makers. Our international guest **Donna Krasnow** brings a wealth of knowledge and experience about the use of creative imagery in teaching and conditioning. She has developed a special program relevant to those working with dancers in professional and community settings. As well, she spent several years refining a Safe Dance Education program using creative imagery and is recognised for her work with children and teachers of creative dance for children. She will be conducting workshops throughout Dance Week.

For more details contact Ausdance Victoria by phone on **03 9686 0099** or email victoria@ausdance.org.au

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Arts Access in collaboration with over 150 people with disabilities and mental health issues, has coordinated a startling yet stunning entry for the Centenary of Federation Parade, entitled Artability - Expect the unexpected!

When? : **Sunday 6 May 2001, 11am - 1pm**
Where? : **Swanston Street b/n Melbourne Central and National Gallery**
Any Queries? : **Jo Cohen, Artability Coordinator, Arts Access 03 9699 8299**

BE THERE OR BE SQUARE

Members of Weave Movement Theatre. All photos by George Kyriacou © 2001



Mission

Arts Access provides access to arts and cultural activity for people who are disadvantaged including people with a disability.

Values Information, Debate and Networking

Arts Access' programs and services are based on four fundamental community cultural development principles:

- that participation in the arts is essential to the wellbeing of the individual and the community
- that all people should have equal access, choice and opportunity to participate in the arts and attend arts, entertainment and cultural events
- that the arts provide an ideal mechanism for the development and expression of individual and community identity and diversity
- that actions to ensure the inclusion of people with a disability improve access for the whole community

Arts Access' Program Art, Advice and Advocacy

Arts Access' annual program is a broad range of artistic practice, access information and advice, advocacy, training and support. Our arts practice work ranges from hands-on arts workshops for people with disabilities and people with mental health issues, to high profile collaborations with other arts organisations. Our arts access work ranges from audience development and accessibility campaigns in partnerships with producers and venues, to a ticket service for people who have disabilities or are disadvantaged. Our presentation work this year will include a major tour, in partnership with Breastscreen Victoria, into outer metropolitan and regional Victoria, of work done by community participants and professional artists.

Seeking and Nurturing New Work

Arts Access' success over 26 years has largely been due to moving with the times, and grabbing opportunities enthusiastically. By constantly exploring new ways of increasing access to the arts, we have been able to nurture new projects, and then allow them to take on their own life – Somebody's Daughter Theatre, Weave Movement Theatre, Big Bag Band and Club Wild have all resulted from projects that Arts Access helped to initially establish. Our philosophy is to use our expertise and our experience in producing arts products that increase accessibility in

some way, and to then allow that methodology to become a part of the broader culture. We don't need to maintain ownership, as our ultimate aim is for the arts to become more accessible in its own right. The ideal world would be where Arts Access did itself out of business!

As Victoria's peak arts and disability organisation, Arts Access plays a crucial information and communication role for the arts and cultural sector in Victoria. The organisation maintains a register of artists and arts organisations, and each year responds to hundreds of enquiries for information, advice and referrals from government agencies, community arts and health organisations, local government authorities, etc.

Arts Access is a respected leader in community based arts practice and community cultural development and we have extensive networks in the arts, health, disability, and other community sectors.

Arts Access plays a key role in fostering critical debate within the arts and disability/ disadvantage sector through conferences, forums, and training programs. As a member of the national network of peak arts and disability, arts and disadvantage organisations (DADAA), Arts Access helps to contribute state issues to the broader national picture.

DADAA

DADAA stands for Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts Australia. DADAA National Network is the peak body for arts and disability, arts and disadvantage in Australia. DADAA works at a national level to achieve equal access to, and representation in the arts for Australians experiencing disability and disadvantage.

All of the peak arts and disability/disadvantage organisations in each state and territory (including Arts Access) are the members of DADAA, working together to use the arts to create positive social and cultural change in the lives of communities and individuals.



Become a member and help us to reach more people

Arts Access is a not-for-profit organisation that requires the support of our members to continue our work. Why not help us to reach more people by becoming an Arts Access or EASE Member. **Arts Access membership** is open to everyone. Your membership contributes to the overall running of our Artistic Program, Entertainment Access Service (EASE), Training Program and Advocacy work.

Annual Membership gives you:

- 'Arts Access News', to keep you up to date with the year's activities
- invitations to public events
- discounts on various Arts Access services and products
- voting rights at our Annual General Meeting

Membership prices are:

Individual:	\$25
Organisation:	\$55

EASE membership is for people whose access to venues or choice of seating is restricted due to physical or sensory impairment

EASE Membership gives you:

- Membership Card - for use as identification for discounts and access requirements
- Ticket Update - a bi-monthly publication listing upcoming events and access information
- Arts Access Newsletter - providing information on the organisation, articles of interest, arts and disability news
- Information on audio described and sign interpreted events
- Venue Access - information sheets available when booking, access information available by phone. Free Vic Venue Guide
- Booking service - use of the EASE Ticket service to purchase tickets and arrange special seating requirements to arts and entertainment events
- Special Offers - notification of discounted and free tickets

Annual Membership Prices are:

Individuals:	\$25
Groups/Organisations:	\$55

For more information, call us on **03 9699 8299**

And don't forget that any donations of \$2 or more are tax deductible and greatly appreciated.

Art Day South Easter Holiday Program 2001. Photos by Catherine Acin. David Fajgenbaum opposite.



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