

VDC Interview Transcript
 Dianne McIntyre, as choreographer for Dancing Wheels
 9.30.16
 Total Time: 59:51

Dancing Wheels
 3615 Euclid Ave., 3rd Floor
 Cleveland, OH 44115

Key:

CF: Candace Feck
 DM: Dianne McIntyre
 MDB: Megan Davis Bushway (VDC team member)

CF: Diane, before we talk specifically about Dancing Wheels, I'd be interested to know what it was like for you having been born and raised in Cleveland — can you paint a picture for us of the dance landscape before Dancing Wheels emerged? What was it like, coming into dance in this place, in this State?

DM: Well, I can speak about Cleveland because I was in Cleveland, Ohio until I went to Ohio State in 1964. In Cleveland I feel the dance was very rich. And I say that because dance was easy for any young person to be able to be wed with. It didn't matter people's income, their background — you could dance, you could be in any of the arts. Cleveland was — and I'd say Cleveland *is* — a very fertile place for arts education. I don't mean just education *about* the arts. I mean becoming educated to *be* an artist. I found this because when I was in elementary school/junior high school/all the way through, we had arts programs — music, dance, all that — in the school. And then, we had special after-school programs. When I was in elementary school, there was an arts program that was organized by what was called the Mount Pleasant Community Center. At that time you could take drama, you could take music, you could take dance after school. My dance class was not in the school; it was at our local library — maybe because that's where the space was — and that's where I was first introduced to modern dance; I didn't know until much later in life that that was pretty revolutionary — for a young person to be able to study modern dance as a child. Before that, and simultaneously, I studied dance with my dance teacher, Elaine Gibbs. She's an African American woman, very supportive — even today — for me, in dance. So at that time, outside of the school system, in the regular social strata, perhaps a lot of the dance classes were what you call segregated. Even though we were in a northern city, all of my dance associates — other little children who were taking dance with Miss Gibbs — we were all black. I didn't think anything about it — that in school, we were racially mixed — black and white. However, some of my little white friends in school, they went to a different dance school, and we went to our dance school. And I didn't think anything about it because our parents didn't emphasize it — and because we had the *highest* dance training, there with Miss Gibbs. So in the early days, even in northern cities, there was not a mix in the dance studios of black and white. There *was*, however, in our modern dance after-school program.

The reason that modern dance was very rich at that time was because Karamu House,¹ which is — I don't want to state it incorrectly — sometimes it's called the oldest African American arts institution

¹ On the east side of [Cleveland, Ohio](#), Karamu House (originally The Neighborhood Association/Playhouse Settlement) includes the oldest [African-American](#) theater in the United States. Many of [Langston Hughes's](#)

in the country; it's really maybe the oldest multicultural arts institution in the country, right here in Cleveland. Well, they had modern dance there, starting in the 1930s. And it expanded — there was a Cleveland Modern Dance Association; Cleveland Modern Dance Association started in the 50s or 60s, and they were very nurturing to me. I was able to study with all the great artists that they brought in here from New York, and, (laughing) basically, from New York City. So I was inspired, really, to continue to dance from my very rich dance background here in Cleveland.

And when I went to Ohio State University, I had the greatest training, I would say, in the world. I'm a little biased, but it's true, too, at the Ohio State University under the direction of Miss Helen Alkire — and I was fortunate to actually take classes with her; I was the last class to be able to study directly with her, before she went on and became a full-out chairperson and developed it into the BFA program. Ohio is very rich in dance. When I first went to New York and auditioned to do this solo, and the people on the panel — this illustrious panel — I hadn't studied with any of them or with anybody that they knew. And they said, "Well, where are you from?" And I said, "I'm from Ohio." And they said "Ohio!!!" They said "*Ohio!!*" So later they realized that Ohio was quite a rich place for dance — this was in the 1970s when I had that comment, and then later, James Truitte, who was on that panel, he became a very great teacher here in Ohio. He was a great teacher always, in the original Alvin Ailey Company, and then he moved to Cincinnati, and many, many people received great training through him. So he realized "That's true about Ohio!" And he helped make it so, or continue it to be so. So it was a rich place in dance, and continues to be so.

CF: Wonderful. How and when did you first encounter Mary Verdi-Fletcher?

DM: Well, years ago, I think it was maybe in the middle 80s, maybe in 1990 or so, my sister told me that she had interviewed an amazing woman — I didn't live here in Cleveland then; I was living in New York. My sister, who was an administrator at Cleveland State University, and she used to be the host for a radio show that came from CSU, and she said she had interviewed this fascinating woman named Mary Verdi-Fletcher, who had this organization called Dancing Wheels. And my sister actually saw a concert of theirs. She said "there are people who are in wheelchairs, and they are also mixed with people who are standing up and whirling around! They do these *amazing* dances!" My sister was just so taken by what they did, and she said they were also known nationally. I said "That's fantastic!" So that was some years before I ever met Mary, and then when I returned to Cleveland in 2003 after having lived in New York for over 30 years, then I did see a wonderful concert — so that must have been about 2004... Oh, I *did* see a concert, however — I can't remember if it was before or after that concert, Mary along with Maggie — Margaret Carlson, Dr. Margaret Carlson² — this is a little transitional period, but I'll say... Here at Dancing Wheels, Margaret Carlson saw me at a concert. The concert was a concert of Verb Ballets³; however, they weren't called Verb Ballet yet — but I'll say it was a concert of Verb Ballets. And she said, "Oh! Aren't you Dianne McIntyre?" I said "Yes." She said, "Are you busy next week?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, come and teach some

plays were developed and [premiered](#) at the theater. Originally founded by two Oberlin graduates (Russell and Rowena Woodham Jelliffe) in 1915, for Clevelanders of different races, religions, and social and economic backgrounds, as well as a trusted community resource for local families.

² Verb Ballets, Producing Artistic Director

³ A nonprofit organization, located in Shaker Heights, OH dedicated to performing high quality, thought provoking works by contemporary choreographers from across the nation.

classes for us, and the classes are going to be at the Dancing Wheels studio. And it's a combination class, with different dance companies. They have their early morning class, we'll have Verb [Ballets], we'll have Dancing Wheels, we'll have Michael Medcalf's Cleveland Contemporary Dance Theatre⁴ —and all of these many dancers will all be in the studio at the same time, and we have several master classes, so we'd like you to do a series of them. And I said "Oh, that's great!" So in the class, there were dancers from Dancing Wheels and these other companies, and I had just a great time teaching what I usually do — traditional modern or contemporary dance.

Afterwards, Mary said "Oh my goodness, we really loved your class!" She said, "We like your movement — it lends itself to the type of movement we do in our wheelchairs." And she said "It's really great that we translate some things you do for *standing* dancers very easily into our movement in the chairs." At the time, I did not exactly know what she meant by "translating" — maybe in music it could be called *transposing*. Or actually in dance composition, when we transpose a movement that you might do with your shoulder, maybe you are going to translate that same movement to a knee. So later I realized that that was what Mary met — that she and her fellow wheelers, they sometimes were translating movement that I was giving to the whole general class, to themselves as wheelers. I said, "Oh, okay. That's great." ...So that was when I first encountered them — actually while I was teaching a class. It was a lot of fun. We did that; it was over several weeks time. And then she said, "Well, one day I would like you to do a work on the company." So that's how I first met them.

CF: Just to be clear, was that in the early 2000s?

DM: It was about 2004.

CF: Okay.

DM: It might have been in the Fall of 2003 — around there.

CF: Your first work for them, then — was that around 2008? Was it *Sweet Radio Radicals*?⁵

DM: Is that what it said, 2008?

CF: That's what I have...

DM: Okay, I guess so.

CF: So that was it — that was the first work, then? How did that come about?

DM: Well, perhaps I had done some other classes with Dancing Wheels over the next few years. I had an ongoing kind of association with them. I had an association with them before I did this first work. The first work I did with them was called *Sweet Radio Radicals*. So Mary called me and she told me she wanted to have a meeting with me to talk about a work she had in mind that I could

⁴ dancer who used to work with Cleo Parker Robinson's company, returned to Cleveland to start his own company, Cleveland Contemporary Dance Theatre in 1998. Medcalf is currently on the faculty of Alabama State University.

⁵ 2008

choreograph. And in this particular work, she wanted me to choose music from this beautiful album she had. The album was an album of music of female recording artists, all in the twentieth century. And it started very, very far back — like in the 1920s — she even had some recordings from the 20s, all the way up to, like, 1999 — like that. So she asked if I would listen to the music, and there were also explanations of the careers of all of these singers, all female. So I said, “Oh, that’s a nice challenge.” And so I studied the music, and I came up with selections that started closer to the beginning of the century, and moved all through time. And I wanted a diversity, in terms of the energy of the music. The narrative would just come from whatever the particular song was about. But in a way, there was a kind of arc with it, because it kind of felt like the arc of the century, the arc of that particular century, especially as related to women. And that’s how the piece came about, the beginning of it. And so I selected the music — I think there are five sections to it, might be six — (laughing) might be seven! And then we just started working, and I also wanted, in the work, to highlight each of the dancers, so that everybody in the piece would be featured. And, yeah, it was a delightful experience. It was challenging — somewhat challenging on both sides — for me, and for them. Do you want me to talk about that?

CF: Of course! How did you guess? (she laughs)

DM: Okay...it was really a delightful experience working on this first piece with Dancing Wheels, and there were challenges. The challenges were not related to the wheelchairs, or with merging wheel chair [dancers] with people standing. The challenge was one I have with almost any dance company I work with that is not my own group of dancers that I’ve selected. It’s a stylistic type of thing. So, mostly it was trying to get them to do the energy, the focus, the flow — what I say is my *style*. I wanted them to absorb my style through each of these musical selections, and my style has a lot to do with being connected with the music. So, that was it. And also, little details — like, there were things that I was trying to do, such as little accents — accents and pauses and looks, and focus — like that. And so they would have to turn in the wheelchair, like turn and *stop*: okay, how do you turn and stop on a dime, when the wheel might want to keep on going? Okay, so little technical things that we had to work out. Another thing that I learned, maybe on the first or second day of rehearsal — when sometimes in rehearsal I go, like, walking all in between the dancers and say “A little more like this, like that...” In Dancing Wheels when you do that, you must be aware that these wheels can roll over your toes. Okie-doke! I learned that pretty fast (she laughs) — that you want to use your safe energy to be close to the dancers to give them the feeling of what you have in mind, and at the same time, be careful — since you are barefoot, yourself, while you’re choreographing — make sure that your feet are not close to a wheel. That was kind of funny, but I learned that pretty fast. One thing I’d like to say about working with Dancing Wheels is that I don’t view the company like: there are some people in chairs, there are some people standing up, let’s see what we’re going to do. I see *them* as *dancers*. Okay, you have a whole company of dancers: I’m not saying this to say something goodie-goodie like that — Like (in self-mocking tones), “*Oh, yes! They’re all dancers — isn’t that wonderful?*” No, I’m just telling you that’s how — when I walk in the studio, that’s how it is. You can walk in the studio and see, over here — I’m just talking, just in general — over here, you might have a person who’s extremely tall and that person has this particular gift that they can jump and just soar in the air; you might have this person over here in a company that is built in a certain kind of compact way and they can move — *tadadadada* — they can move extremely fast. You *use* those things as a choreographer — unless you’re reconstructing a piece that was done before. If it’s a brand new piece, you use those things. Or you use the height of that person, and that height can give you some very beautiful sculptural thing. And then, that’s how I see the Dancing Wheels: you have the personalities of the people, and then you have these people in wheels. The people in their wheels

can do things that we cannot do, with just our feet and our legs. They can spin, they can fly across the room, they can spin, they can — this is a little dramatic — many of them can actually fall out of their chairs — and it was like *Whoa!* Now if you just kind of fall on the floor from a standing position, that's regular, that's just ordinary: we've been doing that in dance since the 1920s, if not before. When you see a person in Dancing Wheels and they're flying across the floor and they come to a stop and they actually fall from their chair, that's a very powerful. So that's what I mean. The things that are the gifts of the individuals, I use that. So I see it all as a company. It's very rewarding working with them, because of that.

And there were some things... I had seen the company quite a few times before, and some of the choreography was just stellar — I mean, let me just say for me, just *amazing* — and sometimes, I saw that choreographers were maybe trying to find, like: “Let's see, what can I *do* with the wheelchair?” And sometimes that's what it looked like. Like, “Oh” — like sometimes, little tricks and things. And tricks are fine, if that's your focus. I didn't want to do tricks; I wanted to do *art*. I wanted to do art with this company — to make it the most artistic and expressive it could be. So that's what my experience was. And there were some things that I had never seen them do — like in this piece, there was Mary Verdi-Fletcher and another young lady named Desiree Foster — I did a duet with them with music by Mahalia Jackson, and I wanted them to flow; I wanted them to do like a kind of swagger, I wanted a kind of swagger with a gliding feeling on top (she floats her arms out, chest-high, to either side). I did not want Mary to do like this (she indicates arms pushing down on the wheels of the wheelchair). I didn't want her — sometimes we do use things with their wheels, and wheeling themselves, and that's part of the gesture. But I wanted her arms to be doing a gesture like that (one arm stretches forward and up as the other reaches back) — and I wanted Desiree to do the same thing at the same time. So, I did something where I wanted Desiree's body to — as she's walking forward — to *push* the wheelchair forward, and they both are doing this (she repeats the previous arm reach), and it's a smooth gliding force — so that took a little bit of doing! There are some different kinds of techniques for the whole company. They have special techniques that no other company would have to work with. So that was something I had never seen the company do before, and it worked very well — so each person that does that role, they have the challenge to make it look like they're just walking forward, just walking forward — but actually they're propelling forward the other individual — and they can't make it look like that's what they're doing.

And then we had another — they did a *repeat* of this — there's one piece that has a feeling of war, and the *slashes* and the *dadadadada* — we can make a lot of what you call energy on the stage like this (she makes a repeated crisscross motion with her forearms, slashing, at chest height), because of the way they can wheel, and other people running and jumping and turning, but we had one thing where all the people fall — everybody falls, and this one is like a war-like piece, and when they repeated it, there was a young lady in the work, and her particular body structure — she was not a person who should fall out of the chair. So, I said “We'll have to make an adjustment.” So in her adjustment, we did something where she used her upper body. She had to remain fastened — her feet had to remain fastened. So we just had to make an adjustment, but she was such a dramatic dancer that it worked very well. And the way she also recovered out of it.

Then we had some things that were a little sassy. I had to work with them on the sassiness. Sometimes the people in the chairs had more sassiness than a person standing. And the other thing is that it's not just like anybody could be a wheelchair dancer: you have to have a very strong dance ability: you have to be expressive, you have to be able to use timing, and technique and dynamics, and all that. So sometimes I've seen people grow in Mary's company, where at first they were more

of a beginner as a wheelchair dancer, and they develop, but sometimes people just don't have it. So then they support in another way...So that's my idea.

CF: Thank you. You covered a lot.

DM: (laughing) I covered a lot, didn't I?

CF: You did — and things that I had wondered about. But I'm curious: you mentioned that the challenges working in this company are not because some of the people are in wheelchairs and some are not. But in fact, every group you approach, you approach in a similar way.

DM: Yes.

CF: Any chance you could take us to, sort of, the first day you're with this company — or that company? How you begin...

DM: Mm-hmmm. Well, actually I was recently on a panel in New York about dance and disability, something that is going to be more in the public understanding. There is going to be, I believe, a very big grant that has been established for more people to work with dance and disability. Earlier this year, for this particular panel, I think I explained to them that I had had some similar experiences working with the Dance Theatre of Harlem and Dancing Wheels. And people were like, "Oh, that's interesting." It was that in Dancing Wheels, in the first time working with them, I had to see what it was that the people in the wheelchairs *do*, technically: how they can turn, how they can stop, how they go forward — just technically what they do. In order to use their abilities to the best of my ability as a choreographer — I had to not waste my understanding of that. So I had to do the same thing — I just did a piece recently on the Dance Theatre of Harlem, my first piece with people on *pointe* shoes. So it was similar — my first piece with Dancing Wheels, first piece with people in a wheelchair — and this was my first piece doing a piece with people on *pointe* shoes. I had to learn in the first couple of days what they can do, related to my choreography, on *pointe*. You know, I've seen *pointe* a lot over the years, but how does it really work? Can you just lean way backwards and be on *pointe*? And do you step on *pointe* to do that? Or do you push up and do that? And they have terms for those things, just like in Dancing Wheels, they have terms. So you come into that situation and learn the abilities of the performers. Also, when coming into a new group, I learn what I call the expressive or the dramatic abilities. Say like, in working on a piece with the students at the Ohio State University, there's a lot of different levels and different kinds of expression —so I don't see the people all just like a blank, like all just one blank group of cookie-cutter people. No. I pull out what it is that is unique and special about each individual and try to highlight that — and I try to do that each time I step into a new situation.

CF: I'm sure like most seasoned choreographers, each piece — or most pieces — allow you to learn something that you might use in other contexts.

DM: Mm-hmmm. Yes.

CF: Can you think of anything in particular, working with the Dancing Wheels company, that was the kind of revelation for you that allowed you to adapt it in some other context?

DM: Oh, you mean, in other situations?

CF: Yes, perhaps — anything that you learned and then put into practice in another choreographic situation?

DM: Uh-huh, yes. Yes... I'm sure it is. Let me see....well what I *learned* that I have carried on....I think one of the things that I've learned working with Dancing Wheels that I have wanted to carry on is this idea of *not* using certain abilities that people have as a gimmick — or a little *trick*. So, it's easy to do that with this company, because, you know, it's just delightful and the people say “Oh, yes — isn't that nice?” So... I have been able to translate that into working with other groups to make sure whatever is happening is not a trick or a gimmick — unless it's some kind of a parody-type of thing. And I'm sure that there are other lessons that I have learned — I guess I've also learned that there are sometimes — I've had the opportunity with this company because I'm here in the same city —sometimes you have to just look at different angles, how to get people to do what you envision is possible. It's not related directly to this being wheelchair dancers and standing dancers, it's just that sometimes because I am in the same city with Dancing Wheels and have been able to come back over and over again — how to push people, even sometimes to tears — sorry to say that (she laughs) — you can cut that part out! How to push people so that what they're able to express emotionally or creatively is sometimes beyond what they think they have inside of them. And I have seen that happen — the limits of what might seem *not* possible, I have seen it *possible* and *happen*. And so that, now that I'm thinking about it, yes — I have been able to carry that over into other experiences. And I do have a rehearsal coming up next week, and now I'm speaking about it, I'm going to use that (she laughs).

CF: Is that rehearsal here, or somewhere else?

DM: No, it's in New York. I won't have that ongoing, like: “Oh just let me run down the street and go see them again...”

CF: Was your next piece *Dancing on a Dream*?⁶

DM: Yes. Mm-hmm.

CF: Anything in particular to say about that process that was different from the first?

DM: Yes, that one was very different. The first one was more like a traditional dance, what you say. I had these different segments, and going throughout the century, expressing sometimes women's issues, sometimes expressing the times — and bringing that forward in movement and emotion and narrative. *Dancing on a Dream* — see, I don't know if Mary does this for every choreographer, but for me, she gives me assignments: “I want a dance related to this.” She doesn't have the specifics, but she knows the general idea. For this one, it was to be almost a biography of her life. And she probably didn't say it like that, but it was a big celebration, it was a big anniversary, and it was going to be almost — it was going to be a long work that really was related to her life and her journey. So, this one I started in a different way because I had to ask her — I had to interview Mary all about her life — from her babyhood, all the way through. Everything. I got her to talk about all kinds of things that maybe she might not have thought were that important. And I like doing works that are based on real life. Sometimes I do that where the people are actually speaking, where they're theatre

⁶ May, 2011

arts, theatre dance works. So that's how this one started, with me interviewing her, asking all about her life, all the details, and then I somehow translated that into a dance, where she was the central person: she was like a little girl, she was a little baby, she got older, she got interested in dance, nothing seemed to stop her — it didn't matter if she was gonna' be in a wheelchair — and she had a dance partner and they just swept this contest — it was like a disco contest or something like that. And it was not a disco contest for some people who might be in a wheelchair. No! It was just for dancers, and she and her partner just took over and the people there were just like "Whoa! This is fantastic." And then from there, she never stopped. So we had all that and it's more a story dance but not more like a ballet where it's like *dub, dub, dub* — it's all very dancey. And the music, we found a lot of music from the 1980s to support that. And Mary, I'll tell you, she wanted the finale to be "I will survive." This is a big disco song by Gloria Gaynor from the 1980s.⁷ Mary had the dream that Gloria Gaynor would sing that finale live. I'm like (dropping her voice) "Alright, Mary!" So we rehearsed the piece, we rehearsed the *dadadada*....She was in touch Gloria Gaynor, and she does not take no for an answer. She has a way of things working out. Gloria Gaynor actually had another engagement on the same day of this work — in Texas. However, that engagement was in the morning, and this engagement was in the evening. I don't know if Mary got a private jet plane or what. I don't know what she did, but she made arrangements with Gloria Gaynor's people and Gloria, and here she was. She was here. I had organized how Gloria's choreography would flow with the rest of the group — I don't know if we actually had a rehearsal, but I talked her through — because she got there just a little bit before time to go on stage— I talked to her what that section was to be like and there! Whoa! It happened! (She laughs) It happened! It was fabulous. I hope she has a video of that. Mary seems to research people who are maybe well known, who are somewhat celebrities, that there is something in their background with themselves or with their associates, where they have connected with people of other abilities or who may have some kind of support of disability. So, somehow she knew that about Gloria Gaynor. It was really a lot of fun.

CF: Do you anticipate other opportunities of working with the company?

DM: Mm-hmm. Yes. Sometimes I'll work with the company when I'm not really a choreographer? At times I come in if they want me just to look at something, just to give notes. For instance, one year Donald McKayle did a brilliant work on the company⁸ — absolutely whoa! One of the most brilliant works I had ever seen on Dancing Wheels. It was Duke Ellington music, with fabulous costumes. So I came to rehearsals as he was developing the work, and I think he went away before the actual premiere, and then I was the person that helped keep it intact, because he gave me notes, I could see what he was after. It was before the present rehearsal director, who is just amazing — Catherine Meredith Lambert, who's brilliant. It was before she was on board. So at times I come in, give some notes — I've had an ongoing connection with them. Yeah.

CF: You know Ohio pretty well. You certainly know the OSU dance scene, you know the Cleveland dance scene, and you probably know quite a bit more. What do you think has been the contribution of Dancing Wheels, or how do you see it fitting in the picture that is dance in Ohio? Would you have any thoughts about that?

⁷ 1979

⁸ *Far East of the Blues* (2010)

DM: Well, one thing I want to say before I answer that question is that there have been many amazing choreographers who offered their work to Dancing Wheels — work that they, of course, have had to create directly on Dancing Wheels. And much of it is really stellar. And I want to say stellar without a — what’s the word? I want to say stellar without — you know the word I am looking for — stellar across the board. Stellar next to anything – not stellar for a company of people who have other abilities — just stellar in terms of art. It’s really amazing, because in these works, people see the work for itself. They don’t see “I’m looking at a work, and some of the people are in wheelchairs, and isn’t that amazing?” No, they see the work for the intention of the choreography, which is very powerful — although some of the intention of the work *is* to highlight the progress or the challenges that have come about because of people with disabilities in the arts. I feel that Dancing Wheels has contributed a great deal to the dance of Ohio. One reason is because people all over the country – and actually internationally— know about the work of Dancing Wheels. And it’s the first company that has integrated...*mostly* they work with people – I have a friend in New York who always has work, and she says “people of other abilities.” Mary’s the first company that has done this type of integration, and taken it to a very high level, so in that way, it brings lots of praise to this particular state — that this is the home and where that type of energy and where that type of initiative was born. It brings a lot of accolades to Ohio that she could come up in this environment and be so inspired by dance — all types of dance: social dance, ballet, modern dance —just from her childhood, dance was all around her, here in Cleveland. And it’s like “I want to do that.” And so that dance would be so strong in her environment and because of the strength of the dance around her, she felt there was no barrier for her to dance as well. And that type of energy and all-encompassing power of dance in this part of the world, in this country, in this state — that says a lot for Ohio, and also for the place of Dancing Wheels in the world.

CF: Anybody want to ask anything else? Is there anything else you’d like to say?

DM: I guess that’s about it.

MDB: Well, you talked about just bringing your style into the rehearsal process, and kind of coming in with your choreographic idea, and then finding a way to make it work with the dancers in the room. But I am curious if you did find ways to investigate — you talked about this moment of gliding — was there any other kind of discovery in the rehearsal process that you found that was generated through the different abilities of the dancers?

DM: Oh yes, almost everything in the choreographic process with the dancers at Dancing Wheels — every moment I’m discovering something because some of the people are in wheelchairs; every moment I am making discoveries about what kind of work, what kind of movement can be done in this chair and connected with the other people, or maybe just by itself — it was always discoveries, moment by moment. I just gave you that particular example — I probably invented a lot of things, movement-wise. One thing, when Mary first was in dance class with me, I think one thing that she liked about my style is that I use momentum to initiate a lot of my movement. And so, when you use momentum and you’ve got wheels underneath you, it causes a lot of beautiful movement — you go *waaah!* (she energetically swipes one arm on an upward diagonal across her body). Because I do this with dancers standing: they’re turning and they’re like “Why am I not going all the way around?” I’m like, “Use your arm.” I’m talking about *any* dancer. I’m saying like, “Don’t make your arm just a picture, use your arm to make you turn. Use it like you’re throwing a ball.” So then a dancer will go “*waah*” – like that. That’s part of my style. So when the people do that — the people in the chairs will do that automatically. They won’t just do like a picture like that — they go “*waaah!*” But then I

have to be like, because it gives you a lot more energy than if you're standing on one foot, then I have to balance — like, “Well, maybe that's a little too much — *waaaah!*” And then you see that different people in the chairs have different abilities. Say, just like you might have a dancer who has a leg that goes up like that — *battement* and the leg goes like — in the wheels, sometimes they can spin and be back like this — spin on their back wheels. And each person can't do that. So you have to say like, “Well, okay, now how do I just feature this or — *dadadadada* — but when I came in, I didn't know anybody could do that. You see. So I had to investigate. And sometime people won't say, “Oh, I have this special thing! I can do this!” So you kind of have to get it out of them. Yeah, sometimes it's also another thing, that you want someone to go *waaaaaab— taaaaaab —waaaaab — baaaaaab* — in a chair? And how far can you go like this? How far? — this is a technical thing— if you push like this and go *aaaaaab— taaaaaab* — how far across the room can you go, and does it go to the end of that musical phrase? — these are all kind of technical things — before you just stop, or before you have to hold on? And sometimes I try to hide some of the functional things that they do. Like, if you have to hold on here — because a functional thing can look like a person walking down the street in their wheelchair. And I say things like that — I say things, they don't mind. They don't care. I say “Let's run over here or walk over here” — they don't mind, because I see them like that. But I want to have the people in the room who are both just sitting there or people sitting in the audience in the wheelchair, you want them to see the magic. I don't want them to see the people look just like they looked when they came in the room, in the wheelchair, like this, and had to sit down. They see the magic — even though the purpose of the work is not necessarily just to be an inspiration. Does that answer your question? Yeah, I mean, inspiration — it's inspiring just like how any art would be inspiring. Okay. Thanks for that question.

MDB: Yeah, thanks for sharing that physical energy.

DM: Oh, okay. Did that answer your question?

CF: Thank you, Diane. It's wonderful to talk with you and hear about your experiences, always.

DM: Oh, oh thank you.

CF: What are you up to in New York?

DM: When I was on that panel with the people about dance and disability, we had some different ideas! Because of my background with Dancing Wheels, and also I have another friend who just left New York recently — her name's Aziza. She had a group called Def Dance Jam Workshop, and she had people with various abilities — some were deaf, some were blind, some were in wheelchairs...and she did all these beautiful works and nothing was about their abilities. So Mary and Aziza, they do not have that — you don't see an advertisement as like “See these people in wheelchairs!” Even the way they — you don't see their upfront information use the word disability. Mary's has it when you read the fineprint, okay? You can see in the posters. The people in New York are saying we are changing, that we don't like the term “people with disabilities.” I said, isn't that the legal term — what the government says? They said, “No. We are disabled dancers. They wanted me to use that term: “disabled dancers.” And they explained to me why that was — which I still didn't absorb completely...and one man was from England — oh, we had a good time. And another lady is very strong, very forceful. And the panel — there was one time when they wanted us to go over to the microphone for something: I was the only one sitting up there who had to walk — I was like the odd person. They just *flowed* across the stage, and I had to get up...

CF: ...and push yourself across foot-by-foot!

DM: I would walk — I felt, like, so conspicuous. Because we did it one at a time. So, that was just one moment. But we had some philosophical differences. I thought they had me on the panel because I had worked with Dancing Wheels, and with Aziza's group. That was not the initial reason — it was because I was black. And they wanted to make a parallel between being a choreographer who is black and dancers with disability — and also some works that you could do that are about black consciousness, and then works that you can do that are about disability and the history of that — but they already had in mind that these were alike: that disability dancers and black dancers, that we have a commonality. They wanted me there to prove that. So I said “Oh! That's why I'm here.” So they had some questions around that. That was another thing about Mary's company, which I didn't mention because it's better not said — it's just kind of natural. But I don't know if this is *because* of her — you know her physical situation — but she always has more people of color in her company than other companies in this area. And she doesn't do it on purpose... maybe it's because other companies, even like ballet companies, are trying to get a uniform type of look or something, but her company is already not a uniform look? She more just takes the people she feels are the best. And we don't ever talk about it. It just is.

CF: It just happens.

DM: Yeah, it just happens.