

# Growing NZ International Dance Day Celebrations

By Jenny Cossey, Hahna Briggs and Tania Kopytko

**In our last magazine we considered growing International Dance Day (IDD) into a nationwide event that would raise the profile of dance. The Dance Industry Strategy recognised dance visibility and recognition as vital to dance's growth. Two organisations have been developing this event over many years and present good models of practice and sound philosophies.**

In Wellington, International Dance Day (IDD) was first held at Te Whaea in 2001 by the Youthdance Education Trust (YET) comprised of Jenny Cossey, Amanda Skoog, Liz Melchior, Liz O'Conner and Helen Forrest. It was supported by the NZ School of Dance and a Creative Communities grant. The ethos of the day has not changed in nine years; a free day of dance from the many dance communities of Wellington to celebrate the art form, promote all dance styles and to encourage the public to participate in a diversity of workshops, and dance performances by amateur and professional dancers. IDD is held as close to April 29th as possible, the date set by UNESCO as World Dance Day.

Over 30 groups have performed over the years including those from Wanganui and Masterton. Annually the event attracts between 1000 and 1500 people as workshop participants or audience members. Many small groups use it as an easy performance opportunity, which does not require them to organise a whole show for their students. The enthusiasm is such that IDD is never short of performances or workshops from the community and even from schools (though it is in the holidays). The NZ Ballet Company and NZ School of Dance have regularly offered open classes for the public to watch. Six IDD have been held at Te Whaea, one at Wellington Performing Arts Centre and two at Te Papa.

YET will be organising the 10th anniversary celebration of IDD in 2011. Having an independent trust, not linked to one particular dance style, allows the Trust to remain politically neutral and build goodwill across the dance sector. It enables teachers, students, dancers and the public to see what other dance groups are doing. Ideas can be shared and dialogue encouraged between diverse groups, creating a stronger dance community.

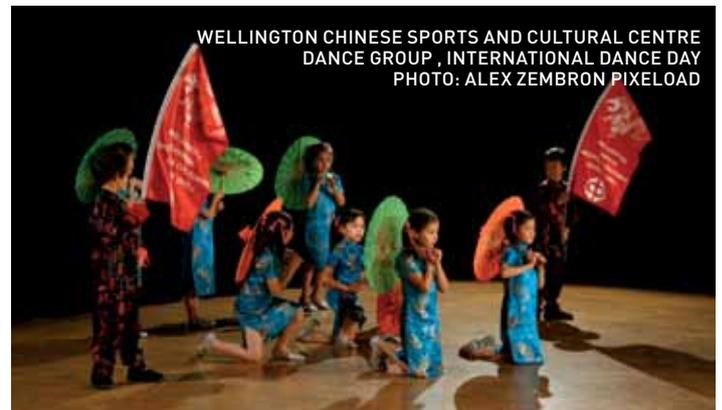
Jenny says "the sign of a successful event is if it is sustainable, and a ten year history of a community dance project makes it a long running community dance event in NZ". YET would like IDD to be celebrated nationwide, so other communities share their dance.

Annual celebrations of dance in all its wonderful glory have been organised by Dance Otakou Otago Inc. since 1995. Originally named *Showcase*, then *The Heritage of Dance Festival*, the event became linked to IDD in 1999 with encouragement from Ralph Buck, then lecturer at the University of Otago.

Dance Otakou's *Heritage of Dance Festival*, which this year became International Dance Day Celebrations, has been supported by the Dunedin City Council and various community grants. It aims to bring people together to create a united effort to honour the dance traditions and innovation found in Dunedin. There is information sharing so people can find out about classes available within their community. The event has always included a variety of dance groups and styles, ranging from belly dance, line dance, ballet, kapa haka and Latin dance to hip hop.

This year, more than 20 dance groups came together in the Otago Museum's Hutton Theatre to perform for each other and the general public in a wildly popular free event. Compered by Eli Gray-Smith, it ended with a grand finale mass dance led by *Folk Dance For Fun's* Evelyn Entwistle. Tony Lane, a visiting UK based tango and swing dance teacher, held *Global Village Dance* as a kind of 'after party' to the IDD celebrations - a social dance party to encourage people of all ages to try a wide range of social dance styles.

Kathryn Olcott, treasurer of Dance Otakou and director of Irish Beat Dance School, believes there are many benefits for her dance students participating in the International Dance Day celebrations such as performing in an open event that is appreciative of all dance forms; learning about different genres of dance; and specifically, the adult students feel more comfortable performing when they see their peers letting loose on the stage. She highly values Dance Otakou's IDD and is eager to see it continue to grow and develop.



WELLINGTON CHINESE SPORTS AND CULTURAL CENTRE  
DANCE GROUP, INTERNATIONAL DANCE DAY  
PHOTO: ALEX ZEMBRON PIXELOAD

2010 was representative of the different types of dance focus, that is, performance, competitive and community based dance. But it could still develop through having audience participation integrated into the event throughout the entire day, and the inclusion of dance forums and visiting dance groups. IDD is the perfect opportunity for the New Zealand dance community to promote the value and importance of dance within our society. "If more local organisations run events to celebrate IDD our NZ national dance community will strengthen and the visibility of dance as an accessible art form will grow exponentially," Kathryn says.

DANZ welcomes your ideas on developing International Dance Day. As the national organisation we would like to be able to promote a huge number of events happening across the country on and around April 29, such as open studios, schools performances or large performance programmes run by YET and Dance Otakou. To promote a variety of events would demonstrate that it is indicative of a large and thriving dance sector. Please provide your information at least 6 weeks ahead of the celebrations. ■