



ICDF Networks

April 2021

Dance Artists



Photo: Christian and Rio from the ABC-Tokyo Ballet Company (see page 4)

"An artist is any individual who has been created by God to use their creativity to make art in their own cultural and personal style and is committed to doing so excellently. An artist on mission is one who does this with the end goal of glorifying the Lord and sharing His glory with those around them."

"Everyone is creative, but not everyone is an artist. Being an artist takes creativity and uses it to craft something beautiful out of the materials that are culturally relevant, whether that be through dance, music, painting, writing, film or another discipline."

Quote from a Blog by Hollen Hostetler titled "Who is an Artist?" first published in the Inspiro Arts Alliance newsletter ... <https://inspiroartsalliance.org/blog/views/who-is-an-artist>. Published with permission.

"The Mindful Artist" - Engaged Faith with Soulful Intentionality and Balance

Cynthia Newland is a well-known choreographer, academic, writer and networker in the ICDF circle. In this article she writes about what it means to live intentionally.

The current definition of mindfulness from the Oxford English Dictionary includes:

1. the quality or state of being conscious or aware of something.
2. a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment, while calmly acknowledging and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations, used as a therapeutic technique.



Photo: Cynthia Newland

Often the act of "mindfulness" involves observation without judgement, neither positive nor negative judgement. Artists may have difficulties approaching aspects of their lives in a "non-judgmental" manner due to the nature of art, and the creative process that often involves assessment and a critical response. Despite this inclination toward self-assessment, exercising the discipline of separating oneself from "who" they are in their core identity to "what" they do or produce, is imperative. It is essential for living intentionally and maintaining a balanced, engaging, and soul rich faith.

Mindfulness involves the practice of being present. It takes training to clear and declutter one's thoughts to honestly and purposefully focus on where you are in any given moment. Thankfully, the scriptures provide practical directives for creative persons or minds in the areas of: The Creator's intention, artistic human design, Jesus being a model, prayer, meditation, and perspectives on our thoughts.

The Creator's Intention

A foundational starting point for mindfully being present, is receiving God's invitation to exist in the path of life He has created for each of us.

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." ~ Psalm 16:11 ESV

Understanding that God expects our all (our entirety) and not presenting ourselves in part, is fundamental for a fully engaged faith.

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." ~ Matthew 22:37 ESV

Artistic Human Design

Reflecting on the Artist of artists creative handiwork aids in our perspective and appreciation of the Master's thoughtful innovation of us and His creation. In mindful recognition, we are in awe of His craft-Godship. This aspect of God being a designer especially resonates with artists who can identify with their Maker as an architect of multifaceted inventions. Contemplating His detailed intricacies, captivates us in reverence and wonder.

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." ~ Psalm 139:14 NIV

"When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" ~ Psalm 8:3-4 ESV

"Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing." ~ Isaiah 40:26 NIV

Jesus as our Model

Considering Jesus as our model, we must prioritize taking time away- we understand Jesus knew the value of communing with the Father as He would often retreat to be alone and to pray.

"But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." ~ Luke 5:16 NIV

He did so in the morning, "Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed." ~ Mark 1:35 NIV

As well as in the evening, "It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." ~ Luke 6:12 NASB

"The Mindful Artist" ... continued

He unselfishly gave of Himself and was fully cognizant of the vital connection between Himself and the Father. We too, empty ourselves in giving our contributions offered in relationships and in our creative endeavors and engagements. The only place for rekindled nourishment to acquire a resurgence of strength and respite, is to pull away from the very thing we believe we are created "to do" and commune with the One who defines and re-defines who "we are".

"Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end." ~ Hebrews 12:2 GNT

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." ~ Phil 2:5 NKJ



Prayer

Art is a beautiful gift from God. Artists who walk in Christian faith are the distinct communicators who provide us with an internal view of the heart of God via their art filled expressions.

We know prayer is a conversation – spiritual communication with the Divine. When artists intentionally commune with God in various forms and styles – especially their refined disciplined artful manner – a delightful exchange occurs. Considering our artistic gift(s) as an act of prayer, we can more fully experience God. These passages serve as a reminder of communing with God in speaking, listening, and seeing – the ways various artists display their creative and innovative creations.

"Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you." ~ Jeremiah 29:12 NIV

"This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us." ~ 1 John 5:14 NIV

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people..." ~ Ephesians 1:18

Meditation

Reflection through meditation has multiple benefits including: God and self-awareness, emotional health, aiding to our focus and concentration, reducing anxiety and so much more. Choosing to meditate on God's word helps us to have a greater understanding of who God is, understand our own identity, to hear the voice and will of God, to increase our faith, as well as being a source of wisdom and peace.

"I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done." ~ Psalm 143:5 NIV

"May my meditation be pleasing to him, as I rejoice in the LORD." ~ Psalm 104:34 NIV

"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds." ~ Psalm 77:11-12 NIV

Thoughts

Some researchers say most humans have over six thousand thoughts daily. Intentional awareness and providing directives to our own thoughts will greatly aid us in balancing an engaged faith. When purposeful thoughts are engaged, we can bring ourselves to the present, set our intentions in order, achieve goals, and gain better control over our responses.

"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." ~ Colossians 3:2 ESV

"Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things." ~ Philippians 4:8 NIV

The mindful artist has the ability to "be transformed" by renewing their mind, Romans 12:2. This renewal process is the work God does in us as we offer ourselves fully to Him. With the new mercies God provides each day comes the invitation to live in soulful balance in faith, trusting God will keep us in His perfect plan and care.

Understanding the value of maintaining inner harmony, we can ask ourselves, "What is my practice as a mindful artist, intentionally engaging and bringing balance in my faith, soul and creative practice?"

Cynthia A. Newland

Finding Christ at the heart of a Ballet Company

Christian Martinu, the Country Contact for ICDF in Japan, shares with us his testimony on the beginnings and the ministry of the ABC-Tokyo Ballet Company

Being raised in Vienna, Austria, as a Roman Catholic Christian, it was always beautiful to see our huge cathedrals in town from the inside and outside. Standing in them gave me a glimpse of how huge and wonderful heaven must be. When I started to work as a professional classical ballet dancer in the likewise huge Vienna State Opera Ballet, it gave me a feeling of being special and chosen. At this time I did not realize myself that the connection of faith with profession was entirely missing.

After professional adventures in the USA my wife Rio Mitani, who was the first Japanese going through the whole program of the Vienna State Opera School, and me arrived in Japan to start a new life. We found an English speaking church and started to worship there while dancing, performing and teaching in Tokyo. When one of the pastors retired we have been thinking which kind of present we could give him that was different from the usual “farewell presents”. The idea to dance for him was born.

The short dance-present was very much applauded in church and for the first time I got a feeling how faith and ballet could be connected. In the following year we toured Australia and one of the “gigs” was to perform at “Church together” in Perth, Australia. Little did I know that we performed in an amazing set up in between the most wonderful pastors teaching in front of several thousands people. When we sat down after dancing and I was worshipping in the huge crowd myself, the Dance Ministry in Japan was born in my heart.



Photo: Christian Martinu and Rio Mitani

Immediately the next year when touring Austria, we put JOSEPH & MARY - NATIVITY into the repertoire of our company and performed in these huge cathedrals I stood in as a child. One of prophecies given to us was that through our work with classical professional dancers we can go places others cannot go. So we continue to create and perform pieces like MOSES - PRINCE OF EGYPT, our rendition of LES MISERABLES and others and use the time during the rehearsals to share with our dancers how God has His hands involved in our lives. The “in-reach” during rehearsals became an important part, as all of our dancers experience the loss of loved ones, and questions come up which cannot be answered by them alone.

During the years many of our dancers - who happen to be those very specialized classical ballet dancers - turned to Christ and became baptized. Regardless of their personal decisions we minister daily to them, as for many dancers our ballets and lives will be the only bible they ever will open.

We know that many of them will turn later in their lives to Jesus when they will face crises and are desperate. When their lives hit rock bottom they will remember what they have heard about Jesus, what they have danced and how Rio and Chris treated them. Rio and I work disguised as ballet teachers in the world of classical ballet to reach those souls who love this art as much as we do. And if one soul becomes saved through what we do, it is all worth it.

Chris Martinu

Lucinda Coleman - a language of the spirit

This interview with Lucinda Coleman is a follow-up after featuring the dance film “Becoming” in the ICDF February newsletter for Missions and Social Concern.

1. Lucinda thank you for being available for this interview but before we talk about your work please give us a quick glimpse of where your love for dance came from.

As a little girl, my Mum took me to see a ballet production of ‘Romeo and Juliet’ and I told her I wanted to do what the dancers were doing. My Mum promptly enrolled me in ballet classes—which I loved! On reflection though, I think when I said “that’s what I want to do” I really meant, I want to learn to speak that language. I saw something incredibly beautiful, ethereal and nuanced in the language of dance and I yearned to speak it, dance it, make it, create it, share it and dwell within it. As I continued to study dance, I discovered this was language of spirit. I felt most whole when my body, soul, mind, and spirit moved as one entity, communicating with others through unworded corporeal text. Sometimes the communication of dance is purely emotional; other times it is the athleticism of skin and bone; other times there is transcendent spiritual communion. Mostly, for me, it has been all of these things, imperfectly formed but filled with hope.

2. The first time we got to know you was when you were director of Remnant Dance and we see dance films with this company as far back as 2012 with “My Grandmother’s Piano”. How did it come about that you became interested in utilising the film medium as a platform to record your dance performances?

Not long after I began taking dance classes as a child, I began making up dances on the cement floor of my parents’ garage. I discovered I enjoyed playing with choreographic forms, and with further training and experience, began to experiment with making dance works professionally. I deeply love the live theatre medium and have made short and long contemporary dance works, site-specific dance works, interdisciplinary dance theatre pieces, as well as experimental dance works for community, education, industry contexts, internationally and throughout Australia. I began experimenting with screendance as a genre when my husband convinced me that our three children would benefit from spending endless weeks traversing outback Australia, with one 4WD, one tent, and all our own water, food, and fuel. The children did love remote camping. I did not. As a way to cope with the vast expanse of deserts and unwieldy corrugated tracks through bush scrub, wild mountains and deep gorges, I began making dance films. My husband was the cameraman and when I suddenly had an idea for a sequence of shots, I’d give direction to his filming my dancing in dirt. Post-production editing occurred back in the comfort of a city, with many good cups of coffee. I have come to love choreographing for the screen as there are endless possibilities for telling a story or creating an artistic piece, using the camera as a choreographic device.



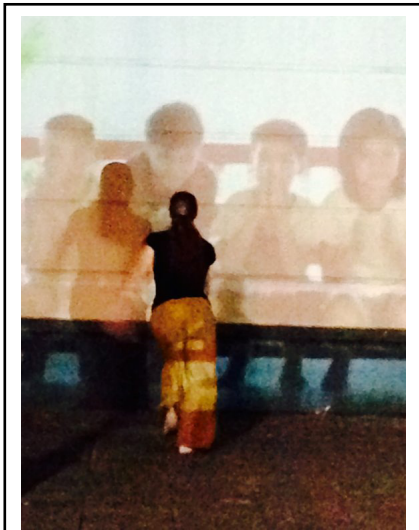
Photograph of (L-R) Katie Chown, Nina Rovis-Hermann, Charity Ng, Lucinda Coleman, by Julian Masters, on location for Remnant Dance film shoot ‘My Grandmother’s Piano’, in costumes by Kate Townsend, Bicton, Western Australia, 2011, reprinted with permission.

3. As an academic you are involved in many presentations and projects internationally such as the 2014 World Dance Alliance Global Summit. Your work in Myanmar for “Meeting Place” seemed to generate a lot of interest and social themes are an important part of your work. Could you tell us more about your exploration of social issues through your work?

Dance, as with all literary, visual and performing arts, has the potential to inspire, agitate, instigate social change, impacting culture and inviting reconciliation and renewal in the midst of pain, poverty and injustice. At the heart of what I seek to make, as a dancer, choreographer, teacher and researcher is space for engagement with the Other: human and divine. The Myanmar project was part of my PhD research, ‘Sites of justice: Face-to-face

Lucinda Coleman ... continued

encounters through dance-making in Meeting Places'. The artistic exchange between Remnant Dance artists and youth at a Children's Centre in Myanmar revealed social justice as the heart of the dance-making experience. The significance of arts research in this context included knowledge creation in the body, with others, and that a space of agency is created for ethical engagement, specifically through the language of dance. The creation of new dance through cross-cultural, multi-arts forms and interdisciplinary contexts enabled space for narratives of justice to emerge along the frontline of dance's particular mode of communication.



Photograph of Katie Chown, performing in front of dance film, 'Meeting Places' for the Fremantle Festival, by Amanda Humphries, 2014, reprinted with permission.

To watch short clips of the 'Meeting Places' projects, as toured in Australia:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeXYJAc1vUI>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J_vJbpKMuis

4. This brings us to your most recent project of "Becoming" that we featured in our February newsletter this year. It was a powerful and sensitive choreography showing some of the different aspects of the nursing and midwifery professions. Could you take us behind the scenes and share some of the creative processes that you went through before coming to the final product?

The contemporary dance film, 'Becoming', features six dancers performing a series of duos and solos in different locations, accompanied by original, devised soundscape. The dance film integrates choreography, movement composition (use of body, time, space, dynamics) with cinematic conventions to create a hybrid dance form for the screen. The work has been delicately shaped by the reflections of experienced Registered Nurses/Registered Midwives; the recorded words have determined the form of dance and provided the basis for the film's soundscape. The intention was to create an interdisciplinary piece which playfully challenges stereotypes of nurses through authentic storytelling and reflexive account, to celebrate the '2020 International Year of the Nurse and Midwife'. I began by interviewing twelve experienced Nurses/Midwives on staff at Edith Cowan University, Western Australian. My intention was to listen to the stories of those moments which most shaped the Nurses/Midwives becoming professional care-givers. The interviews were loosely based on the following three questions:

- Would you share your first experience of managing a situation of pain/ crisis - on your own?
- Would you please describe your first/ significant/ formative experience of delivering/ caring for a baby and new mother?
- Would you share your first, or most formative, experience of a patient dying?

I found, throughout the interviews, the Nurses/Midwives spoke freely and honestly about deeply formative moments in their practice which have unalterably shaped who they are as professionals, to this day. Many of the stories were painfully raw and the impact of situations of trauma were communicated not only through words but through tears, gestures and in facial expressions. Themes began to emerge across the stories told and it became clear the use of water (tears, sweat, liquids) was a fitting metaphor for the Nurses/Midwives becoming fully seasoned and mature practitioners (washing hands, bathing patients/babies, immersion in care of another person whose body is made mostly of water). The descriptions of what it actually feels like to become a Nurse/Midwife shaped the choreography and the spoken reflections formed the core of the film's soundscape, which also includes sounds of running water, hospital noises, ocean waves and composed instrumental music.



Film still [L-R] Katie Chown, Esther Scott, from dance film, 'Becoming' filmed on location at Cottesloe Beach, Western Australia, 2019, used with permission.

Lucinda Coleman ... continued

Rehearsals for the film began with the dancers, Sarah Chaffey, Katie Chown, Samantha Coleman, Stephanie Khoo, Charity Ng, Esther Scott, in mid-September, 2020, followed by a series of film shoots on location with cinematographer, Rakib Erick, which were completed by early November, 2020. During this time, I also worked with soundscape composer/musician, Alix Hamilton, who visited film sets and began devising material for the soundscape. Post-production was smooth as Rakib, Alix and I, worked closely together to ensure the dance film was an authentic response to the stories and experiences of the nurses/midwives.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OGUrrJCTgLo>

5. As a final request - we came across a beautiful piece of writing by you ... almost poetic prose called "A Final Lucid Thought" that we would like to share with our readers. Would that be possible?

A FINAL LUCID THOUGHT

Summer, 2019

Life is a dance. I brush the air with my fingertips, twisting through space. I bend in to listen as another dancer speaks. Our conversation spirals larger and wider as we gesture and laugh, our feet shifting us forward. We emulate each other. We play. The taller tilting body catapults sideways, launching a complex manipulation of bone, muscle, and sinew. The movement is a unique imprint on the surface of the earth—and on me, as I scurry to keep up. I call out, my heart beating faster. I skip, trip, and reach to catch hold of the tilting form ahead. I want to understand the inflection of monologue and interject my own thoughts. The extensions of the other body compel me to wait and observe. I sway. My head twists left. I close my eyes. I feel the breath of a moving form, then stillness.

Life is dance. I am alone in the space. I feel acute loneliness swelling within organs restrained only by skin. My hands clench. I fall backwards. Caught by an instinctive reaction against gravity, my back foot thrusts my torso skyward. I leap high, fall hard: recover stronger. I soar, uninhibited. I feel the flush in my cheeks as I gulp in air. I spin by myself, and I balance on one foot. I make up fancy new steps, and giggle at my own silliness. I am partnered by time. Brimming with possibility, I explore the range of my body. I trust. I test boundaries, crafting nuanced phrases. I ask with my eyes, my knees, my toes, my spleen. I question with my elbows, my heart, my stomach. I listen with my spirit, my mind. The articulation of speech is distinct; the conventions of genre well-practiced. I am free to follow the path of the dance.

Life's dance: unexpected beauty, danger, risk, terror. We try. We fall. We fly. We can be still. We can be frenetic. We are listeners, receivers, movers, speakers. The pulse of a musical refrain inspires, creates, incites, impels motion. We act. We invite contact improvisation. We love, embrace, and expand. We ache, hurt, and so, wait. And w a i t. As the bodies change, so does the dance. Timing is critical for changing the steps. We attune our bodies to the dynamics of others. Delicately, we exit. We return for a final encore, joining the cast gambolling in joy and perfection.



Photos: Lucinda Coleman

To visit the Remnant Dance Theatre website and final Remnant Dance Lucid Blog, 2019-20 go to:
<http://www.remnantdance.com.au/index.php/connect/lucis-bloga-lucid-look-at-life.html>

To read about how Remnant Dance has responded to broader social and economic changes go to:
<http://www.remnantdance.com.au/index.php/make/whats-oncalendar-of-events.html>

Kyrie Eleison: A Lament for these Days

There are more opportunities these days to be part of a mixed media production where dancers can work with artists from other disciplines to bring across a powerful message and one such a project is the “Look Around You/Kyrie Eleison” video produced by the Northumbria Community. As we read about the project we were struck by their hearts as they set about it and on their website we find the following:

“We dreamt it would provide a gathering – and ‘joining in’ – place for those across our Northumbria Community network.

A place of lament and resonance

in these strange, disturbing and difficult days.

A means of calling forth who we are, and are meant to be,
as creatives, dreamers, edge-walkers, followers of Christ.

Acknowledging the pain, asking for mercy

and, through intentional vulnerability,

learning more of how to share the road together:

singers, dancers, creative artists of all kinds

bringing who they are to construct

a beautiful reflection of God’s heart,

for such a time as this.”

(To find out more about the project go to ... <https://monasticliving.org/kyrie-eleison-a-lament-for-these-days/?fbclid=IwA>)

We asked two of the dancers to share with us how they approached their choreographies for this project.

Andy Raine, ICDF Network Leader for the “Men in Dance” Network, writes:

My difficulty in trying to contribute dance elements for this video began with me knowing and loving the song for many years. I’ve sung it, played the bodhran for it as a sung piece, and prayed with it. Never has it inspired me to dance. If it had been going to, I figured it would have provoked that in me by now.

After being part of the sound recording [one of many voices] and singing it often in the shower, I finally came up with a move of sitting up in bed, being challenged to be aware of what was happening in the world I’m planted in, rubbing sleep from my eyes to look around and reach out, whilst contracting backwards, but forcing myself to see. Martin had also asked me to be filmed and photographed standing on top of the Heugh on Holy Island where we live, looking out across the water. I pictured myself doing that dressed in my kilt which is the black and dull white of the Shepherds’ Plaid, the particular tartan native to Northumbria.



Photo: Andy Raine

The only day we could film it was bright, and sometimes sunny, but very icy, and with a cold wind. I’d thought of changing into trousers to dance, but it was so cold my wife Anna said we’d just film both the dance sequence and the reaching over the water with me in my kilt so as to get us out of the cold sooner! On our way to the top of the Heugh we reached a place on its side, and to my surprise I realised there was already the ideal place to rest as if with a stone for a pillow. I knew both Mel Neale and Kevin Fear had been asked to dance as well, so I only did the very first few lines, then stood and reached out high above on the Heugh.

I was pleased and surprised by how what I sent in was able to be used and flowed with the other elements of the video. I had to trust that Martin Neil would have the creative genius to combine the many visual possibilities, as he had with the sung, spoken and percussive elements in developing the final soundtrack.

Mel Neale from CoActive Arts writes:

This song is clearly a heart cry, and as such for me the movement was about embodiment. For me the powerful thing about dance is that, even if you are not the one moving, but you are a witness to it, you connect first through your conscious emotional body. We know how it physically feels to be in grief, anguish, sadness, despair, joy, hope, peace, love, relief so when we see this in a body, or bodies we connect, we become part of the moment. This might be in small gestural or naturalistic movements or those abstracted and performed with great virtuosity, still as witnesses our body responds and connects.

In creating movements in response to this song, I wanted to embody the prayer. The words were very important, but I was not creating actions to go with the song, I wanted to physically journey through the song, the prayer. So my process was to take the words as my starting point and to listen deeply to what they meant to me, right now, in this moment and to express that in my movement, where did I feel it, where was the strain, where was the release. The music served to inform the length of the movement, the time I lived in that moment, in that feeling and heart cry. This is by no means how I would always approach responding to a song as a stimulus, but in this case the music seemed to be in service to the words, to draw them out. My movements were simple, but I allowed the postures to take strain as they morphed from one in to the next, as such the movements were an exertion, they were hard work. This felt like an embodiment of the prayer to me, it was a deeply connecting act to pray this heart cry in movement, and I can only hope that it also resonated with those who connected with the prayer through witnessing it, in the collective form it was shared.



Photo: Mel Neale

It was really interesting to see how my part was edited into the whole collage of responses. When I was working on it, all I could do was commit to the intention of what I was doing. So, when placed with others it gave me a sense of connectedness, as each of us in the place that we were deeply present and as such were present to each other, and those who bore witness, in the same heart cry.

(To watch the video go to ... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DEdVz1OkqzM>)

