



MEDIA RELEASE

Contact: Kate Tsubata, 301-257-4243

**WV DANCERS ON GLOBAL STAGE
Red Carpet Premiere Highlights Dancers as Cultural Ambassadors**

When filmmaker Kate Tsubata decided to bring her long-envisioned concept of a dance movie based on Beethoven’s world-embracing Ode to Joy Symphony No. 9, it was no surprise that West Virginia artists would play a major role in the project.

“Three of the 21 dance groups selected for the movie, and several of the advisors and locations used, are from West Virginia,” Tsubata explained. “But that’s not surprising; we have known West Virginia to be an incubator of powerful artistic production for quite some time.”

Ms. Laurie Goux, who choreographed and performed both with the Spirit Wing Dance Ensemble, and with the Appalachian Ensemble with Will Roboski, has arranged for a Red Carpet Premiere Screening of the film at the Virginia Thomas Law Center for the Performing Arts, at West Virginia Wesleyan College on Saturday, March 16, 2024.

“We will present live demonstrations of the dance forms represented in the film at 11 a.m.” Ms. Goux said, “And then the movie will be shown at 2 p.m. This is a chance for audiences to explore the artistic diversity of our region within a global film production.” The event is free and all are welcome. Featured dancers will be on hand for photos or autographs.

Tsubata had already been involved in a number of productions shot within the state, from independent film projects to the mini-series “American Speed.” “Our team has always found West Virginia to be highly film-friendly,” she said. “We were able to call upon the wisdom and talents of film advisors like Eric “Doc” Benson, Jamie Cope, Barb McQuain and Katherine Walsh Ryan. Through their good offices, we found dance groups representing three world cultures, and locations that could fit each one.”

African Caribbean, Scottish Highland, and Appalachian dance forms are each featured in the film. Katy Dillon, artistic director of the uplifting West Virginia Highland Dancers, helped gain permission to shoot at Davis & Elkins College in Elkins, WV. “We were amazed to find three beautiful outdoor spaces on the campus which helped convey the feeling of Scotland, Appalachia and the Caribbean,” said Tsubata. “The result is truly breathtaking.”

Dancing Joy illuminates Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9, through the traditional dance of 21 world cultures set against stunning natural and historical venues around the globe.

Some 200 dance artists choreographed and performed in the film. The crew traveled 56,000 miles to reach dancers in Indonesia, Fiji, Nepal, Korea, Botswana, Greece, the UK, and a dozen other world locations.

Producer Kate Tsubata prepared for 12 years before embarking on the film’s production. Director Lan T. Lee—herself a choreographer and dancer—utilized the language of dance itself to guide the performers, many of whom spoke no English. Editor Mie Smith meticulously matched dance to the symphonic sound, creating a tapestry of movement, music and scenic beauty.



Fewer than one percent of movies are female led. “Because our producer, director, editor and colorist are all women, we were able to bring a unique sensitivity that helped us bond with each new cultural group. The male Director of Photography and Camera operator had substantial experience in international production, so we could treat every performer and cultural venue with deep respect.”

Of special significance was the inclusion of the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing culture, said Tsubata. “We wanted to honor Beethoven’s own battle with hearing loss, so the first group we approached was the Gallaudet Dance Company, who perform American Sign Language Dance to interpret the choral lyrics. We also use English subtitles during the choral sections to translate the German sung lyrics, so the audience can understand Beethoven’s message.”

“Each dance group choreographed their segments to music chosen from the symphony,” said Lan T. Lee, the director. As a dancer and choreographer herself, she learned each group’s choreography in order to guide the camera operators and direct the action.

Editor Mie Smith painstakingly wove the 4K footage—shot from dozens of angles—together with the stirring music.

The film dispensed with some of the conventions of documentary production. “There is no voiceover, narration or interviews,” said Tsubata. “We wanted people to experience the film as they would experience a concert, or as if they traveled to those countries and were seeing and feeling the dance in person.”

“The resulting film is highly immersive: it begins with the silence of Beethoven’s world, composing the symphony, then goes into his vision as the symphonic music begins. We experience the vastness of our world—and the beauty of each culture—in a journey of the senses.”

Dancing Joy has been honored by **Docs Without Borders** with “Outstanding Excellence” and “Excellence in Editing.” The **IndieDance Film Festival** awarded it Gold in Choreography, Silver in Cinematography and Bronze for Producing, Bronze for Directing, and Bronze for Best Feature. The **Lady Filmmakers Festival 2020** named *Dancing Joy*, “Best Dance Feature Film.” *Dancing Joy* was an official selection for the 2021 **Alexandria Film Festival** and for the 2023 **Rethink Dance Film Festival**.

“The film is a tribute to Beethoven’s vision of all mankind linked in joy,” said Tsubata. “He wrote this when his world was torn by strife, devastated by violence, struggling to find hope. He struggled to produce this uplifting music, which broke with the traditions of symphonic music until that moment.

“In honor of Beethoven’s message and music, we brought world artists together to add their gifts and to carry on his message. We are so glad to bring this powerful film to the people of West Virginia, who have played such an important role in creating this lovely film.”

--END--