



MEDIA RELEASE

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DANCE FILM EXPLODES BARRIERS
Artistic Journey Uncovers Humanity's Shared Longing

The feature film, *Dancing Joy*, flouts documentary traditions—and genres—to tell a story that embraces the entire world.

Dancing Joy illuminates Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, the Choral or Ode to Joy, using the traditional dance of 21 world cultures, performing in stunning natural and historical venues around the globe.

The 78-minute film transports viewers around the world, accompanied by the stirring music first performed in 1824 with the then-deaf Ludwig von Beethoven conducting in Vienna.

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.

As a female-led production, the film is one of less than one percent of all films being made. “The producer, director, editor and colorist are all women. This created a unique sensitivity and awareness of human relationship that forged deep bonds with each new cultural group.” Our DP and camera operator had substantial experience working around the world, with those of traditional cultures, so we were able to operate with respect and honor for every performer, venue and dance form.

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 originated ASL Dance, and who play a key role in the film, including the sign-language-based dance moves to interpret the choral lyrics.”

Authenticity was a high priority for the production. Capturing the historic and natural beauty of the area as well as the traditions and movement of each culture, was paramount. Handheld camerawork, drone and gopro footage augments that on tripods, to bring the viewer into close proximity and engagement with the dance while filming sustainably.

The crew traveled to 4 continents, northern and southern hemispheres-- and Oceania. In the two months of shooting, they experienced summer and winter, high altitude and sea level-- wearing the camera gear throughout their travel to ensure its safety.

“Local crew and unit production teams in each nation helped translate, navigate local regulations, and do wardrobe, makeup, catering.” Danish cinematographer Henrik Meyer and Japanese Camera operator Yousuke Kiname, worked hard to capture the sweep and movement of each dance tradition, to tell the visual story.



“Each dance was planned and choreographed in advance, to music chosen for them from the symphony,” said Lan T. Lee, the director, herself a choreographer, who would learn 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. Colorist Anastasia Shepherd worked with Smith to re-create the natural brilliance of color and skin tone for each setting.

The film dispensed with some of the conventions of documentary production. “We decided against 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: beginning with the silence of Beethoven’s world, composing the symphony, then gradually being introduced to the scenic beauty of the locations, the music carries us from place to place--a journey of the senses.”

“Even classical music enthusiasts may be unfamiliar with the poetic lyrics of the *Ode to Joy*, so we’ve translated the sung portions into English and captioned it in 11 languages, and the ASL dance. Our goal was to make the film barrier-free.”

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**.

“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 in sight and movement. It is our contention that the world’s people share a deep and intractable longing to live in love, in creativity, and in joy. We hope the film will inject hope into human hearts. And perhaps nudge us all into realizing that peace might just be possible.”

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