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Story Topic: AXIS Dance Company

Word Count: 461

The house lights dimmed and the audience was filled with anticipation as the first notes of music filled the concert hall. Lights illuminated a blank stage as the first dancer entered. Wearing simple grey clothing, the night of contemporary dance begun with an ensemble of student dancers.

The Harrisonburg community entered the Mainstage Theatre at the Forbes Center for the Performing Arts on Jan. 21 to watch the AXIS Dance Company in Concert. The Company included two dancers in wheelchairs. Founded in 1987, the AXIS Dance Company has had several dancers with mobile disabilities, from quadriplegics to amputees.

Professor Kate Trammell was instrumental in the organization of allowing the company to come to the university. She believed that dance has something for everyone and expressed her desire to work with this company. After one and a half years of preparation, collaboration with the community, and fundraising, her dream of working with the Company was fulfilled.

The recital consisted of three routines. Several students and Trammell joined the dancers of the company for the first routine, *Light Shelter*. The routines were minimalistic, focusing on the dancers instead of props. The second routine, *To Color Me Different*, featured two dancers from the company alone on the stage. After a short intermission, the recital ended with *Full of Words*, a routine that added in several props, including a bath tub and an armchair.

“After the first [routine], I had this sad feeling, but I didn’t know why I was feeling sad,” said sophomore Alexandria Schroder. “After the second [routine], I suddenly realized it was because I wanted to be a part of it. I’m sad I’m not in it.”

Thunderous applause followed each routine. The night concluded with a standing ovation by the entire audience.

“I’ve never seen anything like it before,” said Schroder. “It’s really amazing.”

After the recital, the dancers came on stage to hold a brief question and answer session. One dancer said that their purpose was to give people the opportunity to stare and through that, they challenged stereotypes. Many students enjoyed the discussion.

“[It] added so much value to it,” said senior Chet Craft. “It just made it so real.”

Other audience members appreciated the opportunity to question the dancers. Dr. Thomas Moran, also a professor at the university and a key organizer, clearly summed up the company’s mission. As someone with a disability, he learned to accept the way he moved. Instead of fixing his movements, he embraced them. Another round of boisterous applause supplemented the sentiment.

“There are people with disabilities, but they’re not being held back, they’re just doing what they can and pushing their limits,” said Craft.

A small reception was held after the talk back where audience members continued to interact with the performers.