

Touch Compass

Your Touch Compass Update!

All day every day not just today!

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- All day. Every day. Not just today #IDPD2024
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- Amplifying Disability Leadership - Co-Chair Drew McMillan on the hot seat!
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- * and more!

Kia ora!

Nau mai haere mai from your friendly neighbourhood leader in professional disability-led arts. Ngā mihi mahana, warmest greetings to you on this International Day of Persons with Disabilities.



**AMPLIFY ACCESS
AMPLIFY LEADERSHIP**



ID: A deliberately greyed out image of an analog amplifier set with all sliders down. Across the centre of the image are the words Amplify Access Amplify

Leadership. The hashtag for International Day of Persons with Disabilities #IDPD2024 is seen clearly at the top of the image.

Can't Amplify anything without Access!

International Day of Persons with Disabilities: A call for active action beyond today.

Too often, this day becomes a platform for feel-good stories and “inspiration porn,” a moment of fleeting elevated empathy while overlooking the systemic barriers that persist year-round.

DISCLAIMER: I'll probably break some kind of word limit. Views are my own.

Aotearoa New Zealand – On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we acknowledge the significance of raising awareness for the rights and well-being of people with lived experience of Disability (LED). The theme of 2024 per the United Nations - Amplifying the Leadership of Persons with Disabilities for an Inclusive and Sustainable Future.

You can't Amplify without Access

For those living with disability, accessibility, and full participation in society is not a one-day observance - it's a daily reality.

Tomorrow, many of you will continue lives largely free of barriers, while people with disabilities face the ongoing challenge of navigating spaces that are not built for them. This is a wake-up call for all decision-makers, influencers, and power-holders to make meaningful, lasting change. It's time to dismantle barriers and ensure equal opportunities across all aspects of life - not just for one day, but every day.

In my role amplifying leadership for NZ's leading Disability-led arts organisation, I often draw attention to Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which

Aotearoa New Zealand ratified in 2008. This critical article underscores the right of all people with disabilities to fully participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport on an equal basis with others. Equal. Not made way for or worked around. Equal.

For people with LED, access to the arts and culture is a fundamental right, NOT a privilege.

Article 30(1) compels us to ensure that cultural materials are accessible—through captioning, audio description, and sign language interpretation. Public spaces and places, museums, theatres, libraries, and national heritage sites must be accessible to all, NOW, not just an aspiration for the future. Yet, we see physical, attitudinal, and systemic barriers standing in the way of full participation.

This call to action is for Aotearoa New Zealand's cultural institutions to Amplify their Disabled Leadership, to lead with accessibility at the core of their decision-making and innovation.

Disabled creatives are Fire! 🔥 🔥 🔥

Bringing immense artistic and intellectual potential, enriching society with unique aesthetics and personal perspectives. These contributions should not be treated as token gestures, trotted out to tick a DEI box, win you an award for access and inclusion efforts - but as valuable assets that shape our collective cultural identity.

Ensuring access to arts education, mentorship, and platforms for creative expression must be a central priority in New Zealand's national arts strategy and a critical part of policy to enable LED folk to live good lives.

Sustainable futures, nah, not until we get past a subsistence present.

Equally critical is the recognition of the right to participate in active recreational and sporting activities. As outlined in Article 30(5), this access is

essential for physical well-being, social connection, and community integration. Ensuring that both children and adults with disabilities have equal opportunities to engage in play, recreation, and sport requires the removal of barriers, provision of adaptive equipment, and accessible training and venues. Sadly Aotearoa is sorely lacking in all of the above.

Show me the theatre spaces where a wheelchair-using professional performing artist can roll through the front door and access the stage without fear of a Minotaur as they get lost in the labyrinth of side entry, service door access points and "where is the wheelchair lift?". That's right, we're still waiting too. They are out there, but few and far between.

In a bicultural nation such as Aotearoa, it is vital that we also honour the cultural and linguistic identities of disabled tāngata whaikaha Māori tāngata whenua, tāngata turi, and tagata sa'ilimalo Pacific peoples. The intersection of disability rights and cultural rights where Māori and Pacific, and d/Deaf perspectives enrich our cultural landscape, and we must make certain that these voices are heard and valued.

Fulfilling our obligations under the UNCRPD demands robust policy, adequate funding, and unwavering commitment. More importantly, it requires a societal shift, recognising disability as a diverse and valuable aspect of humanity.

Every day is an opportunity to create an accessible Aotearoa where people with lived experience can thrive.

On this International Day of Persons with Disabilities, we reaffirm our commitment to making disabled dreams a reality, access a lived reality, not just for one day but for every day.

He tangata takahi manuhiri, he marae puehu
A person who mistreats his guest has a dusty Marae.

JT



Speaking of amplifying access to amplify leadership, nau mai hare mai to the first of a new section - The Hot Seat with ...

ANDREW "DREW" MCMILLAN Co-Chair Touch Compass

New Co-Chair of Touch Compass - What's brought you to this point?

An accretion process! Performer, musician, and my accident, leaving me with a spinal cord injury, my work with Touch Compass both pre-accident and post-accident, non-disabled and disabled, and as a Chair at the Audio Foundation. These are all the elements; circulating each other, like the forming of the planets around the sun, matter attracting matter, an accretion process. There's not just one thing I can point to.

What does being the Co-Chair mean to you?

I didn't take on this role lightly, there's a responsibility here, something bigger than ourselves, a weight of sorts that we carry forward. Different than other boards I've been associated with. We've really leant into the disability-led

kaupapa that we started as an organisation back in 2021. Let's just say I'm getting comfortable in the uncomfortable again. When I joined as a trustee I learned our kaupapa, our wonderful strategic plan, and those powerful pillars that support that, co-created with and by our communities of people and practice. It took a little time to get comfortable with that weight, and now that's shifted again, but I'm good with that. I have Chair experience, I have Touch Compass experience and it's all about putting that together with our focus on a more equitable future for artists and creators.

Experience with Touch Compass as both disabled and non-disabled - any difference?

The elephant in the room is that I have the unique experience to collaborate with Touch Compass as both a non-disabled composer, musician, improviser and as a disabled musician composer, improviser. But what will really bake your noodle is that my interactions then, and now, no difference. Artistically or professionally there's no difference in my engagement, as a musician, composer, Chair. I intend to be a sounding board and coach for the organisation and support our diversification in our artforms.

The state of the sector and navigating that for Touch Compass?

It's an interesting time for the arts right now. We have to manage our resources, our people, and where the funds come from while keeping our ship steered towards a new horizon. I'm excited to sit in this Chair seat, offer what I can, learn more, and identify for myself and our collective brains trust of trustees just what is our way of governance, what works best, for us. I'm excited to work alongside Beckie (Co-Chair) as we steer the ship and support our GM and ADP to make a real difference for Aotearoa arts.

Three words that sum up Touch Compass right now?

If I could sum up what we are and will be I'd say: Innovative, Expansive, Collaborative.

Ngā mihi Drew, you're off the hot seat!

Beckie, you're up next time!



🔥💖🔥 **Standing O's for AIGA!**

It rocked the Nelson Arts Festival this October!

The warrior spirit of Lusi Faiva was especially on show in this powerhouse performance.

"The Nelson Arts Festival was an incredible experience! While it was a whirlwind—70 hours of packing in and out—the atmosphere was simply electric.

Performing at the Theatre Royal was a highlight, and it was my first time on their stage, which made it even more special. The venue is impressively accessible, with a lift allowing easy stage access.

The Nelson Arts Festival team was exceptional. They went above and beyond

to ensure all our needs were met, and working alongside Kelly from Platform Interpreting NZ was a fantastic experience, bringing artistic NZSL interpretation to the work.

We encountered some challenges, but they only boosted our confidence in delivering our accessibility-driven show.

AIGA. Overall, it was a phenomenal event! Ngā mihi nui Whakatū Nelson"

-- Lusi



ID: In this image, Lusi and the AIGA team are celebrating together after their

AIGA show. The setting features a cozy home, with a kitchen area in the background where snacks are spread across the counter, creating a casual, inviting, and celebratory atmosphere. Most of the team is gathered on and around the couch at the center of the image. The team members are smiling, flashing peace signs, and radiating joy, relaxation, and celebration. Their expressions and body language reflect a strong sense of camaraderie, capturing the hard work and rewarding experience of performing at the festival. This moment encapsulates their shared success and the positive energy of the occasion.



IN DEVELOPMENT: WHITE NOISE

Alisha McLennan Marler has just wrapped up taking over TAPAC, in development for 2024 alongside choreographic collaborator Jessie McCall and technical collaborators Filament Eleven 11's Brad Gledhill and independent musician composer Drew McMillan (that's right! Co-Chair of Touch Compass). They were powerfully supported by aerial consultant Eve Gordon (Dust Palace legend!) and rigger extraordinaire Jaine Mieka.

Not even a fully finished work yet "White Noise" is already garnering some

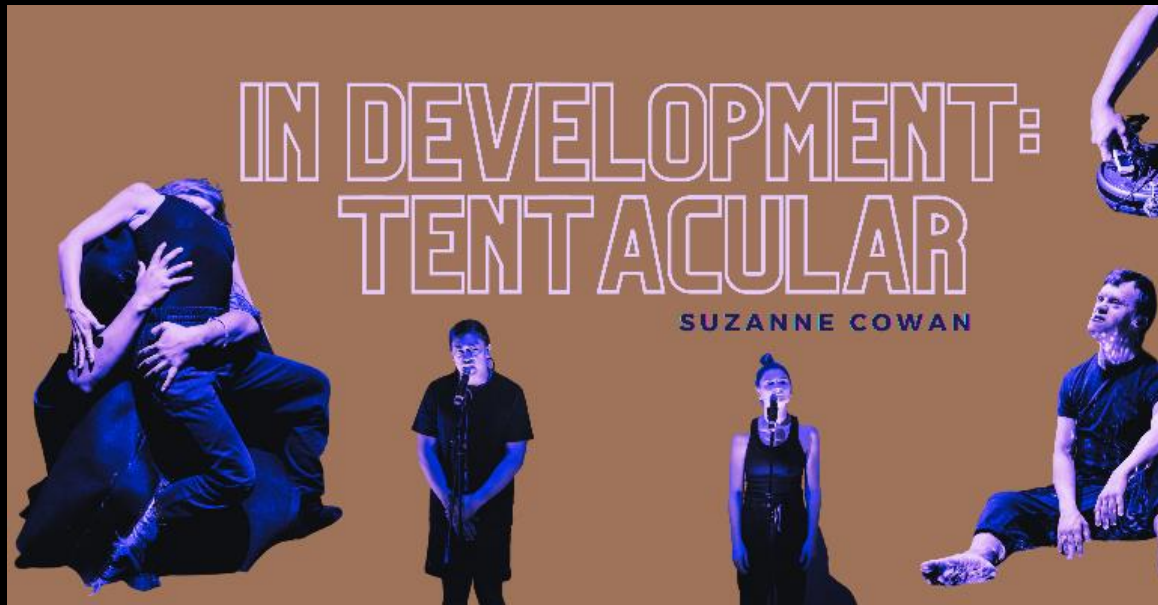
international attention and is beginning submissions for NZ festivals, alongside it's Tuarā Wairua double bill partner; Tentacular.

Stay tuned for more updates on this exciting solo collab journey! 🔄❤️🌟



ID: In this image, we witness Alisha and Jessie in a collaborative creative moment. Alisha is partly suspended in an aerial silk, hands and feet touching the floor as her full head of hair is draped across her face obscuring us from seeing her. Jessie sits foreground, quietly observing Alisha's movement. Behind Alisha is seen a large framed mirror, 3m high and wide, within which is reflected the scene and the rows of seats that form the audience area of the

theatre. The mirror plays it's own character in this work reflecting not just the performance, but also the audience watching on.



Tentacular: A Dance with the Future - heading towards completion 2025!

Tentacular will wrap up its development early next year, to be premiere-ready for Festival and performance opportunities!

Development rehearsals and a technical residency are scheduled in January - April. Using the Old Folks Association and TAPAC Western Springs venues.

Big shout out to our creative technologists Adam Ben-Dror and Futian Zhou who have created and are now currently refining the Tentacular AI robot as well as Kristian Larsen our composer who is creating the soundscape and refining the robot's voice. Futian has been a part of the Centre for Automation and Robotic Engineering Science (CARES) at the University of Auckland as an undergraduate design & software engineering student and has worked closely

alongside Adam.

We want to acknowledge the CARES team who have generously supported the project with materials and space.

Our robot is a unique piece of tech, created specifically for Tentacular. It can move, speak, access everything ever loaded onto the internet, scan the room in high definition detail and choreograph the dancers. It raises questions about human agency and machinic agency and where it might lead us in the 21st century. As a post-humanist work, Tentacular doesn't actually de-centre' our fabulous dancers, Raven Afoa-Purcell, Julie van Renen and Duncan Armstrong, but it does forge a curious relationship between the human and non-human and delve into its' futuristic potential.

From a disability centred perspective Tentacular raises questions about how we choose to 'augment' ourselves with technology – something disabled people are already adept at.



Dance Collab wrapped for 2024, new format 2025.

Dance Collab wrapped for 2024

Dance Collab, based at the Sunderland Lounge in Hobsonville, Auckland, has wrapped for the year after an extended season of 14 sessions since April.

Over the last seven months we have created a lovely core group who are keen to see it go forward in 2025. Next year we will move to a once a month format with two hour sessions as mini workshops that focus on skill development and potentially lead to a performance at the end of the year. It is hoped to target new talent for the company and also create an important community initiative.

Feedback from this year was that it offered a much needed space for accessible dance on multiple levels. It needed to be accessible to participants who had little dance or movement experience as well as those who were well seasoned movers. It was accessible to people with disabilities.

For the core group it became a safe space to explore their creativity and dancers commented on how this also improved their mental health and well-being which is an important aspect of what we do. It is affirming and reassuring to hear that these classes actually do improve people's quality of life.

A big thanks to all the wonderful teachers who contributed to this initiative: Lee McGarva, who was my co-pilot for the first 5 months and then more recently, our Education Co-ordinator and professional dance artist, Vivi Medina, movement and sound artist, Kristian Larsen who generously led two sessions, and experienced teachers, Clare Luiten, Rachel Ruckstuhl Mann, who have both been part of the TC Whanau over the years. All these artists created a rich journey for our Collab participants.

Dance Collab is more than just a dance class—it's a journey of self-discovery and community connection. Join us and experience the joy of movement!



To register for a 2025 class please contact Suzanne Cowan directly suzannec@touchcompass.org.nz or follow the Dance Collab Facebook page [here > https://www.facebook.com/DanceCollabNZ](https://www.facebook.com/DanceCollabNZ)



We've got class! Lets Dance together weekly!

Exciting news! 🌟 Our weekly class programmes continue for Term 4, and members our Tuesday Creative Class were seen performing at this year's Interact Festival in October.



We love supporting our creative community with a range of engaging activities and we were thrilled to be invited to celebrate all abilities again at Interact. 🙌

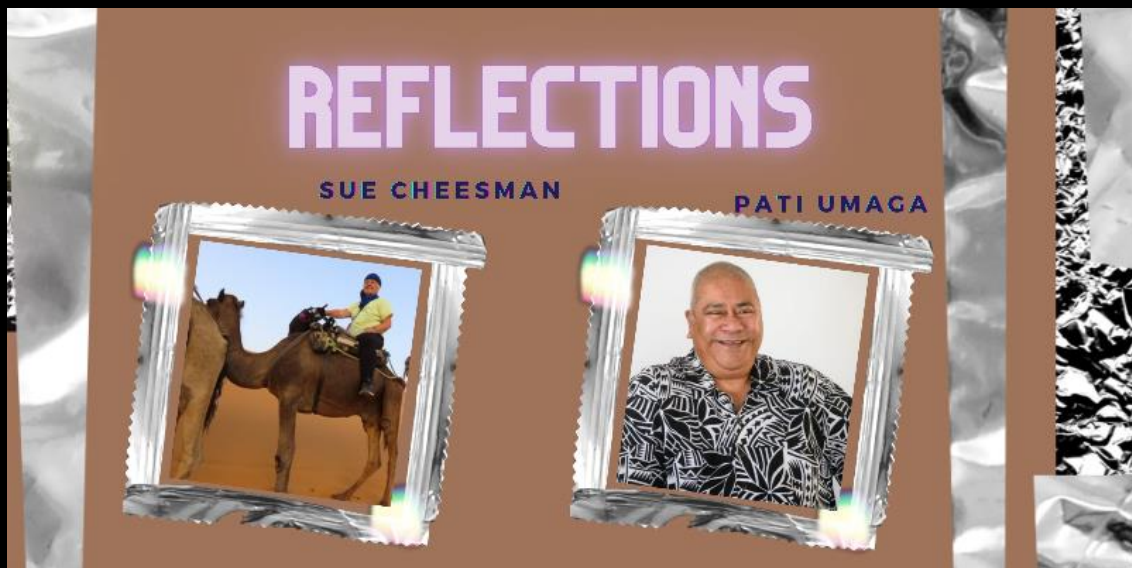
Our Saturday contemporary class welcomed back lead tutor Sue Cheesman after a well earned break for a few months and some exciting educational engagements abroad. Read her review below.

Our programmes give a great opportunity for teens and adults to express themselves, make new friends, and create lasting memories through accessible dance and movement. 🕺 🦽 🕴

Whether you're disabled or non-disabled, our classes offer a diverse and accessible space where everyone is welcome to join our whānau.

Our classes provide a fantastic opportunity to grow connections, learn with others, and explore your creativity in a safe and supportive environment. Recommended for ages 12 and over, our classes are open to all who want to experience the joy of movement. 🕺 👯 🎵

If you or someone you know would benefit from our welcoming and creative atmosphere, we invite you to join us! [Click here to join a class or for more information!](#) Let's dance together!



Reflections from Te Whānau o Touch Compass

✦ Sue Cheesman - I'm BACK! ✦

The long serving inclusive dance legend and tutor lead for our Saturday class programme returned to NZ shores this November. Here's her reflections on her stunning journey.

SUE:

I started my fantastic 4-month travel adventure attending and presenting at the 16th daCi conference, Ljubljana in July. Seven days with dance in full swing at the centre of everything. The effervescence of youth / intergenerational / theory and practice interwoven / rich connections / the people from around the globe / the commitment to dance pedagogy in all guises combined to make this memorable, exciting and embodied.

Watching vibrant youth performances, connecting with dance colleagues both old and new. DANCING, seeing, hearing, touching, connecting, feeling made this conference alive and buzzing with vitality through I-Body, I Dance.

Then on with the travelling adventures!

Panoramic and Stunning views, beautiful lands with ancient bones rich in cultural, people and stories. I climbed up and down hills/steps (millions of them) having amazing adventures all along the way from Slovenia to final stop London. Traversing across the top of Italy, 7days bike riding through Tuscany - fields of sun flowers basking in the 38 degree heat - Dolphins jumping and diving over and under my kayak in Sardinia. The wonders of Barcelona -the magical whimsical inside of the basilca de la sagrada familia by Catalan architect Gaudi plus the most beautiful Theatre I have ever been in Palau de la musica.



15 days in the magnificent land steeped in history and culture of Morocco - hiking in Atlas Mountains - camel ride at sunset and sunrise in the desert. Winding through the narrow maze of alleys in the ancient vibrant souks with diverse array of goods you name it you could buy it particularly in Fez and Marrakech and delicious vegetarian food -all magic unforgettable experiences of Morocco.

Lapping up sun and sea in Greek islands Andros and Tinos with a long time friend reliving our Greek beach holidays many moons ago. On to Basque Country, Bilbao and the architectural Guggenheim spectacular.

Plus my last month in England and Scotland catching up with friends and participating in Parable, Candoco and Indepen-dance - dance companies inclusive dance classes which was great to participate and dance for a change since I had walked Europe. To see the similarities and differences - although not many - with what we do with our Saturday Class Programme was fantastic to have those opportunities to participate. All three classes and teachers welcomed me warmly.

Having lived in London for 14 years I love returning and saw some really stunning dance performances. One was on my last night before returning home I saw a black African dance company lead by a former Pina Bausch dancer perform the rite of spring by Pina Bausch it was very true to the original choreo and stunningly performed by 32 dancers on a stage covered with dirt. A fabulous end to my four month sojourn.

I love to Travel and this was an amazing time with everyday being different and full of magic and memorable moments for what I am calling my second OE. I would like to thank Touch Compass for my leave and to Joanna and Kelly who covered for me expertly while I was away.

Thanks,

-

-- Sue

✦ Pati Umaga - On Disabled artists and Artists of disabled whānau ✦

Touch Compass board trustee and advocate for disability justice, accessible arts, and cultural empowerment.

DISABLED ARTISTS AND THE ART OF MUSIC

ACTIVISM COMES IN SO MANY DIFFERENT FORMS BUT IT SEEMS THAT ART HAS THE MOST IMPACT.

AS A SAMOAN DISABLED ARTIST TELLING STORIES IS WHAT WE'RE ALL IN THE BUSINESS OF AND THE GREATEST STORYTELLERS ARE THE GREATEST ACTIVISTS.

MUSIC IS OUR SAFE PLACE TO CAPTURE OUR STORIES, NARRATIVES AND EXPERIENCES AND TAKE THEM TO THE WORLD

I ENCOURAGE YOU TO CHECK OUT THE FOLLOWING LINKS FOR MORE TO REFLECT ON.

- [Mana Whenua Samoana | 2024 Pacific Music Awards](#)
- [GOLDEN BUZZER Audition: SINGER Jeanick Fournier's Stunning Celine Dion Cover | Canada's Got Talent](#)
- [SINGER Simone Soman Will Warm Your Heart In Her Audition | Canada's Got Talent](#)
- [Dante's Whole World Song Appeal for Variety, the Children's Charity](#)
- [Huillo X Coldplay - Different Is OK \(Live in Mexico City\)](#)

--- PATI

Check on our socials @touchcompass for more news, thoughts, reflections, updates on our upcoming activities and educational opportunities, feel free to reach out to us at office@touchcompass.org.nz



Help us continue to shift the narrative for disabled artists

DONATE/VOTE TO EMPOWER TODAY!

Share in the empowering artistic journey as we make our disabled dreams a reality.

Make a difference NOW, either

DONATE:

Give a little **DONATE NOW** [directly to to our programming and the people who](#)

[make it happen by clicking this link here.](#)

OR

VOTE:

If you're strapped for cash (like we all are!) VOTE NOW [by clicking this link to support our disability-led and accessible practice through MyGivingCircle.](#) **Voting closes 30 December.**

Doesn't have to be big but it all makes a big difference. Let's all celebrate all that makes us unique and remove the barriers to access, one act, one performance at a time.

All donations over \$5.00 are tax-deductible.

**Touch Compass Dance Trust is a registered charitable trust and organisation.
Charities Services #CC23088**

We welcome your support, alofa and aroha to make a difference.

A massive ngā mihi nui to our KAITAUTOKO - our core funders who share our journey to empower, enable and shift the narrative for disability arts:



ARTS COUNCIL OF NEW ZEALAND TOI AOTEAROA



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