



Visibility Podcast



Dancer, Director and Dreamer Episode transcript

Fiona

Hi everyone and thanks for listening to Visibility, the monthly podcast produced by CID, the Council for Intellectual Disability.

Here, we will be telling our stories, and exploring some of the issues that impact people with intellectual disability. To find out more about our work visit <http://www.cid.org.au>.

Now, settle in and enjoy.

Music

[CID's podcast tune]

Adele

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Council for Intellectual Disability acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to their elders past and present and extend that respect to all aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Alex

Hello and welcome to Visibility, the podcast of the Council for Intellectual Disability. Today, we'll be talking with Jianna Georgiou about her experiences as a dancer and director with intellectual disability. She has performed across Australia and



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internationally with Restless Dance and with other acclaimed companies and directors. Gianna is also an athlete and medal winner at the Special Olympics. My name is Alex Elliott. I will be your host today. With me is my co-host Adele Tashkin.

Adele

Thanks so much, Alex. And welcome Gianna. So I understand you've been dancing for a long time now as a member of Restless Dance Theater in Adelaide. What year did you start with Restless Gianna?

Jianna

2006

Adele

How old were you then?

Jianna

Sixteen. Yeah, I've been with Restless a long time.

Adele

And so, what can you tell us about restless dance theater?

Jianna

Restless Dance Theatre is a company, and we have non-disabled and disability as well. It's a company for all of us to do dancing.



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Alex

Can anyone come and join Restless?

Jianna

You can join in, but there is workshops to go through first. They all ages, one is Links with kids and the next group would be Central. There's also Junction, and the company.

Alex

So, when you joined Restless, what did you have to do?

Jianna

Well, I do workshops first. That's the audition. And then after that, Michele is the artistic director. She asked us to come and join the group and continue dancing. I am part of the company. I always work with them. I got paid as well, actually.

Alex

Have you always been dancing, were you dancing as a child?

Jianna

Before I got into Restless, I started dancing, singing and dancing at home. I love music. I did ballet because I loved it. Then I moved on from there that got me thinking to become a dancer. And then Sophie Hyde just asked me, if I wanted to do a short film. I got into it. That's when I got invited to join in with Restless.

Alex

So are you trained in different dance styles?



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Gianna

Actually, I'd be doing two things, actually. I have been doing contemporary mostly. I also did ballet. I don't do other styles, just those two. We have been doing a lot of bar stuff at Restless, we've be doing ballet feet, and a lot of fitness as well. We've been doing a lot of workouts. Been doing a lot of cardios is to keep us moving. They'll keep the heart rate going.

Alex

I want to ask, how do you feel when you are dancing?

Gianna

Yes. So, happy, joyful, confident. I also feel expressive, feel passion and I feel independent.

Adele

Do you ever get nervous? Or shy about going out on stage Gianna?

Gianna

Ahh, no!

Adele

Just like that? Excellent.

Gianna

Only a little bit of nervousness. Just not too much. I get confident.



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Adele

That's excellent. You can feed off the audience and feel confident and alive, and you mentioned that it's your way of expressing yourself and your passion.

Jianna

Yeah.

Adele

I understand that you've also been a competitive athlete. If the dancing wasn't enough, so what events have you been in and what competitions when you used to be an athlete?

Jianna

I could do this one. I used to be in a Special Olympics, I've done a lot of sports. I've got so many trophies and medals. I've done volleyball. I've done basketball. I've done swimming. I also did gymnastics as well.

Adele

Wow, you're so athletic. Do you find that perhaps having a background as an athlete helps you in your dancing career?

Jianna

That also helps me keep myself fit and strong? Yeah, it keeps it keeps myself energized for the rehearsals.

Adele



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You seem to have danced on stage for so long, where are some of the places you've performed in Australia and maybe in other parts of the world.

Gianna

I have been traveling with Restless a lot of times. We went to South Korea. We've been to the UK, Brisbane, Gold Coast. I have been traveling a lot with Restless.

Alex

So I know it's difficult now. But how often would restless rehearse?

Gianna

We have been on Zoom every day, starting at 10:00, and finishing at 4:00.

Adele

That is such a long time to be on a Zoom meeting, isn't it? Do you have it set up so that you can all see each other dancing at the same time? Is that how that works? And then you have a space where you dance?

Gianna

We can't see everyone on camera. Once you have big space and you can dance around in the camera, you can dance in the camera. This has to be like spacious.

Alex

Are you working on a new production or are you spending lockdown carrying out more rehearsals?

Gianna



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I am doing a new production, Expose, so just rehearsing for it. But at the moment, I have a broken leg and I can't go anywhere.

Adele

Must be very difficult to do any kind of dancing with a broken leg.

Jianna

Yeah. It's hard anyway.

Adele

How much longer are you going to be laid up with your broken leg?

Jianna

Well, right now it's healed and I can walk, I can stand, which is good, but I can't dance with it yet. I can use my right leg, which is good and my whole arms too. I can move, but I can't do any exercise with my left leg.

Jianna

They are in the studio right now, so people at Restless they are still rehearsing. I'm not there, but I am on Zoom with them a lot. I have been watching them and I have been giving them feedback, so I can't really help out. They gave me some homework to do. Some creative tasks that they asked me to do.

Adele

I'm glad to hear that that your leg is healing up well, though, and that you're able to walk around. So I guess not long now taking it out on dance again.



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Jianna

Yeah, hopefully.

Alex

Thanks, Jianna. It's been great talking to you today. We're now going to take a quick break before hearing more about some of the issues of being a dancer living with an intellectual disability.

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Alex

Welcome back, everyone. Today we're talking to Jianna Georgiou. She's filling us in on the joys and challenges of being a dancer and director living with an intellectual disability. Your love for dancing, does that continue when you're directing or choreographing?

Jianna

I do like directing and choreographing some shows. Yeah. I've done it with Restless, it's called, Debut. All the dancers do it, they choose their own mentors. The mentors help you to make a dance show.

Alex

And when you're directing or choreographing. Do you ever watch any famous performances to get your own inspirations?



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Jianna

Yes, I do, a lot actually. I have been watching some of my friends' dance shows. I've been watching them live. I've also been watching them on YouTube as well. I've been getting some inspiration from them. That actually does help me make a dance show.

Alex

Do you have some famous dancers who are particular favourites?

Jianna

Not favourites. No, I love them all. I'll just tell you something, but not everything. I liked Sean Parker because he has a company. He's really cool. Gary Stewart, from ADT, I like him. I like watching him making a dance show.

Jianna

Danny Jaber is so cool. I love him. I used to dance with him outside of Restless as well. Leigh Warren, kinda cool. Yeah, there's so many people that I love that I've been working with.

Alex

Do you like directing more than dancing, or do you like to do them both?

Jianna

To be honest, both, ok. I can just choose between those two because I love them both.

Alex

And what is it in particular that you like about choreography?



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Gianna

I do love doing choreography because I like to curate dance pieces I do get inspired, and I have so many options with my dances, sometimes at Restless, sometimes outside of Restless. Yeah, I have been doing a lot of working alongside a mentor.

Gianna

I've got two trios now with my friends that I've worked on, and I continued as a solo. I've also been doing a duet as well. It's hard work, actually.

Adele

Well, that's huge. There's so many different productions and so many different things that you've been working on over the years, Gianna.

Nigel (temporary)

Can you tell us about some of the productions you've directed and what inspired them?

Gianna

So the first piece I'd done was Spirited Gardens. Yeah, it's about my family, who I love the most. And the other piece that I did was Superhero Island. I've been working on that for a long time, and that one is just about people coming together, having friends around you, hanging out and, you know, catch up with people. That's what I like doing, and I've been doing Mysterious Lake it's all about a black swan and a white swan. That actually reminds me of being a ballerina actually.

Adele



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When you're directing the other dancers, what do you expect from them and what do you get from them?

Jianna

OK. So if I was a director, let's just say I give them a task. For example, if you want to be an animal is up to so to think of what movement they do. I just have to create a movement from that and to choose your favorite animal. You know, that's just a basic task. It's fun. You can give them some feedback, what they are doing at the moment. And then you have to create a dance show out of it. You can manage your own staging as well. The lighting technology, then we have the costumes.

Adele

Well, I was just going to say, it sounds like as a director, you've got a lot of responsibility about what the choreography is going to be and the lighting and how everyone's going to look. And it sounds like you take that responsibility pretty seriously.

Jianna

You have to create it yourself and you need someone to be right beside you anyway, in case you need a hand or anything.

Adele

So, you're talking Jianna about your artistic process. Dancing is your career. So this is this is a paid job for you isn't it?

Jianna

Yeah, I've been getting paid for each performance.



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Adele

You've danced with well-known artists and companies like Chunky Move and well-known choreographers like Meryl Tankard. How has that helped you to develop as a dancer and a director?

Jianna

When Meryl Tankard came in to Restless to create a show called Zizane, so Meryl Tankard came in and we did a workshop with her called Zizane. Chunky Move, I worked with Anthony Hamilton.

Adele

And does that does that inspire you as a dancer and a director when you work with these really amazingly talented people?

Jianna

Yeah, I watched them a lot. That got me thinking.

Adele

So Jianna, if you weren't in with the restless dance company, can you imagine where you might be? And do you think there's opportunities for people with intellectual disability or Down syndrome to become dancers?

Jianna

Yes, that's a good one, actually. If I wasn't with Restless, I would suggest that I would go with my other friends. Well, other companies I've worked with like Australian Dance



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Theatre, AC Arts, I can definitely work with other friends from other companies. I can do and have friends there. They're like my family.

Adele

And so just knowing that there's opportunities out there for everybody to pursue the kind of career that you want with hard work and dedication and constant fitness?

Jianna

Yeah.

Adele

For people who are listening to the podcast, if there's anyone out there who wants to know how to become a professional dancer. What would your advice be to them?

Jianna

Yes, people out there you have to start with the workshops first. Then you go to groups like age groups. To be a dancer, you have to be fit, you have to keep dancing, be professional and always have to listen to the director all the time.

Alex

Is there a lot of space for dancers who have Down syndrome or other disabilities?

Jianna

If you want to be on the dance floor, yes. It can either be non-disabled or if you have a disability, you can join in.

Alex



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Anyone can dance.

Jianna

Yes, anyone can dance, you just have to start of the workshops first.

Alex

Thanks, Jianna for joining us today and sharing such wonderful stories and insights.

Jianna

Yeah, no worries. Thanks for having me!

Adele

To those listening. Thank you as well. Please join us next month for another episode in our Arts and Culture podcast series, where we'll be talking with another creative professional living with intellectual disability.

Fiona

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