



IMMERSIVE FILMS DELIGHTFULLY UPENDING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT
WHO IS 'US' AND WHO IS 'ANIMAL'

- Press Kit -

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SUMMARY

NYC dancer/choreographer Chisa Hidaka, MD and producer/partner Benjamin Harley founded the Dolphin Dance Project (www.dolphin-dance.org) in 2009 to bring together wild dolphins and trained human dancers to co-create underwater dances in the open ocean and produce films that immerse audiences in the dancing and dance-making process. Through the uniquely beautiful images of these graceful interchanges viewers enjoy the extraordinary experience of participating in an intimate movement-based conversation with completely wild dolphins in whose eyes we recognize shared intelligence, creativity and rich, meaningful emotional lives. "These human-dolphin dances are precious opportunities to challenge common beliefs that humans are inherently separate from nature," says Chisa, "I think the experience inevitably and powerfully moves us to feel a deep sense of responsibility not only to dolphins but to all our planet's creatures as we make everyday decisions that affect them and the environments in which they live."

The project's most recent film, 'Dolphin Dreams' is a collaboration with the preeminent underwater cinematographer Howard Hall and the Grammy Award-winning composer and cellist David Darling. Mr. Hall has made several IMAX underwater films, and he serves as advisor for the project's feature IMAX documentary, currently in development.

December 2014, the project produced 'So Close 3D: Dance with Wild Dolphins', a one-hour multimedia event at the SVA theater in downtown Manhattan that combined live dance with dance films and documentaries in 2D and 3D and showcased the talents of the project's six underwater dancers. In 2016, one of the 3D short films in the program, 'Amongst' was awarded Best Live Action Film in 3D Theater Session," at the Stereoscopic Displays and Applications XXVII conference. Following the success of 'So Close 3D' the project is currently developing a 3D installation work.

In 2010 the project released its first award-winning short film, 'Together: Dancing with Spinner Dolphins' which screened at more than 25 film festivals around the world and earned recognition as 'Best Experimental Film' at its premiere and 'Best Short Film for Animal Advocacy' at the Artist Film Festival. Since then the project has released numerous short videos and clips online which have been watched more than 100,000 times and has lectured at many educational institutions including Harvard University.

The core of the project's artistic process and research is to discover how human dancers and wild dolphins can communicate through shared movement. Through this process, we are developing an ongoing collaborative, creative relationship with two pods of wild dolphins:

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Atlantic spotted dolphins (*Stenella frontalis*) and Pacific spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*). Each pod has been the subject of longstanding scientific field research projects, which have generated insights into the behaviors and personalities of individual dolphins. The Dolphin Dance Project follows a strict code of etiquette, based on these studies (see below) to ensure that we meet dolphins on their terms, cultivating our mutually shared curiosity and interests, without disrupting their world.

RECENT WORKS

Dolphin Dreams (2017, 12 mins)

meeting wild dolphins as never before

With gorgeous images shot by the renowned underwater cinematographer Howard Hall, 'Dolphin Dreams' (11 min 30 sec) introduces the audience to an extraordinary pod of wild Atlantic Spotted dolphins through the relationships that they have formed with two New York dancers. Accompanied by a moving score from Grammy Award-winning composer and cellist David Darling (commissioned by the New York State Council of the Arts), this short experimental documentary guides audiences from a shared dream of human-dolphin communication to breath taking examples of mutual understanding and trust. It is an opportunity to experience the feeling of meeting and collaborating with wild dolphins as creative equals, just by watching. Sample clips can be seen here: <http://dolphin-dance.org/dolphindreams>

So Close 3D: Dance with Wild Dolphins

as close as being there

A one-hour program of live dance, 2D, and 3D films, 'So Close 3D: Dance with Wild Dolphins' opens with a performance juxtaposing the dance of wild dolphins on film with that of dancers on the stage, then shows films documenting the unique interspecies dance making process, including introductions to individual dolphins and human dancers, and finally immerses the audience in a series of 3D films that give the audience the vicarious experience of participating in the underwater dance. A director Q&A at the end of the show engages audience members of all ages in discussions about wild dolphins and their habitats. Co-produced by Dance Films Association, 'So Close 3D' premiered to packed houses in NYC through support of the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and Artist as Citizen.

The project is actively seeking partners to bring this event to communities throughout the US and beyond. A trailer for the program can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiIbNtAhjT4>

"Glowing with color and light, natural and human beauty, defying gravity, filled with awe and spiced with humor, 'So Close 3D; Dance with Wild Dolphins' was a rare and satisfying occasion. Our heart rates were lowered, we felt wonder and humility, we were educated and amazed." (Marta Renzi, Dance Films Association).

Together: Dancing with Spinner Dolphins (2010, 3 mins)

award-winning debut film

The Dolphin Dance Project's first film, 'Together: Dancing with Spinner Dolphins' (3 min 33 sec, 2010 <http://dolphin-dance.org/together>) depicts a woman and a wild spinner dolphin forging a tender relationship through the shared language of dance. Finished through funding from Dance Films Association, 'Together' won Best Experimental Film at its premier at the Big Apple Film Festival, and in 2012, Best Short Film for Animal Advocacy at the Artist Film Festival in NYC. It has been screened at over 25 US and international dance and environmental film festivals as well as several pro-cetacean events and rallies in the US, UK and Japan.

A full list of completed works is available at our website

WORKS IN PROGRESS

The installation: Moving Toward Us (working title)

an unparalleled immersive experience

'Moving Toward Us' surrounds the viewer with 3D video on 4 screens looping every 20 minutes. Watch for a few minutes and be excited by its novelty, or stay to experience the entire adventure from every angle. The glorious disorientation leads the viewer into an altered state where humans and non-humans become nearly indistinguishable as they move together in grace and harmony. In the darkened, comfortable purpose-built room, the dizzying whirl of underwater images recreates the feeling of being weightless, deep inside the ocean, surrounded by wild dolphins. There's more to the experience than one can logically comprehend. The outside walls of 'Moving Toward Us' provide in-depth information and images that bring dolphins to life as individuals, and underscore our shared need for healthy oceans.

The project is seeking production support for this work-in-progress and partners for its presentation.

The Feature Film: Reunion (working title)

dolphins are people too

To allow a wide audience to appreciate the beauty and the profound implications of the voluntary exchanges between wild dolphins and humans, a feature length giant screen (IMAX) documentary for natural history museums, science centers, and educational institutions will integrate breath-taking dance imagery with insights from the dancers, leading scientists, and ethicists. Stories of the dolphins' families and personalities, and the evolution of their relationship with humans, make the science of dolphin cognitive and creative capacities uniquely personal. As we recognize that dolphins share the same qualities that

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make humans 'persons', we are left to contemplate the implication for how we relate to nature in general.

The Dolphin Dance Project is actively seeking out grantors and financial partners to support the continued development and production of 'Reunion' - a feature film that promises to be rich with beauty, grace, and mind-opening new perspectives.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

To maximize the educational impact of our work, the project publishes video clips and essays about our process online and offers public presentations to educational institutions and community groups. Our online videos have received over 100,000 views. Educational presentations, which feature our short films, as well as 'behind the scenes' stories, have been given at universities (Harvard, Smith, Bennington, Sarah Lawrence, Barnard College, NYU), at the Beneath the Sea Expo 2014, local dive clubs and other venues. The goal of our films and presentations is to increase respect and concern for wild dolphins and their habitats, and to offer our process as an example for how the arts can shift paradigms for how we understand and interact with the non-humans with whom we share our planet. Please contact us if you would like to host an educational presentation.

CREATIVE RESEARCH

The project's dance making process is an ongoing creative research into the possibility for interspecies collaboration using the techniques of dance improvisation. Since 2009, the project has engaged in annual sessions with two pods - Atlantic spotted dolphins (*Stenella frontalis*) and Pacific spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*). We build long term relationships with individual dolphins and discover together the possibilities for a common movement language. The humans must also develop skills in technical free diving to be comfortable at depths of 30 - 50 feet for minutes at a time. Ongoing conversations with the field scientists who study these pods of dolphins ensure that our work builds on the latest knowledge of dolphin behavior, and that the conduct of our creative research remains safe for humans and dolphins alike.

DOLPHIN ETIQUETTE

The Dolphin Dance Project only works with wild dolphins in the open ocean, on the dolphins' terms. We never feed dolphins, nor attempt to coerce or train them in any way. As a rule, the dolphins approach us out of their own curiosity. We do our best to be well-informed about the most current scientific research on the natural behavior of dolphins so that we can interact with them in ways that are safe and appropriate for humans and dolphins. We understand that we are visitors in the dolphins' environment and we never attempt to interact with dolphins if they are resting or feeding or show any signs of disinterest or annoyance.

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We approach dolphins in a very specific and disciplined manner that is informed by our scientific understanding of dolphins and our artistic training and goals. Viewers should not expect similar interactions with captive dolphins or even wild dolphins that are encountered on swim-with-dolphin tours. To avoid building undue tourism pressure on wild dolphins, we avoid disclosing the locations of our film shoots.

Our films give the viewer an opportunity to experience vicariously and kinesthetically what would otherwise require significant training, expertise and expense. We hope they will inspire our audience to learn more about dolphins and to want to protect them. To that end, we provide a webpage for important information about the threats to wild dolphins and what we can do to resolve or minimize them: <http://www.dolphin-dance.org/protect>

BIOGRAPHIES

Chisa Hidaka, MD (co-director)

Inquiry and discovery are the themes that tie together the varied experiences of Chisa Hidaka, MD, co-director of the Dolphin Dance Project. Described by the NY Times as dancing ‘engagingly, like one possessed,’ Chisa began her career in modern dance while attending Barnard College, where she received her BA in Dance in 1986. She has worked for over 25 years as a dancer, choreographer and dance educator as well as musculoskeletal research scientist, and is still active in the NYC downtown dance improvisation community. With an MD from the Weill Medical College of Cornell University (1994), Chisa has been on the faculty at the Hospital for Special Surgery since 2001 pursuing research in orthopedics. Bringing together her medical/science and dance training, Chisa teaches Applied Anatomy at the Barnard College. Through the Dolphin Dance Project, Chisa also brings together her dance and science expertise. She brings to bear her extensive training in improvised dance to interact with wild dolphins through aesthetic choices that are respectful of the dolphins’ voluntary participation as equal partners in the creative process. She uses her scientific background to assess critically the current research on wild dolphins, and hopes, in the future to collaborate with dolphin scientists to investigate whether dance can be used as a model to study inter-species communication.

“Dancing with wild dolphins is a great privilege. The dolphins I’ve met are incredibly creative and so generous and trusting to share their lives with me. I’m profoundly grateful for the many beautiful moments I’ve shared with the amazing dolphins. I hope I can share them with our audiences with the respect and honor they deserve.”

Benjamin Harley (co-director)

Dolphin Dance Project co-director Benjamin Harley started diving at fifteen, studied anthropology, philosophy, and theatre at Yale University. He began dancing 10 years ago after a global career consulting in the telecommunications and media industries. Benjamin has produced and directed multiple films and videos for the project and recently expanded the project’s capabilities by designing an ultra-mobile 3D camera rig. In addition to his creative vision technical acumen for how to make these extraordinary interactions meaningful to a

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wide public audience, he contributes his experience growing successful organizations, his passion to create beautiful films that transform how people understand themselves, and his deep appreciation of the power of dance.

“When Chisa shared with me her first inspiration, I was instantly captivated by the prospect of two intelligent species finding a common ground through dance to not only communicate but to create a work of art. It is compelling in so many ways - to nature film audiences and as a uniquely beautiful artwork, reconfiguring expectations about the relationship between humans and dolphins and the world. In my own experience, meeting the gaze of a dolphin and recognizing it as a true equal has been a transformative experience, profoundly reordering my relationship with nature as a whole. When we humans use our big brains, not to dominate the world around us, but to live in ever increasing harmony with the natural web from which we were born and on which we depend, then our intelligence will be proved. After waiting 15 million years for intelligent company, I think dolphins and whales are yet to be convinced.”