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MEDIA KIT

Dolphin Dance Project

“talented humans and wild dolphins dancing together on film”

NYC dancer/choreographer Chisa Hidaka initiated the Dolphin Dance Project (www.dolphin-dance.org) in 2009 to bring together talented human dancers and wild dolphins to co-create underwater dances and films that document them. Having initially encountered wild dolphins on a vacation, Chisa became intrigued by how much the physical play of dolphins diving and swirling amongst themselves or with humans had in common with the way that human dancers related to each other through movement. Through the Dolphin Dance Project, Chisa is exploring how this physical exchange can be an intimate and profound inter-species communication. Dedicated to a true collaboration between equal minds, the Dolphin Dance Project is producing films that capture this extraordinary relationship between humans and wild dolphins through a lens that integrates insightful scientific research with innovative, engaging underwater dance. This stunning co-creation, presented in the context of what scientists are discovering about dolphin cognition and behavior, highlights the creativity, intelligence, and spirit of wild dolphins with the hope of inspiring audiences to protect them and their ocean habitats.

“When we interact with dolphins as our collaborative equals, we suddenly realize in a profound way that we are not the only intelligent and aware species on the planet,” says Chisa. The works of the Dolphin Dance Project ask audiences to consider the different choices we would make if we fully recognized the consequences of our actions on every other sentient being, not just humans and, perhaps, to feel compelled to ensure that other animals’ lives are not compromised by environmental degradation and other repercussions of our global scale society. The works also suggest how exquisite it might be to live in harmony with nature. Chisa says, “Meeting a wild dolphin eye to eye, it’s hard not to want to be more like her - more wild and more a part of the natural world.”

The films of the Dolphin Dance Project are aimed for a wide viewership, bringing awareness of wild dolphins and appreciation of dance to the large audience of nature film lovers. To make this possible, Chisa has recruited a team of talented collaborators, experienced filmmakers, and notably one of the foremost experts on dolphin cognition, Dr. Diana Reiss (see bios below). In the last year, the Dolphin Dance Project has produced a pilot film to build momentum for a longer composition and accompanying documentary.

TOGETHER: Dancing with Spinner Dolphins

“a human dancer and a wild dolphin discover a common language
to express their mutual affection and delight”

Recognized as Best Experimental Film at its world premiere at the Big Apple Film Festival, ‘*Together: Dancing with Spinner Dolphins*’ (3 min 33 sec, 2010), is the debut film of the Dolphin Dance Project. It portrays Chisa and wild Spinner Dolphins forging a tender relationship through

the graceful language of dance in the deep blue waters of the Pacific Ocean. While directing and performing in the film, Chisa used principles of dance improvisation to work with dolphins that are completely wild, participating voluntarily without feeding or any other coercion. To watch *'Together'* is to see the unfolding of a rare artistic collaboration between a human and completely wild animals. *'Together'* is a true innovation in dance and inter-species communication. It is also a poetic portrayal of the simple beauty of a human in harmony with Nature. *'Together'* is available for download or on DVD at <http://www.dolphin-dance.org/together>

(To reach a wide audience, a film trailer, in four languages including Japanese, Spanish, and French, is also available on the *'Together'* page mentioned above, Youtube <http://www.youtube.com/user/dolphindanceproject>, and Vimeo <http://vimeo.com/dolphindance>.)

Watching the film, the audience will see the importance of eye contact between Chisa and her dolphin partners. "Dolphins' eyes are so expressive," says Chisa. To keep eye contact, dolphins usually put themselves just a little ahead of her because, with eyes on the sides of their heads, they can see almost directly backwards. They also seem to know that with eyes that face forwards she can only see ahead, and would lose eye contact if she were in front. With an amazing sensitivity to changes in movement or direction, the dolphins can 'follow' a dancer while in front of her and also gently lead her. In fact, the dolphins sensitively choreograph much of the dance. One thing that may not be obvious is how slowly the dolphins are moving to accommodate Chisa. Spinner Dolphins can easily swim at 25 miles per hour, and even at their slowest they move faster than any human swimmer. Occasionally, the viewer might notice the dolphins making curious wiggles to try to go slowly enough not to leave the human dancer behind - it is a sign of their generosity and their keen interest in prolonging these moments of 'together'-ness.

The impact of *'Together'* is owed not only to the blue of the Pacific Ocean, spirited play of wild Spinner Dolphins and Chisa's graceful dancing, but Bryce Groark's shimmering underwater cinematography, which frames the action with masterful artistry. Bryce's previous work has been featured by A&E and the Smithsonian Institution amongst others, and he is currently traveling with oceanographer Sylvia Earle, PhD on the team of Mission Blue. Additional underwater camerawork for *'Together'* was provided by Brett LeMaster, the North American record holder in free-diving, who used his breath holding skills to capture the most intimate moments of Chisa and the dolphins moving together under water. Other members of the crew included producers Loui Terrier and Benjamin Harley, and production coordinator Rick Osburn. *'Together'* was shot over 5 days in January 2010 and completed in October with support from a finishing fund grant from Dance Films Association.

A short adaptation of *'Together'*, written and edited by Benjamin Harley, was selected as one of 20 finalists by the Ocean Inspiration celebration of the 100th anniversary of Jacques Cousteau and will screen at their gala in Spring 2011. The Dolphin Dance Project embraces Cousteau's belief that "People protect what they love", and *'Together'* seeks to seduce audiences with an extraordinarily intimate experience of the curiosity, creativity, and generosity of dolphins in the wild.

'Together' was awarded Best Experimental Film at its world premiere at the Big Apple Film Festival (<http://www.bigapplefilmfestival.com/>). It was also an official selection of the Colorado Environmental Film Festival (<http://www.ceff.net/>). In January 2011, *'Together'* will be shown on The Big Screen Project, a huge LED screen visible from the street and several venues in the

Chelsea neighborhood of NYC, as part of the Dance on Camera Festival (<http://dancefilms.org/festival/39th-annual-festival-2011/big-screen-project/>). In April it will be screened as part of the 25th Anniversary Performance Mix Festival also in NYC (<http://newdancealliance.org/performance-mix-festival/>)

The Next Film: *Reunion*

Work has already begun for the next film of the Dolphin Dance Project, '*Reunion: Sharing the Dance*,' which will bring together four dancers and a pod of Atlantic Spotted Dolphins in the waters around the Bahamas. The introduction of additional dancers is certain to bring new and exciting discoveries in human-dolphin interaction and choreography. To be filmed in the turquoise waters of the Bahamas with the charismatic Spotted Dolphins, '*Reunion*' promises to be even more beautiful than '*Together*.'

Chisa recently went on a field research trip to the location with scientific advisor Diana Reiss, PhD. Director of Marine Mammal Research at the National Aquarium and a professor of psychology at Hunter College, Dr. Reiss is an expert on dolphin cognition having published the seminal study using mirrors that shows dolphins express self-awareness. Incorporating Dr. Reiss' expertise, '*Reunion*' will deliver not only more graceful inter-species dancing, but compelling scientific insights and interpretations of what passes between humans and wild dolphins as they dance.

In preparation, the Dolphin Dance Project is actively seeking out grantors and financial partners to contribute to the production of a full length documentary featuring the interactions of several dancers and wild Spotted Dolphins as well as the commentary of Dr. Reiss and other notable scientists - a program that promises to be an extraordinary hour of beauty, grace, and mind-opening new perspectives.

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 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.

We approach dolphins in a very specific and disciplined manner that is informed by our scientific understanding of dolphins and our specific artistic training and goals. It is dancing, not swimming. Viewers should not expect similar interactions with captive dolphins or even wild dolphins that are encountered on swim-with-dolphin tours. We do not share the locations of our encounters.

Our films give the viewer an opportunity to experience vicariously what would otherwise require significant training 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 (producer, director, performer)

Inquiry and discovery are the themes that tie together Chisa Hidaka's experience and training in dance, medicine and science, and which make her uniquely qualified to direct the ground breaking work of the Dolphin Dance Project. Chisa began performing in the mid-1980s receiving critical acclaim for her charismatic stage presence. As a choreographer, Chisa has been creating and performing in improvisational structures since 1986. Chisa has been active in the NYC contact improvisation community for over 20 years. Her work in the Dolphin Dance Project is a natural - if also radical - outgrowth of her long-term and ongoing investigation of dance improvisation. With an MD from the Weill Medical College of Cornell University (1994) Chisa trained in orthopaedic surgery at the Hospital for Special Surgery where she was the head of a research group between 2001 and 2010. Currently, she teaches experiential anatomy at Barnard (where she is an alumna) and Manhattanville Colleges.

Over the past 5 years, Chisa delved into a period of personal research, interacting with wild dolphins around the world (the Bahamas, Azores, Hawaii and New Zealand) through the use of her dance improvisation skills. Bringing to bear her scientific experience Chisa has forged a relationship with scientific advisor Diana Reiss, PhD. Continued collaboration with Dr. Reiss and other dolphin research scientists will give the Dolphin Dance Project an enhanced educational value. Chisa is also working with Dr. Reiss on efforts to protect dolphins against capture and slaughter in Taiji and elsewhere in Japan.

Diana Reiss, PhD (scientific advisor)

Diana Reiss is a cognitive psychologist and professor in the Department of Psychology at Hunter College and the Biopsychology and Behavioral Neuroscience Graduate Program of CUNY. She helped to envision and implement the Animal Behavior and Conservation (ABC) Master's Concentration in Psychology at Hunter College. She is a research associate at the National Aquarium in Baltimore and the Smithsonian's National Zoo in DC where she conducts her research with dolphin and elephants. She was director of the Marine Mammal Research Program at the Osborn Laboratories of Marine Sciences at the New York Aquarium and co-chair of the Animal Enrichment Program of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). She was the director and founder of the Marine Mammals Research Program at Marine World Africa USA in California. Dr. Reiss served as a science advisor of the Animal Welfare Committee of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

Dr. Reiss's research focuses on cetacean cognition, communication, comparative animal cognition, and the evolution of intelligence. Much of her work focuses on vocal communication and vocal learning in dolphins using observational and experimental approaches. She pioneered the use of underwater keyboards with dolphins to investigate their cognitive and communicative abilities. Another focus of her work is comparative cognition and Dr. Reiss and her colleagues demonstrated that bottlenose dolphins and an Asian elephants possess the rare ability for mirror self-recognition previously thought to be restricted to humans and great apes. Her efforts also involve the rescue and rehabilitation of stranded marine mammals including the successful rescue of the renowned Humphrey, the humpback whale in the San Francisco Bay waters. Her advocacy work in conservation and animal welfare includes the protection of dolphins in the tuna-fishing industry and efforts to bring an end to the killing of dolphins in the

drive hunts in Japan. Dr. Reiss's work has been featured in hundreds of articles in international and national journals, science magazines, television segments and features, and newspaper articles

[Bryce Groark \(underwater cinematography\)](#)

After working in the dive industry for years as a PADI and TDI Instructor, Bryce founded Living Ocean Productions in April 2004, with the goal of using powerful imagery to help minimize the gap between science and the general public. In the beginning, Bryce and his partner Jen Groark used their photography and videography to educate tourists about coral reef ecology, particularly on the Kona coast of the Big Island of Hawaii where they live. While these classes still carry on today, Living Ocean Production has expanded greatly, now focusing on television and documentary projects as well as several international conservation projects.

Bryce's award winning photography and videography has been featured in magazines and newspapers, numerous television networks as well as in over 30 International Film Festivals, Aquariums and Museums around the world. Some of his shark footage is currently on display at the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History as well as in multiple anti-shark finning television campaigns across Europe and China. His recent film on sharks, "Requiem" (2007) has won several awards including the Telly (2008), Aurora (2008) and Accolade (2007). In 2007, his shark footage was part of a Congressional Lobby Video produced by WILDAID with a push to help implement shark legislation within the US. Most recently he has been working on the team of Mission Blue with producer Steven Fisher and scientist Sylvia Earle, PhD.

In addition to his work on sharks, Bryce has photographed and recorded many other marine species in waters around the world, including Egypt, Tahiti, Fiji, Australia, New Zealand, Rarotonga, Japan, India, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, Laos, Indonesia, Costa Rica, Mexico, St Lucia and the Bahamas for diverse a list of clients such as A&E Television, Travel Channel, PBS, Telemundo, Sony Ericsson, PEW Charitable Trusts, Starwood Resorts, EA Sports, The Art Institute of America, Kona Blue Water Farms, Pacific American Foundation and The Kohala Center among others.

[Loui Terrier \(producer\)](#)

Loui Terrier received his BA in Film and Video Production from Pennsylvania State University in 1995 and studied fine painting at the New School in 1996. At the Pennsylvania production house FilmSpace, Loui helped produce and/or direct over 50 documentaries, industrials, commercials and local music videos. His clients included Special Olympics, Alltell, Pfaltzgraff, Penn State University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, MIT, and Bell & Evans among others. Since 1994, he has lived in Brooklyn, working in film and TV with John Blanchard, Paul Miller, David Bar Katz, John Leguizamo, Michael Bergman, Michael Leahy and others.

In 2009 Loui produced a short film, A Big Ball of Foil in a Small NY Apartment, which won a Chris Award for narrative short film in the Columbus International Film and Video Festival and which has been screened in Europe, Canada, and in the United States as an official selection of several film festivals including the Big Apple Film Festival, NY Independent Film+Video Festival and Brussels International Film Festival among others. In addition to working on the Dolphin Dance project, Loui is currently developing three shorts films with Chicken Truck Productions, Pavaline Studios, Monkeyandweasel.com, and Wood Shop films.

Based on his visual arts training, Loui has also worked as scenic artist and art director on several projects. Loui has also exhibited his artwork in New York galleries like the Rotunda Gallery (1988), the Ward Nasse Gallery (1996), and the New York State Museum in Albany (1997). His highly developed sense of visual imagery is a guiding principle in his style as a producer as well. Between projects, Loui runs his decorative painting company, Leo & Raf, whose client list includes: Lidia Bastianich, Mario Batali, James Gandolfini, Robert De Niro, and Moises Kaufman, among others. Loui currently lives in Greenpoint, Brooklyn with his 5 year old son, Rayne.

Benjamin Harley (producer)

Ben started diving at fifteen, studied anthropology, philosophy, and theatre at Yale University, and fell in love with dance. Drawn into a productive career providing strategic advice to large corporations and startups, he travelled extensively, living in Europe and Asia. Taking time for creative and spiritual development has included, among other things, immersion in the practice of dance contact improvisation. Initially a confidant and advisor, Ben has become a de facto producer, collaborating on all aspects of the Dolphin Dance Project, stepping in to create supporting materials and to advise on the overall development of the work. He is particularly keen on devising a method for sharing video recordings back to our wild dolphin collaborators during future dance making sessions. It is only fair they know what they are participating in, and who knows what creative sensibility will emerge when they see themselves in 'performance'.

"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, 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."