

Photo: Steve DiBartolomeo

Dancing with Destiny

Visionary, choreographer, and dancer Tandy Beal and her Company celebrate four decades at center stage

By Maureen Davidson

T Tandy Beal & Company's "40 Odd Moves" at Cabrillo Theatre this January marked a significant anniversary in the life of a company of artists. The beloved dancer-choreographer-circus impresario Tandy Beal and composer Jon Scoville celebrated four decades of co-creating with impact beyond most artists' dreams. They and their creations traveled the world and came back to feed the community of Santa Cruz.

Their odyssey reeks with romance and adventure, idealism, triumph against odds, lofty awards, high honors, and international stars of stage, screen, and television. And circus.

"Together!" quipped Beal with a nod. "Through thin and thin!"

Together, Beal and Scoville created decades of epic productions such as "Mixed Nutz," incorporating circus and world dance; "HereAfterHere," a multimedia meditation on life after death; the Pickle Family Circus and other circuses worldwide; and countless extravaganzas involving hundreds of artists and children onstage. "40 Odd Moves" returned the artists to their beginnings: Scoville's music and Beal solo onstage.

Beal performing is a lesson in refinement. Her long, lean body commits exquisitely — the top of the hand leads the arm, the arm engages the body. The head so precisely holds the eyes that focus — and audience eyes follow — to arrive at a gesture so simple that it needed honing for 40 years. As exquisite as the dance and music may be, it is only a sliver of the legacy.

"The reason I have never been able to say no to Tandy is because of what she has given, and the impact she has had," said Chip, who is visible as Executive Director of the Downtown Association of Santa Cruz — and invisible when working as Technical Director of performing arts events. Chip, like Cher, goes by just one name. For one dance in "40 Odd Moves," he shed his headphones to appear onstage as the diva's comic foil in "Gracey," a Beal cornerstone.

"I've worked with Tandy for many years doing production and on the crew of the Pickle Family Circus," Chip said. "When I began, I was still deciding what I wanted to do with my life. I fell into that amazing community of collaborative artists. Working with Tandy is an education in serving community."

Alan Savat was company manager for

decades beginning in the mid-1970s.

"Santa Cruz was a dance center in the '70s in great part because Tandy was here," Savat said. "She toured January through March and was adamant about hiring local dancers and production staff to accompany her. These people went on to work in major companies and form companies of their own."

The opposite also was true, according to long-time administrative director Sheila Baumgarten.

"Tandy returned from a fellowship in Japan, bringing Kyoto artist Ibe Kyoko and extraordinary giant washi paper sculptures," Baumgarten recalled. "We approached Leask's

(Top) Tandy Beal (center) on UCSC's Mainstage Theatre in a performance of "Mixed Nutz."

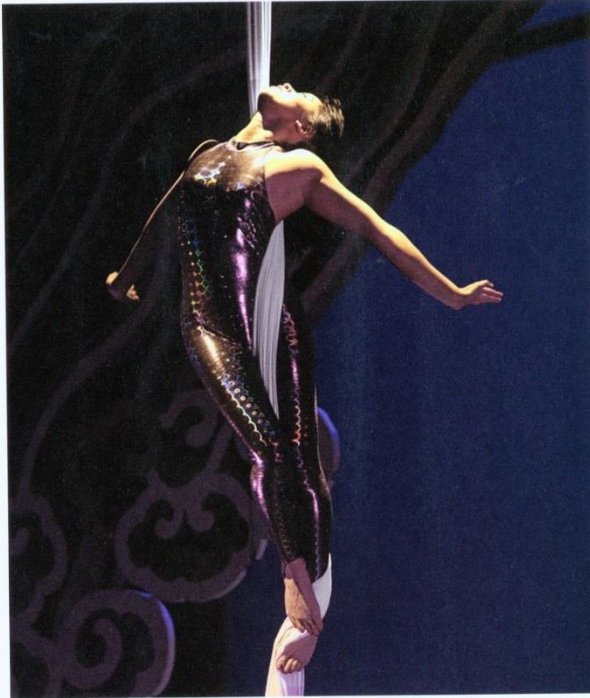


Photo: Steve DiBarotolmeo

(Above) The outstanding performances of Tandy Beal & Company blending combinations of dance, circus, acrobatics, and music rival the legendary Cirque du Soleil.

department store downtown. Sam Leask was so supportive. We mounted the sculptures from the ceiling inside and in the giant windows, with dancers — beautiful.”

& Company wasn't satisfied, however. Jon imagined there could be a Japanese festival, so Tandy approached the Japanese-American community, still experiencing antagonism following the war. With leaders like Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston, the festival took on a life of its own, located from the first in Mission Park, where in June it also celebrates its 40th anniversary.

The exchange of talents from local to international continued when The Pickle Family Circus, a much-loved but financially precarious precursor of the Cirque de Soleil, turned to Tandy to take them under her TB&Co wing. She made a New Pickle Family Circus, involving circus performers from around the world, bringing many home to teach in local

classrooms.

“Tandy's school programs, *Listening to the Earth* and *Dance Around the World*, brought artists into local classrooms for several weeks” recalled Baumgarten. “Then the kids joined them onstage for full professional performances, with lights, music, sets, costumes. Our study guides helped teachers continue to use the skills the artists taught, while the children learned very fundamental dance ideas that were still big enough to hold their attention—and the attention of the audience.”

Modern dance, epic productions, circus, teaching—Sara Wilbourne has seen every side of Tandy Beal & Co.

“She's why I had a career in dance and why I'm here,” said Wilbourne, who toured with the company internationally and followed in Tandy's footsteps teaching at Cabrillo for 15 years. “Tandy came into

Photo: Steve DiBarolomeo



(Above) The colorful costumes of Tandy Beal's "Mixed Nutz" bring a new dimension to the performance of a traditional *Nut Cracker*.

contact with thousands of people, teaching dancers, teaching teachers — what impact! We took 'Listening to the Earth' on tour to the Southwest, arrived in town, and walked into the schools one day. A week later we knew the whole community. Magical."

Magic is a commitment for Saki Tamao, a dancer, gymnast, and teacher, who now manages ArtSmart, Beal's integrated arts education programs. In 2015, ArtSmart will reach 20,000 young people from Santa Cruz to King City.

A new facet of the school programs is the First Saturday Family Concert Series at Veterans Memorial Building in Santa Cruz. On March 7, Keith Terry's Crosspulse Percussion Ensemble, long a staple in TB&Co productions, uses the body as a percussion instrument, dancing, snapping, and vocalizing in an exuberant performance with active audience participation. The Saturday Family Concerts are low-cost performances that families

can enjoy together and, because they have worked with the artist in their classrooms, children are guides for their parents in the kind of family time that's increasingly rare.

"It's more important than ever to bring art to children, to strengthen the imagination," Beal said. "We're all going to have to reinvent ourselves many times. When life gives you its stuff, as it always does, imagination is what gives us empathy. Empathy gives us kindness. We need a lot more of that." ♣

(Below) Jon Scoville and Tandy Beal.



If You Go

First Saturday Family Concert: Micha Scott Dances!

Saturday, April 4, 2015
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Santa Cruz Veterans Memorial Building

First Saturday Family Concert: The Magic Carpet

Saturday, May 2, 2015
11:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Santa Cruz Veterans Memorial Building

Photo: Paul Schraub