



The mission of the CFAR is to provide a multidisciplinary environment that promotes basic, clinical, behavioral and translational research in the prevention, detection and treatment of HIV infection.

**NEWS BRIEF:**

-To learn more about Marie Garlock and her community projects, visit her website at: <http://itisinyou.org/>  
-Visit <http://vimeo.com/21802223> to see a beautiful video of TDFA 2011, created by Jeffrey

Middelstadt  
**For more information on organizations mentioned in this issue:**  
-United Clayton Area Youth Network:  
[prlamberth@nc.rr.com](mailto:prlamberth@nc.rr.com)  
-Interactive Theater Carolina:  
[campushealth.unc.edu/itc](http://campushealth.unc.edu/itc)  
-Triangle Dance Festival for AIDS:  
<http://sites.google.com/site/triangledancefestivalforaids/>

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# Center for AIDS Research

## University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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### Triangle Dance Festival for AIDS: Fusing Performance Art and HIV Education

A UNESCO Bangkok report states, "As a culturally rooted communication medium, performing arts have been traditionally used to convey essential messages, knowledge and skills from one generation to the next" (1). Performance art is being used more frequently as a method of disseminating information about health. At the April 2011 University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Center for AIDS Research (CFAR) Community Advisory Board meeting, Randy Rogers said, "HIV work is a lot of hard work, and it's also a lot of heart work". Performance is effective as a public health intervention because it taps into this very issue – HIV and AIDS are emotional, complex matters that must be approached with sensitivity and care. To reach the public and effect change, interventions to reduce risk behavior and to encourage exploration of personal relationships to health, bodies, and sexuality must both provide facts and appeal to the emotional aspects of the epidemic. UNESCO Bangkok writes, "Performing arts can...be used instrumentally to address social issues and navigate change. They can enhance social coherence and encourage changes of behavioral patterns" (1). Art provides a social framework within which resides the capacity to process, evaluate, and cope with a staggering HIV epidemic that is intimately tied to issues of social justice, poverty, and stigma.

The Center for AIDS Research is working to utilize and sponsor local artists and performance



**Baba Chuck Davis gathers all the TDFA performers and organizers together on stage to join hands while Djiali Cissokho plays the kora (a West African harp)**

groups to maximize HIV outreach and education efforts in the community. No better example of these efforts exists than The Triangle Dance Festival for AIDS, which recently celebrated its sixth year of spreading joy and love through the community through the medium of sound and movement. The festival serves as a way to gather students, researchers, dancers, activists, art lovers, and more for a common cause. The event aims to promote community involvement benefiting local and global AIDS charities. This year, proceeds were donated to the direct-service HIV/AIDS organizations Development in Gardening (DIG) and the United Clayton Area Network for Youth (UCAN). DIG is an organization with a chapter at UNC-CH that focuses on improving the health of people affected by HIV and AIDS through the installation of micro-gardens in hospitals, outpatient facilities, and orphanages to ensure a supply of vegetables. UCAN is an organization that works to improve HIV and mental health issues in Johnston County, North Carolina.

Hosting the performance with enthusiasm, purpose, and spirit was Baba Chuck Davis of the Chuck Davis African American Dance Ensemble.

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### Spotlight on Interactive Theatre Carolina

Interactive Theatre Carolina (ITC) is a performance ensemble at UNC-CH that "uses scripted and improvisational theatre to promote health, wellness, and social justice in the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill community" (1). ITC's mission statement explains, "We believe that when audience members engage the characters and conflict on stage, they are more likely to explore and change their own attitudes and behaviors". Ron Strauss, co-founder of the popular UNC-CH public health course entitled "AIDS: Principles, Practices, and Politics", approached Amy Burtaine, Program Coordinator of ITC, about the possibility of creating a performance to educate the AIDS course students through theatre. What resulted was an impressive collaboration between student actors and students in the class as they explored how to ask a partner to

use a condom.

Burtaine joined ITC in October of 2010. She has over 15 years of experience in applied and community-based theatre and specializes in theatre for social change. Burtaine explains, "I have spent much of my life seeking out the intersection of theatre, education, and social issues". She has "carved out unique opportunities in theatre education and made a career as a teaching artist in diverse settings in the U.S. and abroad". Burtaine trained and worked as a facilitator for with Augusto Boal and the Theatre of the Oppressed in Rio de Janeiro. Her experience has led her to "facilitate interactive theatre programs on drinking and sexual violence with the Interactive Theatre Project at the University of Colorado at Boulder," and she has led "youth peer-education troupes in Guinea-Bissau, West Africa in the use of interactive theatre techniques to

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TDFA Lead Host Baba Chuck Davis with Natalie Cummings, 2010 organizer of TDFA and Marie Garlock, Community Liason for the CFAR CODE Office

## Triangle Dance Festival for AIDS: Fusing Performance Art and HIV Education Cont.

Local performers such as spoken word artist Poetic Mike, Duke University's Defining Movement, UNC's MiscONcEption Hip-Hop Dance Ensemble, EROT Spoken Word, UNC's Bhangra Elite Indian Dance Ensemble, ROSE (a dance company of women 65 years and older) and Too Sick Entertainment (a trio of middle school hip-hop dancers) provided a night of International, modern, and urban dance and music entertainment that was a celebration of life and health. The performances dealt with issues of grief, stigma, fear, empowerment, healing, resilience and sharing HIV status with loved ones.

At the end of the performance, Baba Chuck Davis guided the Memorial Hall audience in a round of voice and movement – the diverse groups of dancers guided the repetition of “Peace, Love, Respect for Everybody; Peace, Love, Respect for the Earth”. On his website for the African American Dance ensemble, Davis explains,

““Peace, love, respect for everybody,” is much more than a catchy way to end a concert and the African American Dance Ensemble is much more than just another dance troupe. The Ensemble is an agency of positive social change and reinforcement of the best of human values (peace, love and respect)...The dance itself becomes the means by which one comes to see something of the human condition.

Imprisonment, famine, poverty, drug dependency, slavery and war can be juxtaposed with celebration of liberation, bountiful harvests, marriage and birth in an artistic blend that demands attention to the realities it represents. The art has a message which not only condemns the worst and celebrates the best of the human condition; it encourages us to do something about the negatives and reinforces the positive” (2). This goal is congruent with the goals of the UNC Center for AIDS

Research – to educate and encourage positive, healthy behaviors in order to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and increase public knowledge and awareness about the epidemic. Davis said in his parting words to the audience, “We gather in art to say we are dancing bodies, as we fight any stigma related to our sexuality, gender, and race. We meet science and fear with love, support, and respect for each other. As long as we dance together, there is no time for hatred”.

The UNC Center for AIDS Research plans to continue collaboration with local artists and to use performance as a means of connecting to the community. The strong ties that are forged through art in action will serve to strengthen our collective resolve to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS and support positive persons and their loved ones.

(1) UNESCO Bangkok: Office of the UNESCO Regional Advisor for Culture in Asia and the Pacific. Report on Expanding the use of innovative HIV prevention approaches using traditional forms of performing arts in Asia. 2008.

(2) <http://www.africanamericandanceensemble.org/>

## Spotlight on Interactive Theatre Carolina

educate communities about HIV/AIDS”.

When Burtaine came to the AIDS course, she explained that ITC had come to talk about “safe sex negotiation...this is where the rubber meets the pavement”. She quickly had the students on their feet warming up as she said, “All of us are in this event together”. ITC sets ground rules in the beginning of their performances to create a safe environment where people can share and explore their own thoughts and beliefs. Most notably, Burtaine requested that each student and participant “respect yourself and others, even if you don’t agree”.

With scenes entitled, “We’ll be careful – I promise” and “A rehearsal for life”, the ITC actors presented scenarios to the class. Actors used lines such as “it can be really hard to communicate about what you need, especially when it comes to sex” and did an excellent job of creating a genuine, honest environment to explore the issues at hand. The students watched scripted scenes, or “realistic situations where characters experience a conflict or series of conflicts” (1). The scenarios ended “in a crisis for all the characters, priming the stage for the audience interaction” (1). The scenes were stopped at the moment of condom negotiation, and students were encouraged to go to the front of the lecture hall and convince the actor to make safe sexual choices by using a condom. The students were engaged and supportive as several volunteers worked to develop techniques of talking about safe sex.

As a part of Counseling and Wellness Services at UNC-CH, ITC fills a developing niche in education through performance art on campus. Burtaine has worked with the group to develop a repertoire of scenes that can be used in business, classroom, and public community settings. The scenes address issues of race relations, sexism, homophobia, sexual assault, drugs and alcohol, physical ability and disability, and more. A research study in Tanzania suggests that “participatory and interactive modes of community-based theatre may be the most auspicious mode of HIV prevention for the most susceptible groups” (2). The Center for AIDS Research is excited to continue collaboration with Interactive Theatre Carolina and to promote the use of performance as a powerful method of dissemination of important health information.

## Performance and Health Advocacy – In North Carolina and East Africa, A Focus on HIV: An editorial by Marie Garlock (May 25, 2011)

Even as concepts of health risk or HIV diagnosis are laid “onto” our bodies, we feel the impacts of these words and facts about health very much in our bodies. Why then do we so frequently leave our physical selves out of the equation? Performance, as a bodily act, as storytelling, gives us a way to open this chasm between the body and knowledge. Live art has a special place in health and HIV advocacy – it moves beyond a pamphlet or website, a phone call, or even a health fair. Health justice performance holds as its goal the movement of audience from pacification to mobilization. It asks: how can we move from *perception* to *insight*? Rather than being satisfied with *knowledge* of facts, can performance promote *understanding* which compels action?

In a recent session of UNC-CH course *HIV/AIDS: Practices, Principles, Politics*, it was remarkable to see “Interactive Theater Carolina” so thoroughly engage 350 mixed level students in communication tactics regarding sexuality. Space seemed to collapse in– a large lecture hall became intimate, “intimidating” performance space was made entirely enticing. Students from the audience joined actors onstage to see who could most successfully “rehearse” condom negotiation in tough, real-life contexts. Art is important because it asks us to see *ourselves* in the context of a lived reality. And, in interactive performance about health, consideration – or reconsideration – of the circumstances in which we find ourselves, gives opportunity to reimagine ourselves, and the options at hand.

To read the rest of this editorial, visit our CFAR CODE office blog at: <http://uncfcar.blogspot.com/>