Groundbreaking research studies the neuropsychological effects of dance on people with Parkinson's disease

TORONTO, ON (October 21, 2013) – Canada's National Ballet School (NBS), in collaboration with Mark Morris Group's Dance for PD®, Sarah Robichaud, Founder & Creative Director of Dancing with Parkinson's™, and researchers from York and Ryerson Universities, is hosting a 12-week dance program to study the physical and neuropsychological effects of dance on people with Parkinson's disease (PD). The program, known as **Dancing with Parkinson's at Canada's National Ballet School (DwP@NBS)** is taking place at NBS' state-of-the-art facilities in Toronto, Ontario. It will study how dance is able to seemingly bypass the neurodegeneration occurring in the PD brain and facilitate improvement in movement for those with PD.

PD is a neurological disorder that severely inhibits movement; it affects more than 100,000 Canadians and over 7 million worldwide. There is currently no cure, but dance has been found to temporarily alleviate some Parkinson's symptoms, improving gait and balance as well as offering psychosocial benefits. The neural mechanisms by which dance is able to uniquely facilitate these benefits have not been researched until now.

Led by York University Centre for Vision Research's Professor Dr. Joseph DeSouza as well as Ryerson University graduate student and NBS alumna Rachel Bar, **DwP@NBS** will see twenty PD participants take part in a weekly dance class co-taught by NBS Artistic Faculty and Sarah Robichaud, both trained in the Dance for PD® method. Volunteers electing to participate in the study will undergo a series of brain imaging scans to help researchers understand how dance affects changes in brain network activity and structure. While being scanned, participants will be asked to listen to music they have danced to during their classes and visualize themselves dancing. Preliminary data gathered by examining professional ballet dancers and non-clinical populations has already shown that after learning a dance, changes in brain activity are detected in primary auditory cortex and supplementary motor cortex, when visualizing a dance while listening to its music. Partial funding for the start-up and research comes from a generous donation from the Irpinia Club of Toronto and Parkinson's Society Canada.

"As a former student of NBS and professional dancer, I'm thrilled to have the opportunity to combine my passion for academic research with my love of dance," said Rachel Bar. "Dance appears to have a uniquely positive impact on people with PD. I hope the knowledge gained through this project will help direct the future of evidence-based dance programs to aid people living with Parkinson's across the country. I am also grateful to NBS Artistic Director, Mavis Staines for her instant willingness to open NBS' doors to our research and extend the art of dance beyond its traditional borders."

For more information about **DwP@NBS**, please visit: www.nbs-enb.ca.

Photo/filming opportunities for DwP@NBS and interviews available upon request.

About Canada's National Ballet School
Established in 1959, Canada's National Ballet School is a world leader in the training of professional dancers and teachers. Dedicated to moving the world by teaching and celebrating dance, NBS is committed to promoting the art of dance through community engagements in addition to offering recreational and professional programs. NBS graduates can be found as dancers, choreographers, artistic directors, teachers and administrators in over 65 dance companies worldwide, and in even more schools around the globe.

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