



Emotions Dance Company's 7 Deadly Sins was performed in May at Orlando Fringe. In the show, the protagonist is tempted by pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, and sloth.



Larissa Humiston, founder of Emotions Dance, a nonprofit arts organization

Join the Movement

by Jill Duff-Hoppes

Photos courtesy of ACalle Photography

This nonprofit dance company combines art and activism

At Emotions Dance in Longwood, there is plenty of meaning behind the well-choreographed movements seen on stage. That's because the nonprofit organization's mission is to raise awareness about significant topics such as the environment and social issues through the art of contemporary dance. That melding of dance and a desire to spark conversation stems directly from owner Larissa Humiston.

The Longwood resident – a dancer since the age of two – is also a professional therapist who helps her clients deal with critical matters every day. So, it makes perfect sense that, when Larissa founded Emotions Dance in 2007, she wanted the arts organization to stand for something.

"That was important to me," she says. "It's just part of who I am, this 'let's-talk-about-stuff' therapist person and this artist person. I really care about the environment; I really care about social issues. This felt like a great way to 'talk' about those issues and also do art."

A native of Syracuse, New York, Larissa studied ballet, jazz, and tap at an arts conservatory in her hometown throughout her youth and took dance classes in New York City during the summers. She earned a bachelor's degree in sociology from

Stetson University in DeLand and a master's degree in social work from Syracuse University. After graduate school, Larissa relocated to Florida and worked as a hospice therapist before opening her own practice.

During college, Larissa continued to study dance, expanding into modern, contemporary, and lyrical. However, an injury derailed any thoughts of a performance career. Still, dancing was too important for her to give up, and thus Emotions Dance was born.

"I can't really imagine my life without dance," says the 39-year-old Larissa, the artistic director and choreographer for Emotions Dance. "Not having it in my life would be like not having air."

Messages in Motion

The choreography for Larissa's shows encompasses several dance styles including ballet, modern, jazz, and tap. Emotions Dance Company, the organization's professional contemporary troupe that performs throughout Central Florida, has two signature productions in its repertoire that it performs in alternating years – *Element Earth* and *Untold Stories*. In both cases, the shows impart a message of hope and the need for change.

Emotions Dance Company's *Element Earth* was performed in February at Harriett's Orlando Ballet Centre. A number from that show will also be presented in October at the *Immerse* event in downtown Orlando.



"*Element Earth* is my discussion of the things that we're doing to the planet," says Larissa. "It showcases our relationship with the planet as well as with each other and touches on climate change and pollution. And *Untold Stories* is a discussion of things that happen every day that people don't talk about because they may be controversial or taboo."

Those subjects include abuse, addiction, sexuality, and illness.

After a year of being unable to perform because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Emotions Dance safely staged *Element Earth* in February and will present a number from that show at *Immerse*, an annual performing and interactive arts experience set to take over downtown Orlando from October 15-17. And in February 2022, the company will once again bring *Untold Stories* to audiences with the goal of making it easier to have a dialogue about these sensitive issues.

Meanwhile, Emotions Dance is putting together a brand-new show called *Icons* that's a little lighter in nature than *Untold Stories* or *Element Earth*. *Icons* will pay tribute to iconic women in music, including powerhouse artists such as Madonna, Aretha Franklin, Adele, Tina Turner, and Billie Eilish.

"Although a lot of what we do is on a serious note, I also like to do fun and educational stuff," Larissa says. "That's what *Icons* is – just celebrating amazing women in music with amazing people in dance."

Stronger Together

In addition to showcasing her own dancers, Larissa enjoys collaborating with other companies. A prime example is a show she created several years ago called *The Shift*, which gives audiences a taste of what Emotions Dance, as well as other local companies and choreographers have to offer. That show's next incarnation will be in September.

Another important aspect of Emotions Dance is its community outreach efforts. In 2019, Emotions Dance did a show to benefit Orlando Health's Cancer Support Center. And for the past several years, the studio has participated in National Dance Day, which was created to promote dance as part of a healthy, active lifestyle. For this year's event on September 18, Larissa's studio will offer free dance classes to

Emotions Dance Company will present two productions this fall:

The Shift will be performed at 7:30 p.m. on September 17 and 18 at Harriett's Orlando Ballet Centre at 600 North Lake Formosa Drive. In addition to Emotions Dance, the show will feature performances by Florida Dance Theatre, Crawford Jazz Project, Emergence Dance Company, and works from choreographers Vincent Sanrocco and Gilliane Hadley.

Icons will be performed at 7:30 p.m. on October 8 and 9 at Harriett's Orlando Ballet Centre. The show will feature Emotions Dance Company and the studio's pre-professional student dancers.

Tickets for all shows range from \$20 to \$30. To purchase tickets or for more information, visit EmotionsDance.org.

the public, led by the talented choreographers whose work will be featured in *The Shift*.

"We're a really versatile company," says Larissa, from the dance styles that the company presents to the issues it champions.

"There's something for everybody in what we do. We're pretty unique in that way."

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