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**UVA GRAD ASHLEY SISTI TO RETURN TO CHARLOTTESVILLE
TO PERFORM WITH AXIS DANCE COMPANY**

**Sisti To Return To Stage For First Time Since Devastating 2008 Riding Accident Just Weeks
From Graduation Left Her Paralyzed From Waist Down**

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA – March 15, 2009 – The Axis Dance Company is known throughout the world for its unique brand of inspiration. When they come to Charlottesville next week, they will bring with them a young University of Virginia graduate who is adding another chapter to her own inspiring story.

Ashley Sisti was a regular in U.Va. Dance Program performances and presentations during her four years here. Then, just weeks before she was to graduate, she suffered a tragic horse riding accident. At first, the experienced rider thought her fall was no different than any other she had suffered in her many years of riding.

“I slid off the side of the saddle and landed on my back,” she said. “Thinking this was just like every other fall I took as a kid, I assumed I wasn’t badly hurt. When I realized I couldn’t feel my legs, it occurred to me that this was a much more serious accident.”

Sisti, who was 21 years old and was about to embark on a life full of pure possibility, was suddenly looking at a very different world. Yet the Powhatan native had her eye on the same things her classmates did. She wanted to enjoy her final days of college life. And she did, attending many graduation events and making her way down the lawn to receive her diploma thanks to a push from eight friends.

That same determination will be on full display next week when Sisti returns to Charlottesville to perform with the world-renowned Axis Dance Company when it comes to town for a week of demonstrations and events capped off with a March 26 performance at the Paramount Theater. One of the dance world’s most innovative and inspiring companies, Axis is a pioneer in the field of physically integrated dance, which brings together disabled and non-disabled dancers.

It was Sisti’s story that actually inspired U.Va. Dance Program head and faculty member Rose Pasquarello Beauchamp to reach out to Axis in the first place. “Having someone I was dancing with one week and the next she could not walk was a huge thing for me. To have her come back here and take to the stage again is going to be truly amazing, and such an important way to challenge students and audiences alike to look at dance and all its possibilities in a whole new way.”

The San Francisco-based AXIS Dance Company is focused on creating and presenting contemporary dance by artists with and without disabilities. AXIS acts as a bridge between contemporary dance and

physically integrated dance, providing audiences a chance to expand the very definition of what the art form is and can be. Since its founding in 1987, AXIS has been stretching boundaries through its performances and educational outreach efforts. The company has attracted the attention and participation of some of the brightest stars in the dance world, boasting a list of collaborators including Bill T. Jones, Victoria Marks, Ann Carlson, Meredith Monk and David Dorfman, whose piece will be performed at The Paramount.

The company's week-long Charlottesville stay will be highlighted by a public performance at the Paramount on Friday, March 26th at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students, children and U.Va. faculty and staff. Tickets can be purchased online at www.artsboxoffice.virginia.edu/. Tickets are also available by phone at 434-924-3376 and in person at the Arts Box Office, located in the lobby of the Culbreth Theatre from noon to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

On Monday, March 22nd, AXIS will give community members a chance to be a part of the performance as they host open auditions for those with and without disabilities to perform in choreographer David Dorfman's "Light Shelter" at The Paramount. For more information and to sign up for an audition slot, visit www.virginia.edu/drama/axisdance/.

The company will present a Master Class for U.Va. students on Tuesday, March, 23 at 11 a.m. at the U.Va. Aquatic and Fitness Center. Admission is free. Later that afternoon, at 5 p.m., they will hold a Master Class for Community Members at the U.Va. North Grounds Recreation Center. Admission for this Master Class is \$7.00. Space is limited in each class, and RSVPs are required by email to ras3tj@virginia.edu.

On Friday, March 26, AXIS will host a demonstration and lecture for local middle and high school students and educators. This youth performance will provide the audience with the exciting experience of participating as an audience member of a live AXIS performance in a theater setting. AXIS dancers will showcase artistic repertory, provide educational information on disability, personal dance history and include the audience in a physically integrated dance experience. Admission is free and open to local students and educators. RSVPs are required; visit www.virginia.edu/drama/axisdance/ to reserve a spot.

The AXIS Dance company residency at U.Va. is generously supported by U.Va. Arts Enhancement Fund, Arts Connect, New England Foundation of the Arts, VSA Arts and The Hook. The MetLife Foundation is the National Tour Sponsor of AXIS Dance Company

For more information on the AXIS Dance Company Guest Artist Residency and Performance, visit www.virginia.edu/drama/axisdance/.