Elevate Theater Company’s Presents Press Start
This integrated musical theater company for adults with and without disabilities will delight audiences on May 6.

University of Utah, April 25, 2016—Tanner Dance created the Elevate Theater Company in January 2016 to provide an opportunity for adults with physical and intellectual disabilities to engage in the arts in a University campus setting with their peers. The company is modeled after the Detour Theater Company based in Phoenix, Arizona with the support of Mike and Doris Lawson. This past fall and spring, the company has welcomed twenty students to weekly classes taking place on Saturday mornings at the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts and Education Complex on the University of Utah campus. In classes, students learn songs and movement under the direction of Mary-Martha Ostler and Aaron Webb. Students practice diction and memorization as they learn speaking and singing parts. Volunteers consisting of University of Utah students, local high school students and other members of the community serve as coaches to help participants with their parts and to perform alongside them.

Elevate Theater Company is excited to present their first full-length musical, Press Start, on Saturday, May 6. This musical transports the audience inside the bright, pixelated world of video games. When the famous characters we know and love run out of lives, they decide to put on a musical fundraiser that will help them raise gold rings and play on. Through hilarious and heartfelt musical numbers we see the heroes, villains and sidekicks like we’ve never seen them before. But when things go terribly awry, it’s the quiet sidekick Little Mushroom who must find the hero within to help save the day! Original sound, lighting, sets and costuming are made possible by the support of many community entities including the Salt Lake County Zoo, Arts & Parks Fund, the Salt Lake City Arts, Culture, Events Fund and the George S. and Dolores Doré Eccles Foundation.

In addition to Elevate Theater Company, Tanner Dance also began a daytime arts learning program for adults with disabilities called LEADD (Learning and Engaging through Arts Discipline and Development). In this program, students meet one afternoon a week to engage in music, dance and visual arts classes taught by experienced arts therapists and teachers. All of these participants have graduated from the public school system and no longer have access to the resources and opportunities found therein. Some students also hold part-time jobs, but most spend the bulk of their day at home with a parent or caregiver. The LEADD Program provides participants with valuable opportunities for continued learning and social interaction, allowing them to develop real-world problem-solving, goal-achieving and teamwork skills. The program hopes to grow to two days a week beginning in fall 2017.

Beneficiaries of these programs for adults with disabilities are not only the students, but also their parents and caregivers. One parent, Ann Dunn, talked about her experience with her son Nathan, who has Down Syndrome and has been participating in Dancers with Disabilities classes at Tanner Dance since he was 8. At age 22, he recently graduated from high school and was finding himself spending a lot of time watching TV. Ann said, “Something this program brings besides education is the social skills. It helps him be creative, strengthens his mind and increases his conversational skills”. Beneficiaries have also commented on the quality of instructors in these programs. Another parent, Lisa Eckersley, expressed how appreciative she is of instructors who are skilled in working with her daughter Annie. She said, “I would normally have to hire a tutor for things like art classes for her, which would be hard to find”.

For Immediate Release

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Elevate Theater Company’s *Press Start* performances will take place on May 6 at 1:00 and 7:00 pm at the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts and Education Complex in the Mary Ann Walton Lee Black Box Theater. Tickets are $5 each and may be purchased by visiting [www.tannerdance.utah.edu](http://www.tannerdance.utah.edu) or calling 801-581-7374.

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**About Tanner Dance**

Confident that the use of wholesome creative activity allows young people of all ages to develop alert minds, healthy bodies, and strong character, Virginia Tanner established the Tanner Dance Program in the 1940s. Her founding philosophy has become an enduring legacy of almost eight decades. Today, the program complements and extends the University of Utah’s mission of teaching, research and service, serving more than 40,000 students annually on campus and at satellite locations, as well as in elementary schools and community centers throughout Utah. The program moved into its new home in the Beverley Taylor Sorenson Arts & Education Complex in February 2014.