

ASU professor creates 'Red,' an interactive dance with toddlers

Amanda Pintore designs performances based on her research methodology with very young children

By Mary Beth Faller, ASU News
October 31, 2025

Red is the color that best embodies the range of energetic expression in toddlers, and that's why [Amanda Pintore](#) named her family-friendly dance performance "Red."

"This is for 12- to 36-month-olds, so we're exploring joyful chaos, rough-and-tumble play, connection making and expression," said Pintore, an assistant professor in the [School of Music, Dance and Theatre](#) at Arizona State University.

"Red" is an interactive performance for toddlers and their families, who all dance together with Pintore. The show debuted Oct. 30 and runs through Nov. 9 at [Mesa Arts Center](#), with several performances scheduled after that at the [Children's Museum of Phoenix](#).

Pintore earned her MFA in youth theater at ASU in 2017, and her thesis explored how to collaborate with very young children and their family members in the dance process.

"It was not just thinking about them as audience members, but as co-artists," she said.

She then worked as associate director of performing arts and education at the Lawrence Arts Center in Kansas and won a grant to further explore the discipline of theater dance for young children, working with them at universities, arts organizations, libraries and community spaces.

She developed a methodology, which she calls a "play lab," for conducting research with young children and then using the results to create a performance, usually with a team of researcher-performers.

"At first, we make as few decisions as possible about the show. Usually we have a hunch, a core idea," she said.

Then they have a structured series of play labs with children, and sometimes also the caregivers, in which the performer-researchers follow the lead of the little ones.

The session is recorded, and Pintore has a system for assigning codes to various outcomes during the session — actions like jumping or spinning, the energy level in the room, whether the participants are playing together, what is said. Then she looks for themes in the codes to further shape a concept. The performer-researchers rehearse to create a performance, return to the play lab to workshop it and then rehearse some more.

Pintore also bases the performances on the intended participants. When she works with preschools, there could be up to 20 children.

“This is their space. This is a different kind of energy. I always say to people, ‘I have a really high capacity for chaos because there's a lot that goes into the mix there.’”

When she works with families, the groups are smaller.

“We never work with more than seven family units at a time because we have bigger bodies in space,” she said. “Red” will have 25 total participants.

Her research led to her recent book, [“Theatre and Dance with Children as Artistic Partners: Devising Performance for the Very Young,”](#) which describes her play lab framework for creating a performance (along with tips, like delegating some of the time-consuming coding).

She also teaches a course on how to create theater dance for young children that collaborates with the Child Development Lab preschool on campus.

An interactive dance performance with toddlers potentially could be hectic, but Pintore said the hours of research help the performer-researchers anticipate everything that might happen.

“There’s a pretty big range of participation, observation and activation in this age range. And we are trained to handle whatever happens in the room,” she said.

They also prepare the participants, starting with a pre-show chat.

“There will be babies who are going to stay in that seat the whole time because they're in an observation space. And children can move freely in and out of the central playing space with us.”

Olivia Hannedo, a lead experience designer for ASU Enterprise Technology, is the other dancer-researcher along with Pintore for the performances of “Red.” The digital musical score is by Ji Sun Myung, an instructional specialist in the School of Music, Dance and Theatre, who will improvise part of the performance.

“She is going to be not only playing live music that we have built for the show, but we also have open sections with no planned choreography where we just will see what's happening in the room and she will play with us,” Pintore said.

At the end of “Red,” which lasts 35 minutes, the researchers help families transition back into their day.

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“We want caregivers to feel comfortable watching their child in this experience, having this moment together,” she said.

“What’s most beautiful is seeing the child-caregiver connection and then watching children connect with their peers that they’ve never met before.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Amanda Pintore, assistant professor in the School of Music, Dance and Theatre at ASU, performs “Red” during a dress rehearsal Wednesday, Oct. 29, at the Mesa Arts Center. The dance is designed for families and children ages 12 to 36 months, who are welcome to interact with the dancers. Photo by Charlie Leight/ASU News

Gallery



Dancer-researcher Olivia HERNEDDO (center), a lead experience designer for ASU Enterprise Technology, moves with Amanda Pintore, an assistant professor of youth theater, as they perform “Red” during a dress rehearsal Wednesday, Oct. 29, at the Mesa Arts Center. The show will run through Nov. 9 there.



Lindsay Vanegas sits with her children, Violet, 4, and Elias, 6, as Amanda Pintore and Olivia Herneddo rehearse "Red" at the Mesa Arts Center. The performance is designed for families and children ages 12 to 36 months, who are welcome to interact with the dancers.



Amanda Pintore (right) and Olivia Hannedo perform "Red" at the Mesa Arts Center. The dance features a pair of red sweaters connected by a 17-foot-long sleeve, created by ASU alumna Brenna Halvorsen, who also designed the costumes. Installation artist Alicia Kelly made the red and white banners.



An interactive dance performance with toddlers potentially could be hectic, but Amanda Pintore (front) said the hours of research help the performer-researchers anticipate everything that might happen. "There's a pretty big range of participation, observation and activation in this age range. And we are trained to handle whatever happens in the room," she said. They also help prepare the participants with a pre-show talk and at the end help them transition back into their day.