



## PhD student Sue Lynn Lau dances her way to Chicago

**24 November 2008**

It was announced on Friday that Garvan endocrinologist and PhD student, Dr Sue Lynn Lau, had won the Graduate Student category of the AAAS *Science* "Dance your PhD" contest. See her winning entry on YouTube.

On October 10, *Science* magazine challenged researchers around the world to interpret their PhD research in dance form, film the dance, and share it with the world on YouTube by mid-November. A total of 36 dances - including solo ballet and circus spectacle - were submitted online.

A panel of nine judges: the three winners of the first "Dance Your PhD" contest, three scientists from Harvard University, and three artistic directors of the dance company Pilobolus, scored the dances on their ability to bridge the art and science worlds.

The judges were also looking for those dances that most creatively conveyed the scientific essence of their respective Ph.D. theses, rather than a high quality video.

Sue Lynn's PhD examines *The role of vitamin D in beta-cell function*. With the Nutcracker Suite playing in the background, she appears as the Sugar Plum Fairy, delivering marshmallow glucose to three beta cell dancers. Meanwhile, a fifth dancer twirls around the stage - representing the sunlight required for vitamin D biosynthesis."

"I really love dancing - although I haven't done it seriously," said Sue Lynn. "I did a couple of years of ballet when I was in kindergarten, and I've done some small classes - swing, a little ceroc and salsa."

"In my view, song and dance should be an integral part of culture. It's how people communicated in the past, how oral traditions were handed down. Somehow we seem to have lost that participative aspect to music in our society."

Everybody in the video is from Garvan's Immunology and Inflammation program. The three beta cells are Sue Lynn's sister, Sue Mei Lau, other PhD students, Jessica Stolp and Kim Cheng, and Matthew Adams the Research Assistant.

"Kim was the sun," said Sue Lynn. "He was a real hit on YouTube!"

So how did they actually go about producing the video?

“After we heard about the contest, we talked about it for a couple of weeks, discussing how we could do it. We’re not technical at all. Another PhD student in our lab, Ken Ho, shot the video. We did it four times in a row and chose the best take because none of us know how to edit videos.”

“We shot it on the stage in Garvan’s NAB auditorium, and I learned how to put together music in Apple’s Garage Band – with lots of reference to the Help menu!”

The contest winners (there were four categories) have each been paired with a professional choreographer, and together they will attempt to translate a scientific paper the researcher has authored into a dance. In the case of Sue Lynn, it will be a paper authored by Dr Jenny Gunton, her supervisor.

The four choreographers, all based in Chicago, will create a single four-part performance based on the papers. In February 2009, the winning scientists will be guests of honor at the AAAS Annual Meeting in Chicago, where they will have front-row seats to the world debut of *This Is Science*, a professional dance interpretation of their published research.

#### **ABOUT GARVAN**

The Garvan Institute of Medical Research was founded in 1963. Initially a research department of St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney, it is now one of Australia's largest medical research institutions with approximately 400 scientists, students and support staff. Garvan’s main research programs are: Cancer, Diabetes & Obesity, Immunology and Inflammation, Osteoporosis and Bone Biology, and Neuroscience. The Garvan’s mission is to make significant contributions to medical science that will change the directions of science and medicine and have major impacts on human health. The outcome of Garvan’s discoveries is the development of better methods of diagnosis, treatment, and ultimately, prevention of disease.

#### **All media enquiries should be directed to:**

Alison Heather 0434 071 326 or Jackie Crossman on 0402 218 662