

# Voice of Dance

"Voice Of Dance is the real deal. It is the best dance site on the web..."  
Anna Kisselgoff, Former Chief Dance Critic, The New York Times

[Home](#) • [Features](#) • [Forums](#) • [Calendar](#) • [Gallery](#) • [About Us](#) • [Store](#) • [Directory](#) • [Tech](#)

September 9, 2009

Search:

**zones** [Ballet](#) » [Ballroom](#) » [Hip Hop](#) » [Irish](#) » [Modern](#) » [Salsa](#) » [Tap](#) » [World Dance](#) » [Jazz](#) » [Auditions](#) » [Diets](#) » [TV](#) »

## Features

[✉ Email Article to a Friend](#)

Rate this Article!

### Choreographer's Corner

Jo Kreiter on the Making of *The Ballad of Polly Ann*

By

Jo Kreiter



Melissa Caywood and Britt Karhoff of Flyaway Productions in *The Ballad of Polly Ann*. Photo by Austin Forbord.

Ten years ago I made a dance on the last hand operated crane on the San Francisco Waterfront. We had to canoe to rehearsal because the crane sat in the middle of Islais Creek where it pours into the bay. I got to climb a 90-foot tower of steel, swing from its support beams and dance on its highest I-beams, balancing against the sway of the water below me. Ten years later, I am making a sequel to that dance. This time, I'm excavating the stories of women who have built the Bay Area's bridges. I connected with Tradeswomen Inc., hired a historian, and collected the oral histories of six bridge builders.

For the past year, Flyaway and I have been creating a movement language that reflects the physical and emotional risks embedded in the bridge builders' relentless physical labor. We have been mining women's experience with physical work, tools, heights, and machinery as well as their cultural experience of working in a male-dominated labor force, and how that affected their sense of self, their femininity, family and self-worth. It takes a particular kind of woman to work in the trades. Feisty. Independent. Mechanically intelligent. It also takes a particular kind of woman to be a dancer. I have been interested in what the two have in common, and how we differ.

We share a devotion to physical process and physical challenges. Both groups of women are a cultural minority; both are small in number in the world, but large in our own power and certainty. Our rates of pay could not differ more, however, and women in the trades face horrific and, at times, life-threatening sexism, often on a daily basis. Contemporary dancers working inside a female-dominated culture simply do not.

## Monthly Dance Giveaways!

Free Tickets and Gear!

Sign up for Free Newsletter to enter

Daily Subscription

Your email

Daily Dance Wire

Your email

## Global Dance Directory

Search Directory:

Search 17,245+ listings!

## Dance

[Major Professional Dance Companies \(Million+\)](#)

[Famous Dancers](#)

[Professional Dance Companies](#)

[International Dance Companies](#)

[Presenters](#)

[Tickets](#)

[Festivals](#)

[Famous Choreographers](#)

## Shopping

[Dance Shops Near You!](#)

[Dance Apparel On Line](#)

[Costumes](#)

[Dance Shoes](#)

[Dance Videos](#)

[Collectibles](#)

[Dance Music](#)

[Dance Make Up](#)

## Dancing

[Dance Classes Near You!](#)

[College and University Dance Programs](#)

## Must See

### New York City Center

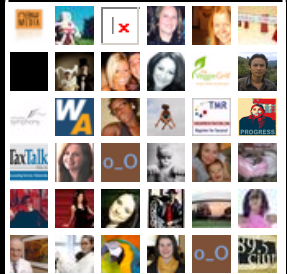


New York, NY  
Sep 22 - Oct 3

*Paid Advertisement*

## Following

### Twitter Followers



View All...

[Follow Us!](#)

[My Twitter Friends](#)

## National Dance Calendar



Sep 10 - Sep 13  
**New York, NY**  
*Above and Beyond Dance*  
[ASCENDANCE](#)



Sep 10 - Sep 20  
**San Francisco, CA**  
*They Gotta Be Secret Agents Poste Restante (a SF Fringe Fest world premier)*

[Competitions](#)  
[Summer Dance Programs](#)  
[Pre College and Pre Professional Academies](#)

#### Professionals

[Dancer Health](#)  
[Artist Management and Agents](#)  
[PR Agencies](#)  
[Presenter Conferences](#)  
[Service Organizations](#)  
[Fundraisers](#)  
[Foundations](#)  
[Designers](#)  
[Rental Performance Venues](#)  
[Web Services](#)  
[Photographers & Videographers](#)

#### Dance Entertainment

[Kids' Dance Birthday Parties](#)  
[Special Event Dance Entertainment for Hire](#)

[Add Listing](#)

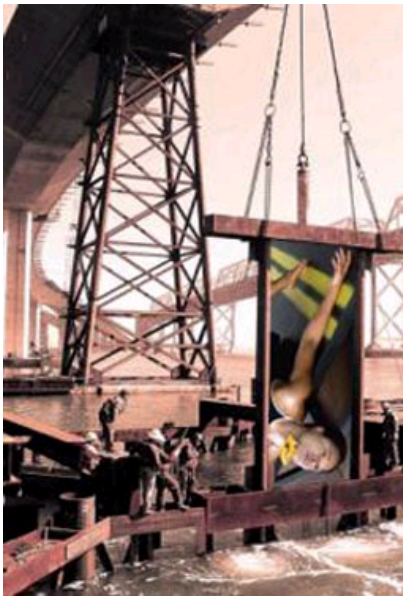


Photo by Joseph A. Blum.

One of the trades I have found fascinating is pile driving. Pile drivers have to work in exquisite cooperation to drive the support structures of a bridge into the ground with a mechanical hammer. It takes hoisting, precision and split-second communication. For the piece, we've replicated a section of bridge that tilts vertically and horizontally, shifting its meaning as it changes position. On it, we have created a dance that explores pile driving. The dancers work with the swing of the bridge to replicate the rhythm of the mechanical hammer. They, too, are working with split-second timings. We have crashed and burned several times in rehearsal. This particular task is probably the hardest thing I've ever asked dancers to do, but after several months, we're on the other side of the risks now and have managed to make an exquisite dance that captures both the heart beat and rigorous mechanics of driving pile.

Most challenging for me about this project is the knowledge that I am creating a dance about the lives of real women who are alive and well. More than half of the women we interviewed are still working in their fields. It is an awesome responsibility to try to honor someone's work, especially knowing they are going to come to the show to check it out. It brings many questions to the process. How true to their stories should I be? What movement invention serves their experience? Will I honor or offend?

Some of their stories have given me immediate choreographic direction. For example, we're embracing the fear a crane operator carries with her every day while she sits high above everyone since she is responsible for the safety of the whole job site. We have taken that fear and made it dynamic, suspended, and quick to fall, catch and release.

We have inhabited the sense of service felt by a laborer working under the bridge, near the water, whose job is to oil the nuts and bolts. Her work is both crucial and invisible to the public. Here, we chose to explore her story with an abstract vocabulary, where service to the public good is illuminated by a dancer moving and being moved by a tiny, toy car.

I am loving the responsibility inherent in these questions, just as I am loving the innovation and generosity the dancers are bringing to the process. I'm grateful to be able to archive these women's stories through dance, where daily work and kinetic imagination coincide.

*The Ballad of Polly Ann* runs through Saturday at 8 p.m. at SOMArts Cultural Center, 934 Brannan St., in San Francisco.  
Tickets: (800) 838-3006, [flyawayproductions.com](http://flyawayproductions.com)

\*Disclaimer: The views of Jo Kreiter are not necessarily the views of Voice of Dance

## Comments



Sep 13  
**Winter Park, FL**  
[Career Transition For Dancers FREE Career Development Workshop](#)



Sep 13  
**Irvine, ca**  
[Irvine Barclay Theatre 20-20-20 Virsky Ukrainian National Dance Company](#)



Sep 18  
**San Francisco, CA**  
[Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Open Rehearsal with Margaret Jenkins Dance Company...](#)

Sep 18 - Sep 20  
**San Francisco, CA**  
[ODC Theater ODC Theater Presents Dandelion Dancetheater's MUTT](#)



Sep 20  
**San Francisco, CA**  
[Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Creating Contemporary Art in Quanzhou, China: A ...](#)

[View Calendar](#)  
[Add Your Event](#)

