

Margaret Jenkins Dance Company Organization Overview

The Margaret Jenkins Dance Company (MJDC) has been a part of the cultural fabric of San Francisco for over three decades—dedicated to the making and touring of new work, international exchange, and programs that support process, choreographic mentorship and performance opportunities. At the heart of the organization's mission is Ms. Jenkins belief that it is incumbent on us as artists to be in conversation through our work—to break the isolation and expand who sees and responds to the arts.

The MJDC was founded in San Francisco in 1973. Margaret Jenkins herself is a fifth-generation San Franciscan, steeped in its particular cultural and artistic traditions. Yet the origins of the Company's singular artistic philosophy can undoubtedly be found among the radical developments that took place in all the arts in the New York of the 1960's.

While studying and working with Merce Cunningham during that time, Jenkins began to reimagine the concepts of both choreographer and dance company. It was in the environment of Cunningham and John Cage that she was first exposed to the collaborative efforts of Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Andy Warhol and many others, as well as to the music of Earle Brown, Gordon Mumma, Morton Feldman and Cage himself.

Jenkins returned to San Francisco in 1970 and immediately began to teach and make works prior to the formal founding of her Company three years later. Her goal was less to create a choreographic entity in the traditional sense than to fashion a fluid site for exploratory, collaborative interaction among all the arts, a place of "company" in its deepest meaning.

The MJDC began touring extensively in the late 1970s. During the NEA's National Dance Touring Program, the Company traveled throughout the United States on a regular basis. The Company has also traveled internationally in Western and Eastern Europe, as well as Asia. Dances have been commissioned by a long list of presenters, including BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music), the Krannert Center in Urbana, IL, the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, MN, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival in Lee, MA, Cal Performances in Berkeley, CA, Arizona State University and University of Arizona, AZ, and on a number of occasions by Dance Center of Columbia College and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL.

The dancers have been critical to the development of this highly physical and gestural world that is her signature. The Company creates dances by continually layering, disrupting rhythms and shattering spatial planes. There is a loose and brazen quality to their explorations, with an abundance of information offered through movement, music and spoken text. Jenkins has continued to emphasize this focus across her entire career, welcoming the participation of such multi-disciplinary artists as Rinde Eckert, Bruce Nauman, Terry Allen and Yoko Ono, and composers Paul Drescher, Jay Clويدt, Bill Fontana, Alvin Curran, David Lang, among others.

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In the summer of 2004, the MJDC opened a new studio in San Francisco. The Margaret Jenkins Dance Lab (MJDL) is the home of all MJDC creative activities and provides the community with a vital space for new types of exchange. No other space in San Francisco can afford to devote its entire day to creative research, open rehearsals, and free lectures and demonstrations of interdisciplinary work, uninterrupted by “training” classes or the daily array of demanding activities of a resident company/space-owner. The particular emphasis of this space and for the MJDC is to create programs and interactions among choreographers that emphasize process not product.

Among the organization’s important programs:

- Choreographers in Mentorship Exchange (CHIME): CHIME will have launched its fourth year in the Bay Area in January 2008, at the same time that a new pilot program extension of CHIME, into Southern California, will begin. CHIME is an artist-driven mentorship program in which self-selected pairs of professional modern dance choreographers—mentor and mentee—receive significant financial support over one year to establish and explore a working relationship that includes, but is not limited to, work in the studio. CHIME continues a tradition, as with the National Dance Labs before it, of the organization’s concern for community and for choreographers’ experimentation.
- International collaborations: the making of new works abroad in conjunction with other groups (as with *A Slipping Glimpse*, made with the Tanusree Shankar Dance Group in Kolkata, India in 2005-2006) or the mounting of Jenkins choreography on international companies (as with GINKO in Tokyo, Japan in 2002) is a primary focus of the organization. She is developing a new work in collaboration with the Guangdong Modern Dance Company of Guangzhou, China entitled *Other Suns*.
- Choreography for new audiences: In 2007, Ms. Jenkins created a new work for the San Francisco Ballet’s 75th anniversary.
- Ms. Jenkins is a founding member of the Center for Creative Research (CCR). CCR centers its mission on creating opportunities for mature artists to engage in supportive relationships with universities, their dance departments and the faculty at large.
- Ms. Jenkins is founder of Choreographers in Action, a San Francisco/Bay Area group of choreographers who meet quarterly to organize and produce a yearly showcase for local artists along with creating a dialogue about art and art making.