

## Margaret Jenkins Biography



**Margaret Jenkins** is a choreographer, teacher, and mentor to many artists as well as a designer of unique community-based dance projects, most notably CHIME (Choreographers in Mentorship Exchange). Jenkins began her early training in San Francisco. In the sixties, she moved to New York to study at Juilliard, continued her training at UCLA and returned to New York to dance in the companies of Jack Moore, Viola Farber, Judy Dunn, James Cunningham, Gus Solomons, Jr. and Twyla Tharp's original company with Sara Rudner. In addition, Jenkins was a member of the faculty of the Merce Cunningham Studio and restaged his works for companies in Europe and the United States for over 12 years. In 1967, Merce Cunningham asked Ms. Jenkins to re stage his work for the Cullberg Ballet in Stockholm, Sweden, one the first times his work was performed by another company.

In 1970, Jenkins returned to San Francisco, and in 1973, formed the Margaret Jenkins Dance Company (MJDC). She opened one of the West Coast's first studio-performing spaces and a school for the training of professional modern dancers. This venue quickly became the center for local and traveling companies to show and share their work. Viola Farber and Merce Cunningham were frequent guests, and dozens of young choreographers had the chance to experiment and take risks. This San Francisco rehearsal and performance space also became the "stage" for Jenkins and her Company. Jenkins takes great pride in being a major "instigator" along with a number of other colleagues of the revitalization of the West Coast as a major center for dance activity. In 2013 – 2014, Jenkins celebrated the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of her Company.

In the last four decades, she has created an impressive body of work, with over 80 works created on her Company, as well as resident companies in the United States, Asia and Europe. Jenkins has received commissions from renowned national and international arts presenters and cultural institutions, including the Clarice Smith Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Maryland, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (YBCA), The Dance Center of Columbia College in Chicago, National Dance Project (NDP), Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, Arizona State University, University of Arizona, New Dance Ensemble in Minneapolis, Repertory Dance Theatre in Salt Lake City, Oakland Ballet, Cullberg Ballet of Sweden, and Ginko, a modern dance company in Tokyo, Japan. In 2008, Jenkins was commissioned to create a new work for the 75th anniversary of the San Francisco Ballet, one of two women with this distinct honor. In addition, she has set work on dancers within various college and university dance departments.

Over the two decades, Ms. Jenkins' choreographic attention has been focused on cross-cultural collaborations between her Company and international artists, including the Tanusree Shankar Dance Company of India, and the Guangzhou Modern Dance Company of China, Ginko in Japan, and the Kolben Dance Company in Jerusalem, Israel. She has also developed ambitious multi-disciplinary works such as *Light Moves*, an evening-length dance created in collaboration with media artist Naomie Kremer. A proponent of a fully realized collaborative art, Jenkins has worked with dance, music and visual arts luminaries, including Terry Allen, Alvin Curran, Paul Dresher, Rinde Eckert, David Lang, Bruce Nauman, Naomie Kremer, Alexander V. Nichols and Yoko Ono, among others. In 2013, Jenkins and her Company traveled to Israel for a month-long residency with the Kolben Dance Company of Jerusalem to collaborate on a new work that premiered during the MJDC's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Season. Soon after the MJDC returned to Jerusalem for its premiere there.

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As an organizer and enthusiast for dance, Jenkins served as Artistic Consultant to Dance About, a dance facility at the UC Berkeley Extension in San Francisco; sat on the steering committee for the 2002 International Women's Day Conference in San Francisco; and facilitated a showcase for presenters to be introduced to the work of Swedish choreographers in Stockholm. She was a founding member of the Bay Area Dance Coalition and of Dance/USA, serving on its first Board of Directors. She was on the Board of Directors of YBCA in San Francisco for six years. She remains an active participant on panels across the United States.

Jenkins is committed to advancing the health and future of the field of dance through a variety of projects. In 2004, she and her Company launched CHIME (Choreographers in Mentorship Exchange). CHIME is a unique mentorship program that fosters creative exchange and long-term relationships between emerging and established choreographers, creating an arena for the critical analysis of choreography outside of the academic environment. Coinciding with the commencement of CHIME, she opened her new studio, the Margaret Jenkins Dance Lab, in the South of Market area of San Francisco, her seventh working space in San Francisco, since 1970. In the last 12 years, CHIME expanded to include CHIME in Southern California, which engages artists in Los Angeles County, and CHIME Across Borders, which brings internationally renowned masters of dance, in a position titled as Chair, to San Francisco to work with locally established choreographers. CHIME Across Borders Chairs have included choreographers David Gordon, Ralph Lemon, Elizabeth Streb, Tere O'Connor and Dana Reitz. For the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of CHIME in 2014 and 2016, Ms. Jenkins mentored 3 dance artists in San Francisco and will continue this program in 2018.

In addition, Jenkins conceived The National Dance Lab (NDL) a “product-driven,” as opposed to “market-driven,” model for creativity in the performing arts. Jenkins has also helped to structure and implement Choreographers in Action (CIA), a unique gathering of Bay Area choreographers who, in combination and collaboration, posit solutions to the myriad of issues that surround the working artist. Similarly, Jenkins was one of the founding members of the Center for Creative Research (CCR) based in New York, which was a collection of eleven senior choreographers who came together under the leadership of Sam Miller and Dana Whitco to create artistic research residencies within universities. She was on the first board of directors of Dance USA and served on the board of YBCA for six years.

For her unique artistic vision, Jenkins has received numerous awards, including a Guggenheim Fellowship, an Irvine Fellowship in Dance, the San Francisco Arts Commission Award of Honor, three Isadora Duncan Awards (Izzies), and the Bernard Osher Cultural Award for her outstanding contributions to the arts community in San Francisco and the Bay Area and 2015 a Sustained Achievement Award from the Izzies. April 24, 2003 was declared “Margaret Jenkins Day” by San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown. On that day, she also received a Governor’s Commendation from Governor Gray Davis. In 2013, she was awarded a residency at The Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center in Italy.

After the completion of her 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary season, she reinvented a way to move forward with a more flexible, affordable, touring model with the work *Site Series (Inside Outside)*, creating a work for people’s living rooms, galleries, museums, parks – any unconventional space.

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*Site Series (Inside Outside)* considers and is propelled by the nomadic nature of being a performing artist - we carry everything with us: our history, thoughts, possessions and experiences to wherever we land and we make those surroundings our temporary home.

The work was generated in the Margaret Jenkins Dance Lab using a Beckett-like imaginary living room, a contained space, to inspire the choreography. An easily adaptable minimal set, all white and placed on a white floor, includes eight remote-controlled globes as a source of light, a big easy chair and a hard-back chair, and portable sound equipment, which can be assembled for each new space. The visual design and set elements by Dave Robertson and Mary Domenico fit easily in a suitcase or a car.

*Site Series* is comprised of many non-linear stories that unfold in the 30-minute dance. How the work is interpreted is a result of the movement, the architecture of the space, the dimensions and design of any particular home or inside environment and the landscape of the outside. Seen inside from three sides or in the round, each audience member's vantage point is distinct. For an outside prologue, Ms. Jenkins, in collaboration with her dancers, designs the choreography specifically for each site.

"I am intrigued by the 'inside outside' aspects of *Site Series*, both the actual and metaphoric implications: how we are publicly and privately affected by the setting of the work, the interaction of the choreography with the site and the dialogue that ensues between the audience and the artists," says Ms. Jenkins. Linked to pieces of pre-recorded music, these works are like song cycles, presented the way chamber music is often heard - in a salon-type atmosphere.

Ms. Jenkins is intrigued by making distinct units of new work (solos, duets, trios, quartets) and re-imagining her highly-charged kinetic material into a new vocabulary that can be seen in the round, in a garden, a gallery, a home or in more conventional theatrical venues. The flexibility of *Site Series* has allowed the Company to launch a new way of working, more intimate in every aspect, performing more frequently in the San Francisco Bay Area, around the country and throughout the world.

For her 43<sup>rd</sup> season, Ms. Jenkins and her Company premiered *Skies Calling Skies Falling* and a reimagined *Site Series* for the Wilsey Center in the War Memorial Building in San Francisco. *Site Series* was viewed in the Education Studio from 4 sides, up close and personal. *Skies Calling Skies Falling* was seen in the Atrium Theater in a more traditional seating environment. There was an 8-minute video by video artists by David and Hi-Jin Hodge that preceded the live dancing filmed in a granary in San Francisco. Additional collaborators were Michael Palmer – poet, Thomas Carnacki - music, David Robertson - lighting design and Mary Domenico – costumes.

"The vortex of superstorms and torchlight parades and poisoned speech. The unimaginable and the all-too-real, and the moments of illumination amidst it all. *Skies Calling Skies Falling* is our response to this vertiginous new reality - how to create a sense of hope while continuing to resist. How to reassert the profoundly human." – M. Jenkins