

Dance Brigade

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press photos available upon request and online at www.dancebrigade.org

**From Wallflower Order to Dance Brigade:
A 35-Year Retrospective Celebration**
Presenting The Great Liberation Upon Hearing and other herstorical dances

November 18 – 20, 2011

Friday and Saturday at 8 pm, Sunday at 2 pm

Novellus Theater at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts
700 Howard Street, San Francisco CA 94103

*****FREE!*****

Donor reserved seating available

www.dancebrigade.org

“They push their point of view with panache and style... with seriousness as well as joy and an uproarious sense of style.” – SF Bay Guardian

“In an age overrun with art as a cold, slick, commodity, the Dance Brigade’s work remains the real thing.” – Dance Magazine

(San Francisco, September 2011) This evening of sumptuous dancing, explosive Taiko, and delicious fun celebrates the history of **Krissy Keefer's** Dance Brigade - from Wallflower Order Dance Collective of the 1970's, to what is the Dance Brigade organization of today. Dance Brigade is known for the fierce inventiveness and deft comic touch in which it explores the intersection between art and social issues. With reprises of *Great Liberation Upon Hearing* and other herstorical dances, we trace the journey of what was one the nation's first feminist dance companies.

The evening opens with a video retrospective interwoven with live performances by the women who have made up Dance Brigade and the mother company Wallflower Order over the past three and a half decades. The rousing tribute chronicles the artists and social movements that created and influenced the company’s work - from the Women’s Movement of the 70s to the Latin American Solidarity Movement of the 80s to the Anti-War Movement of the 90s to the Green Movement of today. The repertoire that the company created as a response to these political times took them across the globe and put them on the map. Said the Kansas City Star about the first dance company specific to women’s issues in theme and content, *“Wallflower Order is a National Treasure.”* Settling in the Bay Area in 1983, the company began producing events and artists as part of their mission. Their Furious Feet Festival saw the first dance event to deal with the AIDs epidemic and

their Revolutionary Nutcracker Sweetie provided performance opportunities for over 500 artists and dance companies over its 10 year run.

The retrospective/documentary showcases the thirty-plus women who worked directly with the company - including dancers **Laurel Near** of SPACE, **Maria Pendones** of Danzay, **Kim Epifano** of Trolley Dances, **Sarah Crowell** of Destiny Arts, and **Sue Li Jue** of Facing East Dance and Music, as well as collaborating musicians **Holly Near**, **Grupo Raiz**, **Mary Watkins**, **Ferron**, and **Copper Wimmin** - each adding their unique talents to a repertoire that includes over fifteen evening-length dances. Joining Dance Brigade on stage in live performance will be their daughter company and legacy, the **Grrrl Brigade**, along with **Allan Frias** (of *So You Think You Can Dance* fame), who is an artist-in-residence at Dance Brigade's community center and performance space, Dance Mission Theater.

The Great Liberation Upon Hearing closes the evening. Fresh off of an exhilarating run at NYC's Dance Theater Workshop, *Great Liberation* is an hour-long dance-drama that explores death and dying based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Raved the Bearstou Journal about their New York run, "...done with meticulous care, mixing mystical and secular images, humor and drama, the sacred and the profane." Krissy Keefer and her cast of eleven brilliant dancers follow the journey from death to reincarnation as laid out in the book Bardo Thodol, which is read to the dead in their state of in-between. After the show's 2009 premiere in San Francisco, Culture Vulture glowed, "*Krissy Keefer created a multi-media ecstatic revel. The dancers are exuberant and remarkable, taking many roles, performing with high energy and acrobatic skill.*"

In the spirit of celebration and staying true to their history of building community through the arts, Dance Brigade has decided to make the entire show free - especially as these tough economic times are proving trying for all.

KRISSY KEEFER / DANCE BRIGADE

Dance Brigade is biting, intellectual, insightful wit, and provocative originality. This dynamic multi-racial troupe of women proves that socially relevant dance can be technically brilliant, as well as exuberant with down-home hilarious fun. This company dances at full throttle. Artistic Director, **Krissy Keefer** explores the intersection between art and social issues with fierce inventiveness and a deft comic touch. Her content driven choreographies are a high-energy blend of ballet, modern dance, jazz, song, text, sign language and explosive Taiko drumming. The company has created over 10 full-length concerts of contemporary dance theater including Pandora's Box, Ballet of the Banshees, Cinderella, Queen of Sheba, Cave Women, Spell, The Revolutionary Nutcracker Sweetie and The Great Liberation Upon Hearing. For these productions, they received numerous grants and awards. Dance Brigade resides in the heart of the Mission District in San Francisco at Dance Mission Theater, where they operate a 140-seat theater, dance studios, adult and youth classes, Grrrl Brigade and produce groundbreaking events.

In 1984, Krissy Keefer and Nina Fichter, original members of Wallflower Order, founded Dance Brigade to create and perform dance-theater that addresses the complex problems of contemporary American women. Artistic Director Krissy Keefer co-founded the **Wallflower Order** in 1975 as the nation's first feminist dance company. Wallflower toured the nation for almost a decade, and staged many original pieces before large, enthusiastic, and predominantly feminist audiences. They developed a new kind of modern dance-theater that was stylistically rooted in martial arts, athleticism, and social justice. As the Wallflower Order's members went their separate ways,

Keefer and Fichter created the Dance Brigade to carry forward their activist vision. Their original works continued to explore social issues such as war, poverty, breast cancer, women's history, death and dying, and spirituality from a feminist perspective.

In 1998, Dance Brigade began to operate Dance Mission at 24th and Mission Streets in San Francisco. At Dance Mission, they created an affordable 140-seat theater and rehearsal space for San Francisco dancers and artists. They expanded the Adult and Youth Dance Programs to include a full range of dance classes in Hip-Hop, Salsa, Bhangra, Brazilian, Bollywood, Afro-Haitian, modern, ballet and more. Some of the groundbreaking events Dance Brigade has presented and pioneered include the SkyDancers, Women on the Drum, Women Against War, and the Manifest!val for Social Change. Each year Dance Mission helps emerging artists launch their professional careers through the bi-annual Choreographers Showcase and the Down & Dirty Dance Series. In 2004, the Grrrl Brigade was formed as an intensive dance/leadership development program designed to provide high quality dance training, performance opportunities, and a sense of self-empowerment for San Francisco's girls ages 9 to 18. This program began with 10 girls and has now over 60 girls participating.

Krissy Keefer has a long history of collaborating with a wide array of artists, companies and non-arts community groups. In the highly successful 2002 & 2008 productions of *Women Against War* at the Herbst Theater, she brought together prominent feminist activists, veteran feminist musicians, both established and emerging dance companies, and Grrrl Brigade. In 2006, Dance Brigade performed as the Greek chorus in San Jose Repertory Theatre's production Euripides's anti-war play, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, directed by Timothy Near. Keefer served as co-director and choreographer for this production. In 2008, she also worked with feminist scholars and students in the New College Women's Spirituality Masters' Program and with Quan Yin Healing Arts Center to create "The Valencia Street Project," honoring 30 years of local feminist history and institution building through original dance theater and public education events. Keefer's latest work on death and dying was a fiery interpretation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead called *The Great Liberation Upon Hearing*. The performances were enthusiastically received by sold out audiences at both Dance Mission in February 2009 and at Laney College in Oakland in November 2009. An adaptation of *Great Liberation* was performed at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival August 2010. In 2011, *The Great Liberation Upon Hearing* toured to New York City for week of performances at the Dance Theater.

WALLFLOWER ORDER

Krissy Keefer co-founded The Wallflower Order in 1975 at the height of the woman's movement with four other women from Eugene, Oregon. Their mission was to provide an expanded artistic landscape as it related to women in the 20th century. Following in the footsteps of Martha Graham and Isadora Duncan, women whose very lives and unique identities shaped American dance, the founders of Wallflower Order created the first dance company that was specific in theme and content relating to women's issues. Working with feminist production companies, political groups and women's service organizations, the company made an enormous contribution to the cultural community of the North American women's movement, giving artistic expression to the issues of political and social justice.

While Wallflower Order and its lesbian infused sensibilities were eventually able to garner respect and attention from the established dance community, and even achieved a modest level of mainstream success, the company's primary audience and support overwhelmingly came from the women's community and from women themselves. In many ways, Wallflower Order's socially

relevant work set the stage for the battle cry of the late 1980's and early 1990's to unite community with art.

GRRRL BRIGADE

Grrrl Brigade is Dance Brigade's daughter dance company; featuring dancers age ten through seventeen. With the creation of the Grrrl Brigade, the Dance Brigade has revived choreography and adapted material to reflect current events to teach to the girls. In May 2010, the girls performed a version of "On the Edge of the World, a People's History of the U.S." Dance Brigade originally performed this production in 1992 to mark the quincentennial of Columbus' voyage to the New World. The revival was to honor the late Howard Zinn who past away early 2010. In 2011 the girls performed, "Stand Up! A show of resistance" that examined issues of child abuse and domestic violence. The GRRRL Brigade is an intensive dance/leadership development program designed to provide high quality dance training, performance opportunities, and a sense of self-empowerment. Our goal is to give the girls, their parents, and our audience the inspiration, magic, and hope only evocative dance theater can spark in creating a just and peaceful world.

The girls are instructed by some of the San Francisco Bay Area's leading dance and taiko artists. They take weekly classes in Modern-Jazz, Afro-Cuban Modern, Hip Hop and Taiko (Japanese drumming) from September to May and are encouraged to create their own choreography. The GRRRL Brigade performs around the Bay Area and Ukiah. Each year they present "The Revolutionary Nutcracker Sweetie: The Kidz Version", an alternative take on the holiday classic presented at Brava Theater; and a spring show at Dance Mission Theater written and choreographed by Dance Brigade staff and the girls, focusing on issues facing girls today and honoring great women past and present.

The GRRRL Brigade was founded in 2004 by Dance Brigade to extend its mission of building community through the arts by creating and teaching dance-theater that explores complex issues confronting contemporary Americans. The program originally for girls 13 - 18 years received such great support and encouragement from the families and our audiences that in 2006 we expanded to include girls 9 - 12 years old. Starting with 10 girls in 2004, we currently now have over 50 participants.

ALLAN FRIAS

Allan Frias has been a leading force of the Bay Area Hip Hop scene for pas decade years. He teaches three packed classes a week at Dance Mission Theater, not only Allan's base but also the home of his hip hop ensemble, *Mind Over Matter*, which performs throughout the Bay Area and beyond. Allan also directs and choreographs for the Junior Jam youth performance program at the Golden State Warriors and has appeared on Fox TV's *So You Think You Can Dance*. Allan, who looks more like a football player than your average dancer, shows firsthand that body type does not make a dancer. His enormous size and personality lend power to his teaching, stage presence and choreography and his performance quality is riveting.

ABOUT *Great Liberation Upon Hearing*

After a successful run in New York City, Dance Brigade returns to San Francisco with its highly acclaimed "The Great Liberation Upon Hearing," a multi-media dance/drama that explores death and dying based on the Bardo Experience as depicted in the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Artistic Director Krissy Keefer follows the journey as laid out in the book Bardo Thodol, which is read to the dead while they are in the state between death and reincarnation. By providing a verbal guide to

the deceased, this tradition shows how to use the moment of death to attain liberation and help the departed with reincarnation into the next life.

Krissy Keefer, in collaboration with Sara Shelton Mann and the dancers, has created original choreography fueled with intense style and structure. The stage set and video are by longtime Dance Brigade collaborator Matthew De Gumbia. He has with have created a translucent visual component depicting luminous images that transform the scenes from a fiery hell to a pure celestial land. Hauntingly beautiful songs and music are by Elaine Buckholtz and Floor Van Herreweghe.

Premiered in 2009 in San Francisco, the work won critical acclaim, summed up in Culture Vulture, who raved: "*Krissy Keefer created a multi-media ecstatic revel. The dancers are exuberant and remarkable, taking many roles, performing with high energy and acrobatic skill.*"

The Tibetan Book of the Dead, whose actual title is "The Great Liberation upon Hearing in the Intermediate State" or "Bardo Thodol," is traditionally believed to be the work of the legendary Padma Sambhava in the 8th century A.D, considered to be one of the first persons to bring Buddhism to Tibet. The book acts as a guide for the dead during the state that intervenes death and the next rebirth. It is a guide that is read aloud to the dead while they are in the state between death and reincarnation in order for them to recognize the nature of their mind and attain liberation from the cycle of rebirth.

The Bardo Thodol teaches that once awareness is freed from the body, it creates its own reality, as one would experience in a dream. This dream occurs in various phases (bardos) in ways both wonderful and terrifying. Overwhelming peaceful and wrathful visions and deities appear. Since the deceased's awareness is in confusion from no longer being connected to the physical body, it needs help and guidance in order that enlightenment and liberation occur. The Bardo Thodol teaches how we can attain Nirvana by recognizing the heavenly realms.

Company director Krissy Keefer has indeed has personal experience with the Bardo Thodol. "I had the good fortune and responsibility," she noted, "to read the Great Liberation to two of my closest friends after they passed away within a year of each other. Reading the book every day to them was very helpful for my own recovery around their passing. I hoped that it helped them. In this time when death is around every corner both on the personal level and on the grand scale of major eco systems collapsing, I find this material critical to my own mental health."

CALENDAR LISTING

Please note: Hi-res jpegs are available upon request and are online at dancemission.com or dancebrigade.org

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Tickets: FREE!

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Photo of Lena Gatchalian and Debby Kajiyama
Photo by Andy Mogg