

Student dancers explore social issues with power, grace

By **Anne Brice**, Berkeley News | APRIL 14, 2015



UC Berkeley student dancers will soar onto the stage Thursday in *Berkeley Dance Project 2015*, a highlight of the season by the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance Studies. The show features works by three choreographers — Jo Kreiter, Ann Carlson and show director and department professor Lisa Wymore — that explore contemporary social issues, including community, protest and rescue.



(Photo by Megan Lowe)

The performance begins in the air with Kreiter's piece, "When to Let Go," which explores the concepts of rescue, vulnerability and interdependence. She describes her work as "an intersection of social justice and acrobatic spectacle."

In the piece, dancers move on flying apparatuses — curved steel bars that swing from the ceiling — in duets and trios, relying on one another for balance and support. "At first, my partner and I felt a little shaky on the apparatuses," says Alisa Carreras, a junior dance and performing studies major who is dancing in the piece. "But we grew to trust each other. It's really about exploring what your body can already naturally do."

Moving gracefully on swinging bars is no easy feat. It takes guts, determination and a lot of training. Kreiter has been choreographing off-the-ground pieces that use flight and suspension for the past 20 years. She says that students experience a learning curve that "moves from excitement to big sore muscles to struggle and then to a kind of grounding that allows you to learn what you need to learn, and beyond that, to experiment in new ways."

The theme of rescue is integrated into each aspect of the performance — from how the dancers move with one another to the set and costume design. Bright orange life jackets hang from the bars, one apparatus is molded into the shape of a boat and dancers depend on one another to stay "afloat." Kreiter says she worked with students to explore the concept. "I guided a process of redefining the word, facilitating a personal link between their lived experience, their perceptions of our world at the moment."

Kyla Tillery, a senior in the theater department, says dancers bring their own interpretations of the theme, which creates a stronger performance. "Our experiences alter the way we see the world," she explains. "When I'm dancing in this piece, I'm thinking about people in my community who need help and refuse to take it. I'm thinking about rescue within myself and when I need it. Everyone can find what it means to them and take that piece with them."

Also featured is a new work by Wymore. The piece examines elements of protest and highlights the power of masses of people gathering in public spaces. The final act of the performance is choreographed by New York-based conceptual artist Carlson, who restages *Flag*, a dance that the *New York Times* called "a convincing symbol of a politically troubled nation." (The dance was originally performed in 1990 as a response to the first Gulf War and the censorship of the early 1990s.)

Berkeley Dance Project 2015 opens Thursday, April 16, and continues through Saturday, April 25 at the Zellerbach Playhouse on campus. Tickets are \$13-\$20 and can be [purchased online](#) or at the door. Tickets are half off for the 4 p.m. performance on Cal Day, this Saturday, April 18. The show runs an hour long with no intermission.

To learn more about *Berkeley Dance Project 2015*, visit the Department of Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies [website](#) or read the student [blog](#) for updates, photos, and bios on the dancers and choreographers.



(Photo by Megan Lowe)

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