

Kaeja d'Dance Bio | 2023

Kaeja d'Dance, under the leadership of Co-Artistic Directors Karen and Allen Kaeja since 1991, stands as a pioneering force in the world of contemporary dance. The company has consistently pushed the boundaries of artistic expression, leaving an indelible mark on the global dance landscape with its commitment to exploring the human condition and fostering inclusivity.

Transcending conventional boundaries, Kaeja encompasses various mediums, including live performances, dance films, community integration, and outreach. At the heart of their creative endeavors lies a celebration of the universal aspects of everyday life, passionately emphasizing the extraordinary within the ordinary. Their work is deeply personal, socially relevant, relational, physical, and imagistic, forging emotional connections with audiences through intimate storytelling.

Karen and Allen Kaeja, both award-winning choreographers and performers in stage and film, draw inspiration from their Ashkenazi Jewish heritage and family ties, fueling their artistic vision. Their impact on the dance community is reflected in their recognition in encyclopedias, including the Canadian Who's Who, The Canadian, Theatre Dance in Canada, and The Globe and Mail's Best Dance of 2012. The Kaejas have collectively received over 40 awards and nominations, notably the 2019 Dance Ontario Lifetime Achievement Award, the 2012 CDA "I Love Dance" Community Award for Porch View Dances (PVD), and the Paul D. Fleck Fellowship for Innovation at Banff. Their numerous nominations include the 2023 Eldred Family Dance Award for exceptional achievement, TAF 2020 Celebration of Cultural Life Award, TD Arts Diversity Award, American Choreography Award and the CDA "I Love Dance" Innovation Award.

Kaeja d'Dance has made its mark through diverse platforms, from touring and presenting to curating and collaborating. Their dedication to nurturing the next generation of dance artists is evident through extensive mentorship, teaching, and residencies. The company unites intergenerational and multi-disciplinary practicing artists, creating a space for original creations and commissions that sometimes blend professionals and everyday participants.

Karen and Allen Kaeja are bridge builders who champion collaboration among diverse, intergenerational, and multi-genre communities. They actively promote Canadian talent through festival platforms, training, and mentorship, with a commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. The company prioritizes sustainability for historically

underrepresented racialized artists in the dance community. Their large-scale works often feature over 15 diverse dance artists from Ontario, as seen in initiatives like Kd'D2, Bird's Eye View, Stable Dances, Porch View Dances, Flock Landing, Moving Connections, Laneway ART-ery Dances, Just Dance Jane/Finch, TouchX, ICE, XTOD, and Solo Dance Xchange. These experiential projects bring joy and a sense of aliveness to both participants and audiences alike. Kaeja d'Dance has graced international stages, from the TORQUE International Dance Series to the Canada Dance Festival and Guelph Dance Festival, while also captivating audiences worldwide in India, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, Israel, England, Spain and Venezuela.

Allen Kaeja's connection to his heritage as the child of a refugee and Holocaust survivor fuels his artistic endeavors. His foundation in stage and film creations was laid through fifteen years of Holocaust-inspired dance works, where history's impact on artistic expression remains central. Internationally recognized as a choreographer and dance film director, Allen's work resonates on a global scale. With over 210 stage works and 35 films, his choreography has graced commercials, films, and festivals worldwide, bridging the gap between the stage and screen. Nominated for awards such as the Banff World Television Awards, Clifford E. Lee Award, Bonnie Bird (UK), and a UNESCO Citation for the Year of Culture and Peace, Allen shares his expertise globally through the development and teaching of Kaeja Elevations and Dance Film master classes. His commitment to passing the torch to the next generation of dancers and creators shines through in his mentorship and educational initiatives. He recently was choreographing Wendy / Peter Pan in collaboration with Director Keira Loughran, an undertaking disrupted by the pandemic, at the Stratford Festival in 2020.

Karen Kaeja's work serves as a source of inspiration for multiple artists. Her artistic journey is marked by a relentless exploration of touch, agency, and body memory. Recognized with the 2022 George Luscombe Mentorship Award and a finalist for NFLD's ACE Award and the Muriel Sherrin Award for International Achievement, Karen has seven Dora Mavor Moore Award nominations, including one win. She is a driving force behind collaborative initiatives, co-founding the aLOFT ensemble and spearheading events like the Festival of Interactive Physics (FIP) with Pam Johnson, Estrogen with Sylvie Bouchard, and Cloud 9 with Claudia Moore. Karen's dedication extends to mentoring and dramaturgy for emerging and mid-career dance artists, nurturing their growth, voices, and creative spirit. She is deeply committed to programs like Creative Risk Residency and KAIR (Kaeja Artist in Residence), thriving on the development of innovative performance platforms that foster collaborative relationships among dancers, everyday people, and the body. Initiatives like Porch View Dances, Wedding Brigade, Stable Dances, Flock Landing, and Bird's Eye View have been hailed as transformative experiences, regarding the intersection of dance and the public. Karen's

creative exploration centers on life's imperfections, discovering beauty in destabilization, awkward interfaces, and the pursuit of authenticity. Her acclaimed stage works, including TouchX, Solo Dance Xchange, Crave, and Uncover, have garnered critical acclaim for their emotional depth. As an improvisational dance artist, she has contributed to numerous processes and performances by renowned choreographers. Karen is also a dedicated educator and researcher, offering partnering and improvisation teaching worldwide and contributing to symposiums across North America with articles published in esteemed art journals.

Kaeja remains deeply committed to artists, audiences, communities, and partners, upholding their promise to research, collaborate, and innovate while mentoring the next generation of dance creators. Their unwavering passion for both the creative process and its outcomes is evident in their continual dedication to reinvention. Kaeja sends a resounding message that art is an inclusive experience, keeping audiences in close proximity and making the transformative power of dance accessible to all.