

Karen Kaeja

Biography

Karen Kaeja is an award-winning choreographer and performer for stage and film, community builder, project instigator, mentor and curator. *"When she dances, her reserve turns into something almost violently intense."* Globe and Mail. Co-artistic director of Kaeja d'Dance with her husband Allen Kaeja since 1991, she is an HBFA graduate at York University where she initiated the first dance therapy program at Baycrest Hospital. Recent recipient of the 2019 Lifetime Achievement Award from Dance Ontario, she is distinguished in three Encyclopedia's - the Canadian Who's Who, The Canadian, and Theatre Dance in Canada. Her awards include the 2012 Canadian Dance Assembly "I Love Dance" Community Award for her invention of Porch View Dances which is annual since 2012 (PVD), Moving Pictures Best Performance and the Paul D. Fleck Fellowship for innovation. A 7-time Dora Mavor Moore nominee, her work *Crave* received 4 Dora nominations, winning for Outstanding Male Performance. A finalist for the TAF Muriel Sherrin Award, Karen has twice been named one of NOW magazine's top-10 dance artists. Her nominations also include NFLD's ACE award for her MUN/Dance NL 2014 residency, and with Allen - the American Choreography Awards, Banff World Television Awards, TD Arts Diversity Award, Canadian Dance Assembly "I Love Dance" Innovation Award, and runner-up for NOW Magazine's 2011 Best Local Choreographers and 2019 and 2015 Best Dance Company. PVD was hailed by The Globe and Mail's Best Dance of 2012 and won the King East Neighbourhood AWARD-Kitchener, for Community Engagement.

Karen was appointed as Memorial University/Dance NFLD's first dancer-in-residence (2014) for 6 weeks of creation and teaching, and the first Artist in Residence at the Guelph Dance Festival (2012). She has been presented by dancers, festivals, and performance series nationally and internationally including the Canada Dance Festival (12X), Guelph Dance Festival (5X), Banff residency (6X), LiveArts, Dancing On The Edge, Harbourfront Centre, Tangente, L'agora, Vancouver East Cultural Centre, Yukon Arts Centre, Dusk Dances (7X and Ontario Tour), Ottawa Dance Directives (ODD), Older and Reckless (5X) and DanceWorks (2X).

Past commissions include a Blue Ceiling solo for Lucy Rupert, Chimera Project for Malgorzata Nowacka and Brendan Wyatt, Toronto Outdoor Art Fair, EDge Dance company (UK with 4 mos European tour), Judith Thompson's Rare Theatre, Sylvie Bouchard/BoucharDanse, Jasmyn Fyffe, MOCEAN, Water Sources, School of Toronto Dance Theatre, Canadian Contemporary Dance Theatre, George Brown Dance, plus commissions and touring to India, Sweden, Venezuela, Mexico, Spain, Portugal, Israel, England, Europe, the US and across Canada. She was a choreographer for the Banff Centre's Creative Gesture Lab 2018 and presented by the Fall For Dance North International Presenter's Program 2019.

Celebrated as *"one of this country's top ten dance artists"* and *"a champion of contact dance"* (NOW mag), Karen is *"one of Toronto's top Improvisers"* (Toronto Life). She has danced in hundreds of performances by choreographers such as Allen Kaeja, Marie-Josée Chartier, Claudia Moore, Kathleen Rea, Peter Bingham, Jessica Runge, Randy Glynn, Denise Fujiwara, Maxine

Heppner, Holly Small, Tedd Robinson, Benjamin Kamino, Lina Cruz, DA Hoskins, Susie Burpee, and Noemie Lafrance's *Dérives* at the Bentway.

An image investigator, Karen's creative enquiry focuses on life's imperfections – where destabilization, awkward interfaces and the effort to attain, are seen for their humbling beauty. Among her acclaimed stage works are *Crave* ("absolutely haunting" - Globe and Mail), ("Beautiful, vibrant and emotional." - Palabra, Mexico), *Eugene Walks with Grace*, *Uncover* ("real substance, choreographic intelligence and nuanced, layered meaning" – Toronto Star) and *Taxi!* (whimsical and poignant, cheeky and sexy – Life with more Cowbell). At the forefront of community and participatory arts practices with a reference to 'real people dancing in real spaces' she is "exploding barriers between art and life" Toronto Star. She has instigated award-winning projects that bridge professionals and non-dancers through conceiving large-scale site-specific performances that integrate public participation. She has worked with thousands of people in performance creation. Karen thrives on developing innovative platforms that provoke collaborative relationships between dancers, everyday people and the body.

Karen is "*the mastermind behind Porch View Dances*" Toronto Star - now on a Provincial Scale as "*Pure artistic gold*" (Apt 613, Ottawa) and the "*poster child for site-specific dance done right*" (Globe and Mail). Other community inclusive inventions of Karen's are *Wedding Brigade*, *Stable Dances*, *Flock Landing* (112 thus far), *Ed's Sign Language* at Toronto 4 Everyone and *Bird's Eye View* at Casa Loma Stables which was "*Nuit Blanche 2007 Greatest Hits*" Toronto Star. With Allen, she has initiated many site-specific and audience interactive engagement performance strategies including *Fool's Paradise* – Open Doors Ontario (2015) and *Downtown Dances: Moncton* (with the Atlantic Ballet Canada 2016 to present) where she and Allen create dances for over 150 business employees, community members, and the Mayor and City Council.

An international teacher of improvisation and the first teachers of Contact Dance at the National Ballet School with Allen, they were on faculty at Brock University and have been for over 28 years, at the School of Toronto Dance Theatre. They teach partnering and improvisation world-wide at conferences and institutions such as En Avant, London Contemporary Dance School/The Place, Wisconsin University, CODE, World Dance Alliance, Yokohama Ballet Intensive and Mukogawa Women's University (Japan), and the Israeli Contact Improvisation Festival. The heart of her current research and critical writing concentrates on Touch, where the interrogation and celebration of body memory as a living archive are in continuous balance. She has been a part of Symposiums across North America with several articles published in Dance Journals including *The Dance Current* and *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* and Gesture Press. Karen's Moving Connections Project was launched in 2019 to research connection, isolation and loneliness through her collaborative dance practice with people of all ages with a special focus on older adults. *Moving Connections: In Touch* went on-line during COVID-19.

Karen is Instrumental in the co-development of *Kaeja Elevations* and *Express Dance: Educators' Resource for Teaching Dance*. Karen co-founded the aLOFT ensemble, Festival of Interactive Physics (FIP), Kd'D2 (2nd Kaeja Company of emerging dance artists performing Company repertoire 2000-2004), *Estrogen* with Sylvie Bouchard and *Cloud 9* with Claudia Moore. She is

mentor and dramaturge for many flourishing dance artists including Malgorzata Nowacka, Sylvie Moquin, Mio Sakamoto, New Blue Emerging Artists, Jen Roy, Shay Erlich, Sohpie Dow and Jasmyn Fyffe. Choreographic Mentor for Roshanak Jaber's *No Woman's Land* of Jaber Dance Theatre, she remains Artistic Advisor for JDT. Karen is Movement Dramaturge for Stratford Festival's 2020 Wendy and Peter Pan. Karen established the Creative Risk mentorship project.

Screened in over 400 festivals worldwide, her choreography and performances have appeared in TV documentary's, including the Gemini nominated *Old Country* and Bravo! Freedom documentary series, *XTOD: Moments in Real Time* and is featured in 20 films for CBC, BRAVO! and Bravo!FACT, garnering international awards. Karen's film *Mika's Alley*, toured South America and the American Dance Festival where it remains part of the archive collection. With Allen she has received special 'Jury Mentions' from IMZ (Europe) and the American Dance Festival (USA). The Kaeja films are also a part of the permanent collection at the MoMA and the Jewish Museum in New York, the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Israel and in an exhibit at the Museum of Civilization, as well as owned by many university libraries. *Sweet Exit* filmed in Cowhead, Gros Morne with musician Daniel Payne and *Farewell to Honest Ed's* were screened at the Contact International Dance Film Festival. She performs as The Coven in *The Witch* directed by Robert Eggers (Sundance and TIFF).

"According to *NOW Magazine*, "*the coolest couple on the dance scene*", Toronto Star, the Kaeja's ongoing series of lifeDUETs have recently been performed in Toronto (Theatre Centre), Moncton (ATBC), Vancouver (VIDF) and Japan (4 cities). When witnessing Karen and Allen, Martha Schabas of the Globe and Mail finds herself "*thinking of the likes of Kahlo and Rivera, Plath and Hughes, Stein and Toklas – artistic couples in which a profound affinity for a shared form proved transformative.*"

Karen's *Extraordinary TO Dances (XTOD): Solo Dance Xchange* recently premiered 22 commissioned solos of established artists from varying practices being radically inspired by each other's XTOD film solo. The film is sponsored by FibeTV1 (Canada) and MarqueeArts (UK). XTOD:SDX and lifeDUETs performances premiered with residencies in Japan at the Canadian Embassy, Hiroshima, Nishinomaya and Osaka during the Company's 3rd residency there.

Upcoming commissions include *Dusk Dances 2020* and *Guetcha Guaritcha* for Citadel's Bright Nights. Upcoming new projects as a dancer are for Allen Kaeja, Bruce Barton, Tedd Robinson, Aria Evans, Marie France Fortier and Kathleen Rea. Karen's *uncover* will be performed at Tanzmesse in Düsseldorf, Germany and she is in new creation development for a fall 2021 premiere for Kaeja d'Dance's 30th anniversary. Karen is a cohort of the Toronto Dance Platform/Toronto Choreographer's Network and was a guest at the Polish Dance Platform in Gdańsk, Poland. She is creating and performing for a NAC #CanadaPerforms.

Kaeja d'Dance receives multi-year operational funding from all 3 levels of government, is a multiple Trillium and Metcalf Foundation recipient, SSHRC partnership funding with UofC, DCH, RBC, CCA Accelerator, plus others. Karen has served on organizational committees and juries for CADA, DCD, DTRC, Dance Ontario, KM Hunter, On the Move (founding member), OAC, TAC and the Canada Council for the Arts. www.kaeja.org