

## Appendix B

### Elizabeth Streb Biography



photo credit:

[www.strebusa.org/pages/company.html](http://www.strebusa.org/pages/company.html)

**Elizabeth Streb** is an internationally acclaimed contemporary movement artist based in Brooklyn, New York. Her work is concerned with physical action that defies conventional notions of the body's capabilities, requiring performers who are extremely flexible, strong, and daring. She makes pieces that challenge the normal definition of dance, utilizing a movement vocabulary that references athletics, daredevil stunts, and circus artistry within the frame of her formal choreographic concerns.

Born in Rochester, New York in 1950, Streb enjoyed a physically active childhood. By the time she reached high school, she had honed the skills to play on the varsity basketball and baseball teams, and was "obsessed" with downhill skiing and motorcycle riding (Eichenbaum 153). In 1968, she entered the State University of New York at Brockport, where she earned an undergraduate degree in Modern Dance.

Following graduation in 1972, Streb moved to San Francisco, where she danced for two years as a member of the Margaret Jenkins Company. Conventional dance concerns, however, did not sustain her interest for

long. Where modern dance claimed to be innovative, she found it mired in tradition, concerned with making steps rather than taking action; where it claimed status as an independent art form, she found that its movements were too often tied to storytelling, music, and visual illusion, rather than those concrete physical concerns that are particular to movement, such as velocity, force, and palpable bodily risk. Ultimately, she found that the existing state of concert dance was fundamentally "dishonest," based on practices that were intended to camouflage the effects of gravity and impact rather than put them on display.

Returning to New York, Streb began a series of physical experiments that continue into the present, generating alternative choreographic ideas that heighten and showcase the body's capabilities. She founded her company, Streb/Ringside, in 1979, which she continues to direct as a kind of laboratory for the scientific exploration of movement information. In performances of her work, she strives to make the body's actions reverberate in potent ways with the viewer: by foregrounding the thuds, smacks, and wallops of physical contact between the dancers themselves and between the dancers and the various surfaces with which they interact, Streb hopes that those in the audience will have physical sensations that allow them to participate directly in the thrills — and chills — of bodily motion.

In the twenty-seven years since she founded her company, Streb's work has steadfastly penetrated the conventional boundaries of dance, fusing her artistic interests and training with ideas from the worlds of circus, extreme sports, public spectacle, and





Photo credit: Cary Conover

physics. Her performers crash against walls and other solid surfaces, swing from bungee cords, cables and poles, take flight by means of trampolines, poles, and swings, dive through glass, and dodge moving obstacles, such as swinging cinderblocks. She creates performance environments that include specially designed apparatuses to extend or limit the body's range of motion, thus producing distinct parameters within which the performers solve a variety of physical problems.

She also maintains and promotes her strongly held belief that art must exist for a broad public, not for the elite few.



Photo

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Accordingly, she has staged her works in amusement parks and city garages, in the huge salons of Grand Central Station, and in the fields of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, in theatres, outdoor festivals and on television.

Since 2003, she has taken up residence in a large industrial garage in the Williamsburg area of Brooklyn, where she has banished the formalities of the traditional concert hall. Here, neighbors and guests are invited to observe open rehearsals, take classes from company members, and watch performances from movable chairs and floor mats, while they sit munching snacks from the house popcorn machine. A statement by Streb on her company website summarizes these beliefs:

We want to be part of the general public's daily activity just as working/walking/shopping/commuting. We want them to see us invent new pieces dancing/flying/flailing/crashing. We want them to watch/question/interact/participate in our creation and to get a clear picture of the hard work that mingles with skill and talent in the making of art. For the past decade, in this way, I have consciously worked to shift the paradigm of how we see art, where we see it, why we see it ... continuing a general quest to bring dance to the people, believing that there is a huge untapped number of people out there who are dying to participate in an Action Exchange.

#### **Additional Information on Wild Blue**

##### **Yonder**

*Wild Blue Yonder* is a performance event that had its premiere at Wolf Trap National Park for the Performing Arts in 2003. Choreographed by Elizabeth Streb and

performed by her company, the work was commissioned as part of a celebration commemorating the 100th anniversary of the first flight of the Wright Brothers. Since then, the work has continued to be a part of Streb's repertoire, and is adapted for those spaces in which it is performed.