

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Do You Dare!

Ann Haskins · Monday, October 10th, 2022

A forest, a room with buckets of plaster, a plaza fronting an office building, abandoned train tracks, an expanse of sand—all settings for dance films to be screened this Saturday as **Dare to Dance in Public, Round 5** hosts a day filled with screenings and a live performance.

Now in its fifth edition, *D2D* (as it became nicknamed) began with an invitation that had nothing to do with a film festival.

After he launched the online magazine *Cultural Weekly* in 2011, Sarah Elgart was one of the first writers Adam Leipzig recruited to write a regular column about the world of dance films. In addition to her credentials as a choreographer, company director, and educator, Elgart was an award-winning filmmaker in her own right and for years worked with *Dance Camera West*, SoCal's respected film festival, including several years on DCW's Board of Directors.



In her *Cultural Weekly* column Elgart dove deeper into the world of national and international dance films. Over time, she saw the potential for the online magazine to expand its reach as a platform to democratize dance and screen the resulting dance films. She went to Leipzig with the idea of an online challenge to inspire performance in public places that would be captured on film and then screened as a film festival.

“When Sarah Elgart first approached us with the idea of *Dare 2 Dance in Public*, we couldn't wait to say Yes!” Leipzig recalls. “Sarah's exemplary writing about dance, based on her deep history as one of America's foremost choreographers, has continued to enliven our digital pages for years and fuels our ongoing commitment as a proud sponsor and host for *Dare to Dance*.”

Based on the simple premise that dance belongs everywhere and to everyone, Elgart and *Cultural Weekly* launched *Dare 2 Dance in Public*. In 2015, the online magazine began inviting submission of short dance films responding to the challenge to dance in public places. The effort was promoted in the weekly publication, providing screening links to selected submissions, and publicizing the finalists. The response was tremendous. A festival was born.



In subsequent years, *Cultural Weekly* continued its support with articles actively inviting submissions and providing links for winning films of the *D2D Festival*.

For *D2D Festival Round 3*, the event collaborated with the 2020 *Dance Camera West Festival* which presents dance films at live screenings. *D2D Round 3* screened at REDCAT for a live audience, one entire evening of the *Dance Camera West* festival. That was January 2020.

Within a month, cancellation of live performance was spreading as fast as the mysterious, highly contagious virus that in mid-March 2020, shutdown the state of California. As the pandemic shuttered live performance across the country and internationally, stymied dance companies and choreographers went online to keep their dancers dancing— rebroadcast of pre-pandemic shows, streamed performances by solo dancers or quarantined pods proliferated. Then choreographers began exploring the possibilities of filmed dance, some for the very first time.

Elgart found the cinematic caliber of dance films improved significantly during the pandemic, but she considers dance film really began developing in the mid-1980s.

“Most dance films before the 1980’s were really documentation, usually shot straight on from the back of a theater and devoid of any cinematic element because they generally were for one of three purposes,” Elgart explained, “A sample to show a financial backer or a booking agent, a way of documenting choreography so it could be restaged, or as a historical record of a choreographer or dance.”

For Elgart, what changed was the emergence of MTV in the 1980s and the appetite it triggered for music videos that cinematically combined singing, music, and dance to efficiently convey a story in the length of the video, a type of mini-musical movie.

“I was choreographing for music videos, often with the same directors, who were open to my learning the elements of camera angles, editing, lighting, etc.” In addition to the videos, Elgart continued with site-specific projects for her own company and community projects. A suggestion that she develop a film on a community program working with the incarcerated women, led to other film projects and a two year fellowship at the prestigious *Sundance Film Festival*.



Elgart has praise for the growth of dance film during the pandemic as choreographers took their live performance perspectives into cinematic realms.

Although the pandemic was easing last year, *D2D Round 4* returned to its online format in 2021. This year, *D2D Round 5* is again screening for a live audience at a promising new 300-seat dance venue. The festival schedule includes three separate 90-minute programs of dance films and an on-site Butoh-informed performance by Oguri and Roxanne Steinberg.

Elgart noted that the shift during the pandemic to streaming and approaching choreography from a cinematic perspective greatly expanded the number of submissions, particularly from abroad. The 2pm opening session of this year’s festival is devoted to International submissions. The second session at 4pm is selected entirely from submissions from China.

“In the past we had a handful of dance films from China. This year more than 60 came with a clear demonstration of the deepening of the quality of the dance films from that country,” Elgart explained.



The performance by Roxanne Steinberg and Oguri at 5:45pm will precede the final session at 7pm screening the winners and honorable mention films.

With that early support, *D2D* eventually established itself as a significant west coast dance festival. Seven years and one pandemic later, *Cultural Weekly* is now *Cultural Daily* and continues its support for *D2D* which is now its own non-profit led by founder Elgart as Executive Director and Zoe Rappaport as creative producer.

Leipzig underscored the importance of the festival and Elgart's leadership.

“Sarah’s aesthetic is that dance is practical, democratic, and the most basic form of human expression. Through *Dare 2 Dance in Public*, she has made her imprint on this artform global.”



Anyone who missed out on submitting to the initial five rounds, take note: submissions for Round 6 are already being accepted. Info at [Dare to Dance in Public](#).

Dare to Dance in Public, Round 5 at Gloria Kaufman Performing Arts Center, 3200 Motor Ave., Cheviot Hills; Sat., Oct. 15, 2, 4, 5:45 & 7pm, \$15-\$40 at [Eventbrite](#), info at [Dare to Dance in Public](#).

[Preview](#) with tastes of the dance films.

(This article first appeared in [LA Dance Chronicle](#).)

This entry was posted on Monday, October 10th, 2022 at 8:10 pm and is filed under [Film](#), [Streaming](#), [Dance](#), [Performing](#)

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