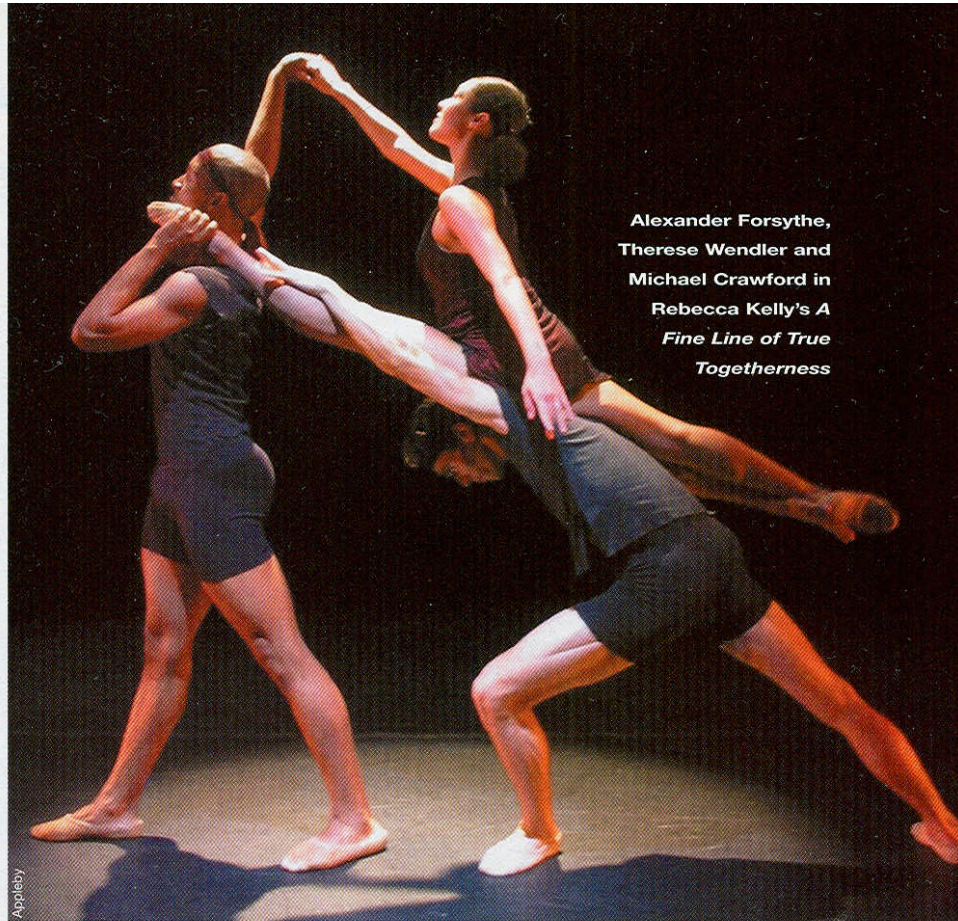


Company Profile

Small, strong
and flexible,
NYC-based
Rebecca Kelly
Ballet has
staying power.

Rebecca Kelly Ballet



Alexander Forsythe,
Therese Wendler and
Michael Crawford in
Rebecca Kelly's *A
Fine Line of True
Togetherness*

A lot has changed since the 1980s, when New York City's SoHo neighborhood was the hotbed for up-and-coming artists, hip galleries and small, progressive dance companies. But 25 years after creating Rebecca Kelly Ballet, Artistic Director Rebecca Kelly is still running her company there. "When I first moved here in 1979, I felt like a pioneer," Kelly says of her early days in the then-run-down industrial district. "Later, there were so many neat little places for dancers and small companies. Now, there aren't a lot of us left."

The secret to RKB's staying power may be attributed to the strength and flexibility of its dancers, and the strong relationship between Kelly and her company, as much as to a strength of will and artistic vision that resonates with its audience.

"I have been torn between writing stories and dancing," explains Kelly, who trained at the Washington School of Ballet and with modern masters such as Merce Cunningham. "But it's incredibly gratifying to tell a story through ballet. It's a challenge to find the story in line and form, to search for meaning where there are no words."

Kelly's ballets are both narrative and abstract, unabashedly lyrical yet still overtly contemporary. Last season included Kelly's *Carmen: Jose's Dream* and *A Fine Line*

of *True Togetherness*, which was set to a percussion mix. This range of repertoire, as well as RKB's distinctive blend of classical and modern movement, demands a certain flexibility of both body and mind from its diverse company. "We simply don't have time to fuss with technique," says Kelly. "We want to concentrate on the *why* behind the movement. Dancers need to have strong technique and a courageous heart to take them there."

"[RKB] was an opportunity for me to do a lot of contemporary work—new ballet where I can still use my classical background," adds Therese Wendler, who joined RKB after dancing with Ballet Hawaii, The Joffrey Ballet and Victoria Ballet Theatre, among others. "In a small company, you have the opportunity to do a lot of dancing, grow as a dancer, but you must be flexible and have a certain maturity. There's a lot of freedom to try different stuff."

Kelly's husband, business partner and former dance partner, Craig Brashear, teaches the company, concentrating on the role of male dancers at RKB. Says Alex Forsythe, who trained in the classical Russian style in his native Budapest and joined RKB in 2000, "With RKB, the male definitely has its own [identity], he's not just a support for the

ballerina. All the dancers are created equal and given space to explore themselves and grow."

It's a testament to that ability to change and grow that RKB has survived the cultural changes in Manhattan. RKB has achieved the status of a small dance company that can go that distance, performing each season in NYC and Lake Placid, NY. "It's a process," says Kelly about creating dance. But the statement could as easily apply to building a dance company. "You simply put one foot in front of the other and create something as beautiful as you can. Then you put it out there."

By Sarah FK Coble

Sarah FK Coble is a freelance writer based in Naples, FL.

AT A GLANCE:

Number of dancers: 5-12

Contract length: 1 year, but dancers work on a project-by-project basis.

Associated school: No associated school. A summer intensive performance program for young dancers is offered at Lake Placid Center for the Arts and SUNY, Potsdam.

Number of performances per year: 16

Auditions: Annual three-day open call and interview; audition in company class by invitation only.

Website: www.RebeccaKellyBallet.com