



**“A Thoughtful Approach at 25”** reads the headline of one review, which concluded with *“The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary performance...indeed something to celebrate.”* This milestone birthday for Rebecca Kelly Ballet indeed provides ample opportunity for reflection, pride, wonder, and a host of other feelings.

9/11 brought to our conscious attention that we are lucky to be born into a society where we the people have choices: the luckiest ones get to choose the pattern and flavor of their lives.

Nobody *invites* you to be an artist. We select ourselves and we become responsible for that decision. Sometimes we feel lucky to be artists, but there are periods when we do not feel so lucky. At times, Rebecca Kelly Ballet has resembled a mini United Nations, in that the dancers come from all over the map. Several of our dancers are European born, and attended elite and selective schools. They were instilled with great pride and dignity for their art. They were taught to feel special. They felt “chosen.” They do better. Others had to struggle in every way for the privilege of dancing, and fought their way to preserve pride in what they do. They have a different strength, born of conviction. The casual regard in the U.S. for a career in dance always requires an adjustment. But at least here we have the freedom to choose dance.

I continued to reflect upon what have I been doing for all these years in dance that keep me in the field. – It starts always with dancing, but I was quickly drawn into choreography, the making of steps and ballets – for the wonderfulness of it, the beauty, the power and eloquence of sharing thought and imagery, for the curiosity, to see what beautiful dancers could do, to transcend the spoken language, and because I could. The choice was mine. Over the years I grew to see how dance is a celebration of our humanity, bears witness, and fosters community. In teaching, I witness in students of every age time and again how deeply dance connects us. As an American artist, it is my privilege to live by the products and drive of my imagination. In a political context, dance can be seen as a larger emblem of our society’s freedom. As an artistic director and sole choreographer of a company - society did not restrict my movements.

We live within 1/4 mile of ground zero. Along with thousands of downtown New Yorkers, what we saw that day is tattooed into our retinas, our minds, our hearts. The loss on 9/11 was also the break in our illusions and unthinking trust in going forward. What is dance after that day? The very first ballets I created after 9/11 took a while to come. They were *American Suq* (means marketplace in Arabic) –the first one inspired by my speechless indignation at the materialistic “go shopping” advice offered as balm after 9/11. *Can't Sleep* came to me during March 2003 thinking about the mothers and children and minefields, and those dangerous yellow packages confused with toys, or bags of chips and peanut butter! These were ballets I safely worked out and tucked away in youth companies while I grappled with what had changed in me. The ballets I made for Rebecca Kelly Ballet however since 2001 included *The Wilderness Suite*, *Jose's Dream*, *Reves*, *The Soldier's Tale*, and *Air*; all dances that avoided a direct look into the abyss that was 9/11. It took five years before I was ready to produce *Silver Circles, after the fall*.

Just as *Silver Circles* was completed early in 2006, I came across Chris Hedges' chilling commentary [WAR is a Force that Gives us Meaning](#). He stated what I had been realizing my way towards in the ballet: "...for war is a drug. It is peddled by mythmakers- historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state -- all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty. It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it, even humor, which becomes preoccupied with the grim perversities of smut and death..." from [WAR is a Force that Gives us Meaning](#), by Chris Hedges, c 2002

*Silver Circles* permitted me to examine the validity of our “great American myths.” The principal dancers Therese Wendler and Duncan Cooper, in their costumes of reflective silvery whiteness, represented America's naïve sense of itself to the world before 9/11. And the dark ensemble represented the lurking fears, terror, mistrust, the manipulations generated from within our own culture after 9/11.



2006 draws to a close and RKB's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations are already in the past. With the creation of over 60 ballets, many New York City seasons and artistic collaborations, international and national touring from Poland to Kansas, a thriving summer training program in upstate New York, I find our RKB dancers more extraordinary than ever. Their talent and beauty is deeply touching and precious. And it all costs so much more. In recent years, I've never once heard our current President mention the arts, let alone the realm of dance.

Creativity flourishes because of and sometimes despite its culture, but it is always meaningful and nourishing to artists to sense endorsement for what they do, to hold the hope that creativity is valued even if the dollars don't always flow. People react to the passion and the intensity of artists following their paths, or maybe it is the freedom they imagine we embody.

As we leap forward into the next 25 years with excitement for the experiences and insights each new ballet will bring, and new dedication to participate in this tremendous expression of humanity, we gaze into the future with a mix of awe and curiosity for the changes ahead.

Rebecca Kelly  
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Rebecca Kelly Ballet, New York City  
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Photographs by Adrian Buckmaster, copyright 2006  
From "Silver Circles, *after the fall*"

Dancers pictured:  
Duncan Cooper, former principal dancer with Dance Theater of Harlem  
Therese Miyoshi Wendler, principal dancer, Rebecca Kelly Ballet  
Ensemble from Rebecca Kelly Ballet

[www.RebeccaKellyBallet.com](http://www.RebeccaKellyBallet.com)