

## PRESS KIT

# M O V I N G S T O R I E S

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a documentary film

by

Rob Fruchtmann  
Cornelia Ravenal  
Mikael Södersten  
and Wendy Sax

[TRAILER](#)

Six dancers. Four countries. One week to change lives.

## **LOGLINE**

An acclaimed New York dance company travels the world, working with at-risk youth, teaching them the tools of choreography so that they can tell their stories through dance.

## **SYNOPSIS (short)**

V1 – An acclaimed NY dance company travels the world, teaching the tools of choreography to young people who've experienced war, poverty, sexual violence, extreme prejudice and severe trauma as refugees. As the dancer-teachers struggle to break through, their students respond in extraordinary ways - and as they prepare to perform in public in only a week, both students and teachers are transformed, unlocking feelings and stories in wellsprings of creativity.

V2 – MOVING STORIES, directed by Sundance award-winner Rob Fruchtmann, follows six diverse dancers from an acclaimed NY company to India, Romania, Korea, and Iraq where they work with at-risk youth through the Dancing to Connect program. With just one week to teach the tools of choreography and collaboration in preparation for performance, the film captures the struggle, frustration, determination, and transformation of students and teachers alike.

## **SUMMARY (medium)**

Six diverse dancers from the acclaimed Battery Dance company travel the world to work with young people who have experienced war, poverty, prejudice, sexual exploitation, and severe trauma as refugees, teaching them the tools of choreography so that they can tell their stories through dance.

The film follows them to India, where they work with girls rescued from sex trafficking and gender violence; to Romania, with Roma (gypsy) kids from one of Europe's worst slums; to South Korea, with young North Koreans who risked their lives to escape; and to Iraq, where they work with a gifted young Muslim dancer, fighting to survive.

Incredibly, they have just one week to teach the tools of choreography and collaboration to kids who may be enemies, who may have been abused, who may be suspicious and fearful, so that they can create dances to perform for their communities.

As they struggle to break through, the dancer-teachers confront their own frustrations. Yet their students respond in extraordinary ways - and as they prepare to perform in public in what seems an impossibly short time, both students and teachers experience surprising transformations, unlocking feelings and stories in wellsprings of creativity.

## **SYNOPSIS (long)**

For 40 years, the Battery Dance company has been a force on the New York and international scenes. In hundreds of performances and workshops in American schools, they've not only moved audiences but changed thousands of young lives. Seeing dance as a universal language, founder Jonathan Hollander created Dancing to Connect, in which his dancers travel the globe to teach the tools of creativity to youth who've experienced war, poverty, sexual violence, extreme prejudice and severe trauma, enabling them to express their feelings and stories through dance.

They have led workshops in over 60 countries. MOVING STORIES follows them to four: India, with girls victimized by gender violence and sex slavery; Romania, with young Roma from one of Europe's worst slums; South Korea, with North Koreans who risked their lives to escape; and Iraq, with a young Muslim dancer in a country that forbids him to perform.

The dancer-teachers are diverse: Clement from Ghana and Holland, Mira and Robin from small-town Texas, Sean from the low-income projects in Brooklyn, Tadej from Slovenia - from different religions, sexual orientations and cultural upbringings. As they work to encourage their students to move, then dance, then create their own dances, we see how each approaches the challenge with both trepidation and high expectations. Not surprisingly, the rigors of training their own bodies are vastly different from the patience and passion needed to inspire young people.

But they're not just teaching; they're preparing for public performances. Each has just one week to take young people who may be enemies, who may have been abused, who may be fearful – who may not want to move at all – to a place where they not only express themselves through dance, but perform for their communities.

From Day 1 to Day 7, we see both progress and setbacks in each group. Conflicts occur when students refuse to move, or to work together, or seek to undermine the teacher's authority. Yet there are surprising moments of connection, when teachers and students share something that transcends culture or country. And as connections are formed, bridges are built from Brooklyn to Baghdad, Slovenia to India, Ghana to Romania, Texas to North Korea, and the global community is suddenly smaller and more personal.

Interwoven throughout is the story of a passionate Iraqi dancer named Adel, who reaches out to BDC from Baghdad after hearing about the workshops. From afar, Jonathan takes Adel under his wing and his dancers teach and mentor him in a most unconventional way – via Skype. After six months, they finally meet in Jordan. But what ultimately happens is a shock.

The processes culminate in climactic performances, where trials and errors along the way bring cathartic release. The joy afterwards is palpable, as the journey has transformed not only students but teachers.

### **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT | Rob Fruchtman**

To me, dance is an art form that triggers emotions and feelings like no other. For that reason, it can help unlock the secrets, emotions and yearnings inside us, whether we're trained dancers or ordinary bi-pedal beings.

Our film, which documents the groundbreaking work of the Battery Dance Company with young people around the world, is incredibly satisfying for me as a filmmaker. I've seen how dance is both a way in and a way out. It provides an opportunity to explore important issues viscerally and emotionally through the best language on the planet, the movement of the body. No words. Just expression that comes from mind and body talking to each other, connecting the inner life to the outer world.

As we return to the basics of human relationships — movement, touch, listening, storytelling, creativity, self-expression — something transcendent is communicated that breathes hope for a better, more humane future. And as race, religion and ethnicity divide people the world over, we hope that the film will show that we can connect with each other through something fundamental to all humans: movement. The beauty of this kind of expression is that it is unpredictable. It is an exploration, and for me, it's thrilling, a bit scary and ultimately deeply rewarding for those who come along with us for the ride.

### **BATTERY DANCE FOUNDER'S STATEMENT | Jonathan Hollander**

The stories told in this sensitive film have become a kind of diary for each of us involved in the Dancing to Connect process. Bringing them so compellingly to life on the screen is revelatory and galvanizing for us as we continue to explore what a dance company can be in the world.

## **PRODUCERS' STATEMENT | Cornelia Ravenal, Mikael Södersten, Wendy Sax**

In a time of rising xenophobia, fear of “the other” has re-entered public discourse in a terrifying way. MOVING STORIES counters this through presenting diverse peoples connecting and communicating through something we all share: the body. When we use the body creatively – to communicate, to express experiences, to tell stories – connections form between people, despite all other differences.

The film takes audiences to several countries, portrays people of different cultures, and shows how teachers engage students in exercises that promote respect, empathy, awareness and self-esteem. Before our eyes, we see young people gaining the tools they need to work together and to forge connections. These tools go beyond the classroom and dance.

As filmmakers, we believe that suffering is born of disconnection: from others, from opportunities, from hope, and even from our own bodies. But we have the power to relieve that suffering through connecting. Movement is universal. As one of the dancer-teachers says in the film, “I don’t have to speak dance in English. I don’t have to speak dance in Arabic. I don’t have to speak dance in Romanian. It becomes the same language.”

ARTICLE / REVIEW | Psychology Today

[www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-bejeezus-out-me/201803/film-review-moving-stories](http://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-bejeezus-out-me/201803/film-review-moving-stories)

## **SCREENINGS**

MOVING STORIES premiered at MoMA’s Doc Fortnight in February 2018. It was selected for the American Film Showcase, sponsored by the US State Department and USC as one of 40 films from over 300 submissions to represent the US at embassies around the world. The film has since screened at the Berkshire Film Festival and Transilvania International Film Festival, among others, with upcoming festivals on the east and west coasts, in Europe and in Asia.

Updated list of announced screenings:

[www.wildernessfilms.us/movingstories\\_screenings.html](http://www.wildernessfilms.us/movingstories_screenings.html)

## **THE TEAM**

In 2014, filmmakers Cornelia Ravenal and Mikael Södersten met BDC Founder Jonathan Hollander and Deputy Director Emad Salem. When Cornelia heard about their work, as a former journalist, she knew it was a story that had to be told. And as a trauma survivor herself, she knew firsthand the power of movement to heal. Soon, they reached out to Sundance award-winning director Rob Fruchtmann, who came on board. The first shoot was in India with Senain Kheshgi field producing and Shakeb Ahmed on camera. Rob and DP Lex Fletcher shot in Romania, South Korea and NY. Iraq and Jordan footage came from multiple sources. During the editing process, Wendy Sax joined as a creative producing partner.

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## TEAM BIOS

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**Rob Fruchtman (Director, Editor)** is a Sundance and Emmy award-winning director, producer and editor. His documentaries explore the arts, history, world cultures and social justice issues and have aired in festivals and on television around the world. He won the Documentary Director award at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival for his feature film, *SISTER HELEN* (co-directed with Rebecca Cammisa) which aired on HBO in 2003, and has won three Emmys and several nominations for his work with PBS and HBO. He directed and produced *SEEING PROOF* in 2007, a film about Cambodia's brutal Khmer Rouge regime and its lingering effect on Cambodia's society, for George Soros' Open Society. In 2004 he made *TRUST ME*, for Showtime, about Christian, Jewish and Islamic boys at an interfaith camp in North Carolina. He also directed *SECRETS OF ANGELS, DEMONS AND MASONS*, based on Dan Brown's best-selling *SECRETS OF MARY MAGDALEN*, on PBS in 2007. He has created series with the BBC, Showtime, Reader's Digest /Disney Channel such as *IN SEARCH OF CHINA; KRONOS, THE BODY ADORNED, ON THE EDGE OF BEING: DOCTORS WITH CANCER: THE LAST OF THE INCAS* for Showtime and *ANCIENT SPLENDORS*. His programs about the arts include the Emmy-winning *DANCE NEW YORK Dance (WNET)*, a profile of Elliot Feld and Paul Taylor; *ISO DANCE THEATER* (PBS), with former Momix and Pilobolus dancers (five Los Angeles Emmys); *KRONOS: MUSIC OF OUR TIME* (PBS), a portrait of the Kronos Quartet, with Philip Glass and John Cage; and *THE CREATION OF OMO* (PBS), a dance special with the San Francisco Ballet. In 1994, he created a program in Pakistan to teach documentary filmmaking skills and socially conscious filmmaking. He began his career as a dialogue and sound editor on films including *THE UNBEARABLE LIGHTNESS OF BEING, QUIZ SHOW, BLUE VELVET, BACKDRAFT, WILLOW* and others, working with directors such as Robert Redford, Ron Howard, Philip Kaufman and David Lynch.

**MIKAEL SÖDERSTEN (Producer / Editor / Production Manager / Post-Production Producer)** has worked as an independent filmmaker and script doctor with Scandinavia's leading producers and television networks. He directed and produced two novella-length films broadcast on Swedish TV: *PASS*, with Michael Nyqvist (*THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO*) and *FISSURA*, called "the best Swedish short of the decade". With Cornelia Ravenal, he's made *THE OTHER WOMAN, WHITE MAN'S BLUES*, and the offbeat documentary, *FIVE FEELINGS ABOUT FOOD*, which together have won seven "Best" awards at over 25 festivals. As a script doctor, he's worked on over 60 films, TV-series and documentaries, including Tomas Alfredson's *TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY* and Staffan Julén's *THE PRICE OF THE POLE*, and developed over 25 features, including Grand Jury prizewinners at Tribeca and Sundance. As a screenwriter, he co-wrote the narrative feature *I LOVE YOU – A DIVORCE COMEDY* that premiered nationwide in Sweden in 2016. He majored in film at Harvard and studied film theory at Stockholm University. He's taught story structure at the Swedish Royal Academy of Fine Arts and currently teaches Directing Actors at Columbia University's Graduate Film Program.

**CORNELIA RAVENAL (Producer / Writer)** has had work performed at Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center and regional theaters, published in magazines in Asia and the US, and screened at over 25 international festivals. Projects include *MOVING STORIES*, which premiered at MOMA's 2018 Doc Fortnight and is beginning its festival run; the 2015 off-Broadway NY Times Critics Pick *NIRBHAYA* (Producer); the off-beat documentary *FIVE FEELINGS ABOUT FOOD* (Co-Director, Producer, Writer); and the award-winning shorts *THE OTHER WOMAN* (Writer, Producer) and *WHITE MAN'S BLUES* (Writer, Producer) starring Michael Nyqvist (*THE GIRL WITH THE DRAGON TATTOO*). As a journalist and cultural critic, she has written for *The Washington Post, The Philadelphia Inquirer, The New York Post, and Art Asia Pacific* and was a US Correspondent for *India Today*, India's leading newsmagazine. She is a co-founder of WIP (Women Independent Producers), a 60-member organization that meets monthly to discuss critical topics and share professional resources. She has a B.A. in English and American Literature from Harvard University and has lived and worked in Sweden, Egypt and India.

**WENDY SAX (Producer)** was an originating producer of the documentary **PARTICLE FEVER**, winner of the Audience Award / Sheffield International DocFest, Grand Jury Prize / Moscow Science Festival the Stephen Hawking Medal for Science Communication. It also screened at the Telluride Film Festival, New York Film Festival, Abu Dhabi Film Festival. She also acted as Associate Producer on Jennifer Fox's **THE TALE** (HBO, 2018). As Artistic Director for IFP/Indie Film Week from 2003-07, she curated films including **BORN INTO BROTHELS**, (2004 Documentary Academy Award), **MAD HOT BALLROOM** (Paramount Classics) and Sundance Award winner **FROZEN RIVER**, (Sony Classics). As VP of Production & Development at Rigas Entertainment, she co-produced Sundance-winner, **SONGCATCHER**, (Lions Gate). In addition, she worked with Barbara de Fina and Martin Scorsese on the **AGE OF INNOCENCE**, **CASINO** and **KUNDUN**.

**SENAIN KHESHGI - India Field Producer** is a Pakistani-American journalist and filmmaker who has produced, written and directed projects for CNN, PBS, Discovery and the BBC. She co-produced **THE FIRST YEAR** with Academy Award-winning director, Davis Guggenheim (**AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH**), broadcast on PBS and awarded the prestigious Peabody Award. She has developed projects with Academy Award winner Ross Kauffman, Shari Berman and Robert Pulcini (Sundance Award winner **AMERICAN SPLENDOR**). She has a keen interest in exploring the intersection of faith and politics, as well as religious and cultural conflict and human rights. She directed **PROJECT KASHMIR**, a feature documentary filmed in which she and an Indian-American friend investigate the war in the Kashmir Valley and find their friendship tested over deeply rooted religious and cultural divides. It has been awarded grants from ITVS/PBS, The Sundance Institute, Cinereach, The Fledgling Fund, The Center for Asian American Media and selected by the US State Department to screen at over 55 embassies and consulates around the world. Senain was a Tribeca All Access Fellow and a Sundance Institute Fellow in 2006.

**LEX FLETCHER - DP (Romania, South Korea)** was CNN's first cameraman in the northwest, during which he shot many hours of video every day to fill the never-ending need for news. In the 1990's Fletcher worked for Bravura films and was Director of Photographers on **SCENIC WONDERS OF AMERICA**, **GREAT WONDERS OF WORLD**, and **GREAT SPLENDORS OF THE WORLD**. This Emmy award-winning series took Fletcher around the world several times. The programs all aired on the Disney Channel and The Discovery Channel and sold worldwide. Fletcher received three national Daytime Emmy award nominations, and won two Emmy awards for Outstanding Achievement in Cinematography. Fletcher has worked with director Rob Fruchtmann several times over the last dozen years. In 2003, he was DP on the award-winning documentary **TRUST ME**, a funny, inspiring, and moving film about overcoming prejudices and fears at an interfaith summer camp in North Carolina, which aired on Showtime. In 2004, Fletcher was DP on Fruchtmann's 13-part TV series, **SAMURAI SPORTSMAN**.

**SHAKEB AHMED - DP (India)** is a filmmaker and director of photography until recently based in India. Recent credits include MTV's recent **EXIT** documentary on human trafficking and two episodes for the six-part PBS documentary-series **SACRED JOURNEYS** (Saudi Arabia pilgrimage and India Kumbh Mela). He also shot **FOUR WOMEN AND A ROOM**, a documentary about motherhood in India, winner of Silver for Best Documentary, IDPA Awards for Excellence, 2008. He has also shot for BBC, NatGeo and NHK, Japan. He's worked in subjects and genres including history, science, commercials, public-service messages, news-reportage and public-affairs content, mainstream television and independent documentaries.

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