

ZAS FILMS

PRESENTS

BREATH MADE VISIBLE

Directed by Ruedi Gerber

"I've always said dance is the breath made visible and that covers about everything because once you stop breathing and the breath is no longer visible, you stop moving." - Anna Halprin

FILM FESTIVALS

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MILL VALLEY FILM FESTIVAL 2009

80 MINUTES – 16:9 – DOLBY 5.1 – ENGLISH - COLOR – NOT RATED

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SHORT SYNOPSIS

BREATH MADE VISIBLE is the first feature length film about the life and career of Anna Halprin, the American dance pioneer who has helped redefine our notion of modern art with her belief in dance's power to teach, heal, and transform at all ages of life. This cinematic portrait blends recent interviews with counterparts such as the late Merce Cunningham, archival footage, including her establishment of the first multiracial dance company in the U.S., and excerpts of current performances such as "Parades and Changes" at the Georges Pompidou Center in Paris, to weave a stunning, inspiring account of one of the most important cultural icons in modern dance.

LONG SYNOPSIS

For the last seven decades, Anna Halprin, the American dance pioneer, has redefined our notions of modern art by exploring one question in her work: What is important in life? The search for that answer has ushered in such revolutionary experimentation in theater, music, and performance that its reach extends beyond the arts and into our cultural conscious. Anna has not only succeeded in fusing art and life but has developed a new mindset: one that hails the vitality of existence and debunks the 'limitations of age.'

BREATH MADE VISIBLE is the first feature documentary about the life and career of Anna Halprin. The film takes its audience from Halprin's initial explorations of dance in her childhood to the experimental performances conducted on a dance deck under Californian redwood trees, through her spectacular tours in Europe, her withdrawal from the stage due to illness, and, finally, her triumphant return.

Previously unreleased archival footage further extends the subject matter from a personal portrait of an artist to what is essentially the history of the socially and politically committed art of dance performance in North America. In a profoundly touching interview, the late Merce Cunningham reflects: "Anna is a prophet, a philosopher." In 1955, Anna established the world-famous San Francisco Dancers Workshop, which included John Graham and A.A. Leath. They would go on to earn the highest critical acclaim and controversy in Sweden while causing scandal in the U.S. for their use of nudity in their performances. In the '60s, Halprin would break down more barriers by finding the first multicultural dance company – a poignant symbol of black and white coming together.

At the heart of the film is Anna's relationship to her husband and world renowned architect, Lawrence Halprin (Roosevelt Memorial), which allows the film to transcend the medium of dance, just as Anna's work does, to become a universal tale about survival and expression.

An early pioneer in the expressive arts healing movement, the film delves into Anna's work with cancer patients (Anna herself is a survivor), AIDS patients, and the elderly through the use of dance as a method of healing and becoming whole. As she recalls: "Before I had cancer, I lived my life for my art, after I had cancer I lived my art for my life."

The recent battles that her own husband has been waging with illness would lead Anna to turn her grief into art once more through the dance routine "Intensive Care" in 2004. With the aid of truly awe-inspiring footage, Halprin can be seen making her triumphant return to the stage at the youthful age of 80. A few years later, during her 15 minute solo performance at the sold out Joyce Theater in New York, Halprin profoundly whispered to her audience: "There are so many more dances yet to do – with all you!"

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

BREATH MADE VISIBLE is a film about the living legend, Anna Halprin, one of America's most influential though obscure treasures of modern dance. Yet the project is not a dance film, but a film about what is important in life and how we can cope with it. It is ultimately about our values and how we can stay authentic to ourselves and experience life in the 21st century.

When I met Anna the first time in 1982, she was no longer performing publicly; she was in the middle of developing dance as a healing art and inspiring new directions in the art and dance therapy world. I was working as a professional stage actor in German state theaters at that time and saw her as a performance artist who, through movement, was researching the intersection of theater and dance with real life. I bonded quickly with Anna. Although some of my friends in the 1980's labeled her as "New Age," it struck me how she was constantly pushing the limits of theater and life and that she was way ahead of her time, constantly instigating creativity in others. Eventually, a few years later, this helped lead me to become a filmmaker, as I continued to explore the relationships between fiction and reality.

Over the next twenty years, Anna and I only had sporadic contact until February 2002, when I caught her at the Joyce Theater. I was so happy and surprised to see her in the headlines of the New York Times! I could not believe that she was in her 80's and was coming full circle and returning to the stage! As the piece developed, I noticed that many people in the audience had tears streaming down their faces. And I too suddenly, felt myself deeply moved by this 82 year-young woman. In a world of poseurs and surface-level stylistic directions, it was a great relief to find myself in the presence of someone whom I believed to be absolutely authentic and whose message was so universal.

I wondered why more people outside the dance performance and art therapy community didn't know about her. This show made me want to create a film that would affect an audience the way Anna's performances do. When I learned from Anna that no one had videotaped her performance, I quickly organized a shoot for the final night. It was too late to get permission to film from the wings, but we were able to shoot from an angle behind the audience. Later, when Anna invited me to join her workshop the following summer, I hesitated. I had just completed my first feature film "Heartbreak Hospital," and felt too out of shape to dance and "perform" with professional dancers from Japan, Australia, France and all corners of the U.S.

In the end, though, I accepted her invitation. It again proved to be an eye-opening experience for me 20 years later. At the end of the workshop, I asked Anna if she would be willing to allow me to make a film about her life. "Okay," she said, "But, you've got to hurry up, I'm already 83!" A few months later, I sent her a formal agreement and was surprised when she declined to sign it on the grounds that a French journalist was already pursuing her for a theater and dance festival at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. Disappointed, I gave up the idea.

I returned to San Francisco to participate in Anna's annual workshop in 2005. That summer Anna asked me if I wanted to collaborate with her on a film called "Seniors Rocking," a dance piece she choreographed to empower the elderly and to break down the stereotypes of aging. The performance included 50 participants between the ages of 65 and 100 performing in rocking chairs next to a lagoon. Her concept for the film was to expand the performance to include the participants' personal histories and through these stories explore the question: What is the most important thing in life? She was searching for stories from the heart and messages that the participants might leave behind as a legacy for their children, grandchildren and friends.

Knowing Anna as well as I did at this point, and how she uses her own personal issues and transforms them into large events, I pointed out to her that this project also touched upon her own legacy and once again broached the subject of my interest in documenting her life. Anna thought for a moment, and then not only agreed to give me access to her past and her work, but suddenly invited me and my camera up to her house to film her and her husband, the architect Lawrence Halprin.

When people who knew of Anna heard that I was making a movie about her, they became very excited and emotional. It was my intention to make this film for people who had never heard about her. I wanted to steer away from an educational biography and engage the audience emotionally, like in any good feature film. The result is a film that shows not only how her unique story unfolds from her ground breaking performances of the 1950's and 60's to her solo performances today, but also how her life and work illustrate the true meaning of dance, and its power to not only help us cope with our lives, but to transform them as well and remain truthful to ourselves.

ANNA HALPRIN BIOGRAPHY

Anna Halprin's diverse career has spanned the field of dance since the late 1930s, creating revolutionary directions for the art form and inspiring fellow choreographers to take modern dance to new dimensions. James Roose-Evans, author of "Experimental Theatre," named Anna as one of the most important theatre artists of the 20th century.

Anna founded the groundbreaking San Francisco Dancer's Workshop in 1955 and the [Tamalpa Institute](#) in 1978 with her daughter Daria Halprin. Her students included Meredith Monk, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Simone Forti, Ruth Emerson, Sally Gross, and others, some of whom became involved in the progressive and experimental Judson Church Group. Over the years, her famous outdoor deck has been an explorative haven for numerous dancers and choreographers, including Merce Cunningham, Eiko and Koma, and Min Tanaka; composers such as John Cage, Luciano Berio, Terry Riley, LeMonte Young, and Morton Subotnick; visual artists such as Robert Morris and Robert Rauschenberg; poets such as Richard Brautigan, James Broughton, and Michael McClure; and countless others.

Halprin is an early pioneer in the expressive arts healing movement. She has led countless collaborative dance programs with terminally ill patients, long committed to a belief in the connection between movement and the healing power of dance. Halprin has also investigated numerous social issues through dance and through theatrical innovations. For the past decade, she has led "Circle the Earth," a contemporary community dance ritual to confront real-life issues facing participant communities around the world. Her "Planetary Dance: A Prayer for Peace" between people and the earth was staged in Berlin at an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Potsdam Treaty to end World War II, and involved over 400 participants. In 1995, she was invited by Mikhail Gorbachev to present an invocation at the State of the World Forum in California.

Halprin has recognized new directions for dance and courageously followed those paths into unknown territories, ever-willing to adapt her work to the present moment, a philosophy that led to a broad redefinition of dance.

Halprin has created 150 full-length dance theater works, which are extensively documented in photographs, books and on film. She is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including a lifetime achievement in choreography from the American Dance Festival. She is the author of three books and has released numerous videotapes about her work. She has received numerous honors from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the American Dance Guild, and many others. In 1997, Anna received the Samuel H. Scripps Award for Lifetime Achievement in Modern Dance from the American Dance Festival. The Dance Heritage Coalition has named Anna Halprin one of "America's Irreplaceable Dance Treasures."

Halprin continues to make revolutionary work exploring the beauty of the aging body and its relationship to nature. Recent works include the award winning video *Returning Home*. In September 2004, she performed the confrontational routine "Intensive Care: Reflections on Death and Dying" at the Festival D'Automne in Paris. In 2005, Anna developed a filmed performance called "Seniors Rocking." In 2006, The Museum of Contemporary Art presented a major one-woman exhibition of her life's achievements.

At the age of 86, she continues to perform, travel, and teach with fervor. Anna gets the most out of her life, living by her adage: "Aging is like enlightenment at gunpoint."

STATEMENTS FROM ANNA HALPRIN

"I have an enduring love for dance and its' power to teach, inspire, heal and transform. I've spent a lifetime of passion and devotion probing the nature of dance and asking why it so important as a life force. I find great excitement in sharing my deep love of dance with ordinary and diverse people. Their unique creativity inspires me to make dances that grow out of our lives. I want to integrate life and art so that as our art expands our life deepens and as our life deepens our art expands."

"As I sit on the bench overlooking my dance deck, a flood of questions arise. What next? Where am I going? What is my work now that I am eighty-seven? What do elders in other cultures do? Teach the young, heal the sick, care for the land, hold the rituals, speak with the ancestors, and maintain the family. I take all these actions, and call upon the spirits, wherever they may be, whatever that might mean, and however they may appear, to lead me further into this evolution of dance to which I have committed my life. I continue to believe in the shining potential set forth by all of this work, in its evolution from rebellion to expansion to community to healing and back again to the natural world."

"I believe if more of us could contact the natural world in a directly experiential way, this would alter the way we treat our environment, ourselves and one another."

CREW BIOGRAPHIES

RUEDI GERBER (DIRECTOR, PRODUCER)

The Swiss filmmaker Ruedi Gerber began his career as a professional theatre actor, performing in over 30 plays throughout Europe. He also wrote, directed, acted, and toured with his own one-man show "Spiwit of Spwing." A chance encounter in 1982 with dance pioneer Anna Halprin would eventually inspire Gerber to pursue a career as a filmmaker.

Upon graduating with honors from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts in 1990, Gerber produced and directed a series of award-winning fictional shorts, including CAFÉ MECANIQUE, a dreamlike tale about an evening encounter between a man and a women that is played out to the music of Carla Bley, MIDNIGHT BARBEQUE (Best Director Award, NYU), a thriller spoof inspired by William Burroughs's infamous 'William Tell' experience, and COMMUNICATION AT YOUR WORKPLACE, an award-winning, commissioned series of short comedy films about miscommunication.

Transitioning into feature film and feature length documentaries, Gerber's films continued to garner acclaim and adoration. They include LIVING WITH THE SPILL, a classic anti-corporate film told from the unique point of view of Alaskan residents, produced for Channel 4 in London and aired repeatedly in 24 countries, and META-MECANO, a film about Jean Tinguely and Niki de Saint Phalle's move into the Tinguely Museum (awarded Best Architecture Documentary, Paris 1997)

Gerber then directed his first narrative feature in the U.S., HEARTBREAK HOSPITAL, starring Patricia Clarkson, John Shea, Demián Bichir, and Diane Venora — a romantic comedy and spoof about the blurry lines between reality and fiction. Soon after, Gerber reconnected with Anna Halprin and his theater roots. In 2005, he started to work on what would become BREATH MADE VISIBLE, a feature length documentary about Halprin's inspiring, trailblazing life and work.

FILMOGRAPHY

2009	BREATH MADE VISIBLE (Director, Producer)
2002	HEARTBREAK HOSPITAL (Director, Producer and Writer)
1997	META-MECANO (as <i>Rudolf Gerber</i> – Director, Producer and Writer)
1992-94	COMMUNICATION AT YOUR WORKPLACE (Director)
1991	MIDNIGHT BARBEQUE (Short Film, Director, Producer)
1991	LIVING WITH THE SPILL (Short Documentary, Director, Producer)
1990	CAFÉ MECANIQUE (Short Film, Director, Producer)

MARIO GRIGOROV (COMPOSER)

Mario Grigorov has composed scores for such prestigious films as the Academy Award winning documentary TAXI TO THE DARKSIDE and the upcoming, Sundance award winning PRECIOUS: BASED ON THE NOVEL 'PUSH' BY SAPPHIRE. As the son of a concert pianist and trumpeter, Mario traveled as a young boy with his family throughout Europe and the Middle East, enabling him to experience and absorb many rich and unique cultures, languages, and musical styles. He has lived in Tehran, Iran (where his father performed in the Shah's symphony orchestra), the former East Berlin, Austria, Australia and now, the United States. Grigorov has seamlessly incorporated these life experiences and musical travels into his music, melding them beautifully into his own distinctive style. While playing the piano in a music store in Los Angeles, Mario was signed on the spot to a record deal by Warner Brothers Records' A&R executive Bob James. The Warner signing led to the release of "Rhymes with Orange" and later to the number four Billboard Magazine charter "Aria." Prior to arriving in Los Angeles, Grigorov continued his exploration and application of classical, jazz, and world music while composing over thirty original film scores in Australia. Since landing in the U.S., he has continued to write original music as well as score films, some of which include TENNESSE, SHADOWBOXER, 29 PALMS, THE INSURGENTS, THE ATTIC, and THE THIRD WAVE.

ADAM TEICHMAN (DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY)

Adam Teichman has been working as a director of photography in film and TV for over 25 years in both dramatic and documentary films. His documentary credits and work as a contributing cinematographer include THUG ANGEL, THE LIFE OF TUPAC SHAKUR, WELCOME TO DEATH ROW RECORDS, STAND AND BE COUNTED, THE LIVING CENTURY, and HEALTHY BABY GIRL. His work can also be regularly seen on many prime time network shows such as "The Oprah Winfrey Show," "The Dr. Phil Show," and "The Doctors" as well as numerous archival documentaries for the Grammy Foundation, NARAS, with much of his work on display in the new Grammy Museum in downtown Los Angeles. He is the owner of the LA based AT Productions.

MIKE KING (CO-PRODUCER)

An award-winning graduate of New York University's Graduate Tisch School of the Arts, Mike King has been working in the New York film industry for over 15 years. He has worked on numerous films from Robert Redford's QUIZ SHOW to Stephen Gaghan's SYRIANNA, as a location manager on various TV shows, including THE SOPRANOS and MAD MEN, has line produced segments of Hal Hartley's FAY GRIM and Tamara Jenkins' THE SAVAGES, and Co-produced

LIBERTY KID, winner of the New York Latino Film Festival, recently broadcast on HBO.

LIST OF PRINCIPAL INTERVIEWEES

Anna Halprin
Larry Halprin
Merce Cunningham
John Graham
A.A. Leath

THE CREW

Producer & Director.....Ruedi Gerber
Director of photography.....Adam Teichman
Edited By.....Francoise Dumoulin
C. Peters
Story Consultant.....Deborah Dickson
Co-Producer.....Michael King
Original Music.....Mario Grigorov
Music Supervisor.....Beth Rosenblatt
Post-Production Supervisor.....Pamela Page
Sound Editor.....Margaret Crimmens
On-line Editing.....Olga Mazurkievicz
Technical Consulting.....Ueli Nüesch