



Melissa's Perfect Dance Partner: Props

From Bouncing Blue Balls to Chairs and her infamous Wheel, read how props and her father's engineering inspired some of Melissa's most celebrated choreography.

BLUE BALLS

Rebounding Blue (1996)

I created this work when exercise balls had just entered the fitness arena. Back then, they only came in one color (blue) and one size.

Intrigued by their size, weight and volume, I worked with four dancers to create movement of smooth rolls, bounces, and balances turning the stage into an otherworldly landscape. The trial and error process brought a lot of laughs though, as we learned to *roll* with it.



LONG POLES

Vessels (2000)

I created *Vessels* while pregnant with my twin daughters in 2000. I was inspired to explore ways in which things get carried and are supported. In this case, how poles could support dancers.

At one point in the piece, I created an image of a large boat where the dancers used the poles as oars. My own twin sister, who is an artist, painted designs on the poles.

SHORT POLES

Rituals (2005)

Rituals is full of fluidity. The costumes and short golden poles catch the light perfectly creating a vibrant, rich environment for partnering and fluid movement. One of the dancers in the Company at the time was in Color Guard in High School. She had off the chart skills in tossing and catching the poles. Working with her, we developed innovative new material.

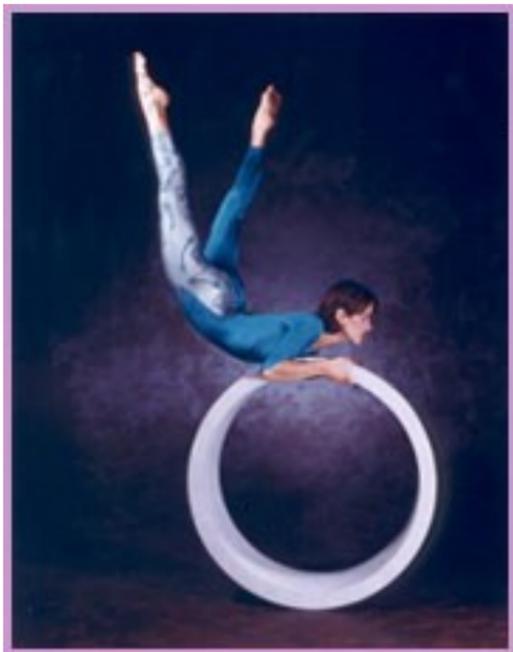


Photo by Jennifer Girard

THE WHEEL

Reaching There (1988)

Reaching There was my first professionally produced piece in Chicago during my early years with The Chicago Repertory Dance Ensemble. At the time as a young artist, working with another dancer was daunting as was being onstage alone. I asked my father George Thodos, who was an engineer, to construct a partner for me that I could interact with. He designed and built me a wheel, which has now traveled on tours around the world. The wheel was key in my discovery of my own movement style.

CHAIRS

These props recur in three of my pieces which are connected to my cultural Greek roots.

"*Tria*" (1999) is a trio inspired by the lives of my mother and her two sisters. They immigrated from Greece to continue their education, receiving fellowships and scholarships for graduate work.

"*Anasa*" (2007) which means "breath" in the Greek language, is dedicated to those who lost their lives in the devastating wildfires in Greece but on a larger scale, touches on the cyclic rise and fall of Greek civilization throughout history.

"*Thio Kosmos*" (2016) means "two worlds" in Greek. It is my most current use of chairs. This piece embodies the Greek American existence, where two different cultural ways of life and thinking are navigated to create a new perspective in today's world. I am grateful for the interviews with Greek Americans whose stories helped me create this movement.

