



How Thodos Dance Chicago Began

Melissa Thodos is just 6 years old when her life's vision comes into focus. On a walk with her siblings and mother near the north suburbs of Chicago, they pass a storefront under construction. "What are they building? What will that be?" Melissa wonders. Her mother tells her that it will be a school for dance. Melissa peers in and sees the vast floors of the studio being built and has the immediate desire for movement.

"This is it," says Melissa. "This is what I want to do."

Flash forward to 1992 at a theater in Chicago. It is Melissa's eighth year dancing professionally, and her creative energy cannot be contained. Tonight is the first performance of her own choreographic work. She performs with a single partner – a wheel. She sets it on stage and walks to the wings, awaiting the rise of the curtain, the sound of music, and her dance with the wheel to begin. She takes a breath and enters the stage. Thodos Dance Chicago begins.

For Melissa, creating dance is just as important as dance itself. In the year 2000, Thodos Dance Chicago breaks barriers by producing new work from its own dance artists. Melissa wants all of her dancers to have the same opportunities she had as a dance creator. This marks the beginning of a new milestone: Thodos Dance Chicago's *New Dances*. Every summer, the dancers work to tell their own stories – stories of, from, and about the world we live in today. Each year at *New Dances*, the stories they create are brought to life on stage.

A few years later, Melissa moves into a brand new dance facility and creates a youth dance program. TDC dancers now mentor and educate the next generation of dancers from Chicago and all over the country. For Melissa, the joy of giving back to the community is immeasurable.

Over the years, the dancers continue to work hard in rehearsal, constantly creating and exploring movement. They capture the physical and lyrical essence of Melissa's choreography and move fluidly through the technical work of Lar Lubovitch. The dancers hone the signature movements of Bob Fosse and are graced with the guidance of Ann Reinking. They push themselves to embody the quirkiness of Sybil Shearer and to be true to the journey of the iconic Japanese-American dancer, Sono Osato. They work to meet the theatrical demands of American stories from the past that must be told.

Thodos Dance Chicago dances and teaches across 27 states and 6 continents. We share what was built in Chicago – dance that is truly "beautiful, refreshing, innovative and unique" – with communities throughout the world.

We are 25 this year and our mission remains strong. Dance performance, creation and education. We thank you for this ride to 25.

