

MELISSA TOOGOOD



MELISSA TOOGOOD is an award winning, internationally recognised Dancer and Master Teacher, hailed as "superlative" by *The New York Times*.⁽¹⁾ Having spent 22 years abroad, she recently returned to Sydney, Australia but continues to work between NYC and Sydney. Melissa was a member of the esteemed Merce Cunningham Dance Company. One of the final few who worked directly with the dance legend, she has taught Cunningham Technique internationally since 2007. Melissa is a 2013 & 2015 Merce Cunningham Fellow and an official Stager for the Merce Cunningham Trust.

She continues to work closely with the choreographer Pam Tanowitz, whom she danced with for 18 years. For 12 of those years, she served as Rehearsal Director, and Artistic Associate. Melissa worked with Tanowitz as Assistant to the Choreographer on new creations for The Australian Ballet, Ballet Austin, Paul Taylor American Modern Dance, The Martha Graham Dance Company, the Juilliard School, Fall for Dance Festival, the Royal Ballet London, the Vail Dance Festival and others. Melissa formulated and managed masterclasses and workshops taught by herself and the company, emphasizing Tanowitz's unique style and signature choreographic practices.

"Ms. Toogood has had a prolific freelance dance career since the disbanding of Cunningham's troupe in 2012."⁽²⁾
— *The New York Times*.

She has performed with Kyle Abraham/Abraham.In.Motion, Kimberly Bartosik, Wally Cardona, Michelle Dorrance, Rosie Herrera Dance Theater, Rashaun Mitchell + Silas Riener, Miro Dance Theater, Jodi Melnick, the Stephen Petronio Company, Jamar Roberts, Sally Silvers & Dancers, The Bang Group: Tap Lab, Christopher Williams, Bill Young, Michael Uthoff Dance Theater, and many others. She has been on faculty at Bard College, Barnard College, Dance New Amsterdam, New York Theater Ballet School, the Merce Cunningham Studio, and regularly teaches for the Merce Cunningham Trust. She has staged Cunningham's work on the Stephen Petronio Company, New World School of the Arts, The Washington Ballet, Vail Dance Festival, Harkness Dance Festival and Bard College; and Tanowitz's work at Princeton University, Rutgers University and on L.A. Dance Project. Toogood's own work has been commissioned by the Boston Ballet, New York Theater Ballet, Vail Dance Festival as well as choreographing the fragrance launch for Issey Miyake's *Pure d'Issey*. With her sister Jodie Toogood, she created an evening of work titled *Set A Part* in collaboration with visual artist Kenneth E. Parris III, presented at The Space Dance and Arts Center, Melbourne and again at Newtown High School of the Performing Arts in 2019. Melissa was a choreographic mentor to Juilliard students during *Unavailable Memory: In conversation between Cunningham & Cage*, presented at Baryshnikov Arts Center, NYC 2022. She is the subject of Vol 8 No 2 of the Art Publication *Dance Ink* shot by award winning photographer Pari Dukovic.

Dance Magazine named her in their *25 to Watch* in 2014 and featured her in the inaugural episode of *Behind the Curtain*, 2015. Melissa has been a contributor for publications such as *Dance Magazine*, *Dance Enthusiast*, and *Modern Painters*, and hosted David Vaughn's *The Dance Historian Is In* at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 2020. Melissa has been a featured guest on the podcasts *Dance & Stuff*, *Still Spinning*, and multiple appearances on *Conversations On Dance*. She lectured on Collaboration with Visual Artist Kenneth E. Parris III at Bard College and spoke with Sarah Skaggs, Director of Dance Dickinson college, for the webinar *Ballet Is Woman-Celebrating Representational Gains in Choreography & Ballet*, 2022. Melissa has conducted John Cage's *Concert For Piano and Orchestra* for performances of Merce Cunningham's *Antic Meet*, 1958, and performed a Narrator role in *Knee Play 5* from Einstein on the Beach for Helen Pickett's *When Love*. Consistently embracing opportunities to work with artists of other disciplines including fashion designers: Titania Inglis, Samantha House, and TOME NYC, acclaimed writer Anne Carson, and visual artists Nancy Levine, James Welling, and Mikhail Baryshnikov for whom she appeared in photography exhibitions of *Merce My Way*. She is featured in Richard Daniel's *Dances for an iPhone* and in various films that have been screened internationally including *Cunningham* a 3D film by Alla Kovgan, *Tesseract* a 3D film by Charles Atlas, *If The Dancer Dances* by Maia Wechsler, Merce Cunningham's final film collaboration *Craneway Event* by Tacita Dean, *I Was Waiting for the Echo of a Better Day* by Jeremy Jacob, and *Every Moment Alters* and *Dancers (slightly out of shape)* by Liz Sargent which screened at the Venice Biennale in 2022 & 2021.

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Upon her return to Australia, she has taught company classes for Bangarra Dance Theatre, Sydney Dance Company, Lionheart Dance Company and open classes at ReadyMade Works Inc. She staged Merce Cunningham's *Field Dances* 1963, on young dancers from Seet Dance and presented as part of March Dance Sydney Festival 2023. She continues to mentor Seet Dance kids periodically with *Dance by Chance* workshops. In 2024, Melissa staged an excerpt of Cunningham's seminal work *OCEAN* on Victorian College of the Arts' graduating cohort. As part of this interdisciplinary project, she oversaw the production, set, lighting, costume and set design students as they recreated the original design and worked with the dancers to create their own response piece to be performed alongside Merce's work to complete an exciting evening-length program. She worked closely with PHD candidate and professional musician Cameron Deyell, to create original music to be performed live for the show. Currently, she teaches Cunningham Technique and stages Cunningham repertory on Sydney Dance Company's Advanced Training Program and for the pre-professional bridging program DanceFormation.

Melissa grew up in Campbelltown NSW, attended Newtown High School of the Performing Arts in Sydney, Australia, and holds a BFA in Dance Performance from New World School of the Arts, Miami, FL U.S.A. She now resides in Sydney, NSW Australia.

1. Kourlas, G., (2015, March 23). [Review 'Acutal Size Plus' Sally Silvers's Hitchcock-Inspired Work](#), *The New York Times*.
2. Burke, S., (2019, March 3). [Review: An Abundance of Cunningham at Harkness Festival](#), *The New York Times*.