

A DOCUMENTARY BY CATHERINE GUND

BORN TO FLY:

ELIZABETH STREB VS. GRAVITY



BORN TO FLY
Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity

an Aubin Pictures Production
Directed by Catherine Gund
Produced by Catherine Gund and Tanya Selvaratnam

Screenings

SXSW Film Festival - World Premiere, March 2014

Cleveland International Film Festival - March 2014

Full Frame Documentary Festival - April 2014

Seattle International Film Festival - May 2014

Sheffield Doc/Fest - June 2014

Sydney Film Festival - June 2014

Frameline LGBT Film Festival - June 2014

Film Forum, NY, NY, September 10-16, 2014

Laemmle Noho 7, LA, CA, September 26 - October 2, 2014

INTRODUCTION

Skill is being able to navigate the known world, but then being able to throw yourself into an unknown universe and being able to navigate that... in a mostly harm-free way.

- Elizabeth Streb



Elizabeth Streb was born Elizabeth Green. She was adopted by the Streb family at the age of two, her arm in a cast.

The Streb family lived in a working class neighborhood in upstate NY. Streb's father was a bricklayer. She came to admire his strong body and the determination with which he worked. She thought perhaps if she pushed herself far enough, she could learn to be unbreakable.

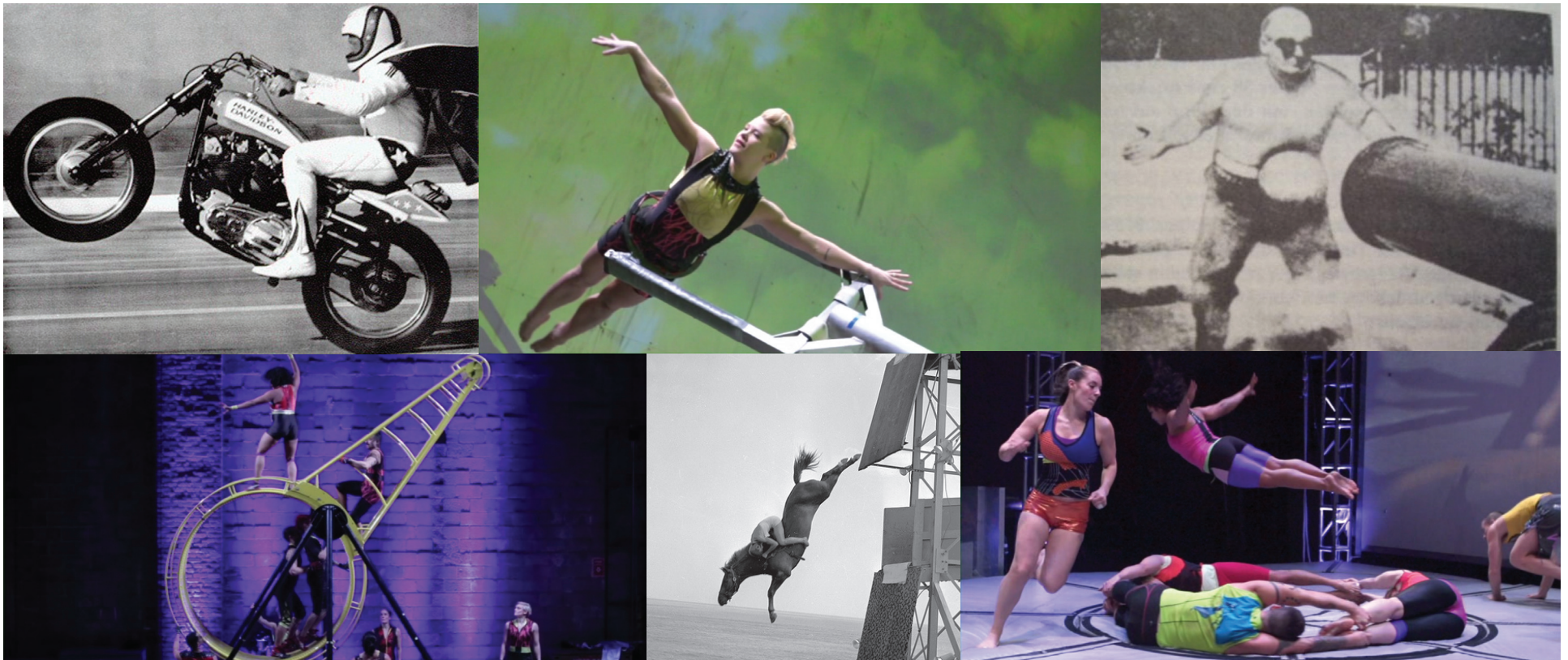
Elizabeth Streb has carried that drive throughout her life, always pushing her physical and mental limits, and those of her STREB Extreme Action Company.

The feature-length documentary BORN TO FLY: Elizabeth Streb vs. Gravity pushes the boundaries between action and art, daring us to join Streb and her dancers in pursuit of human flight.

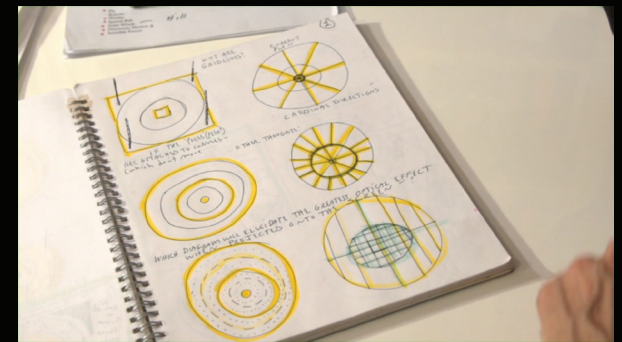
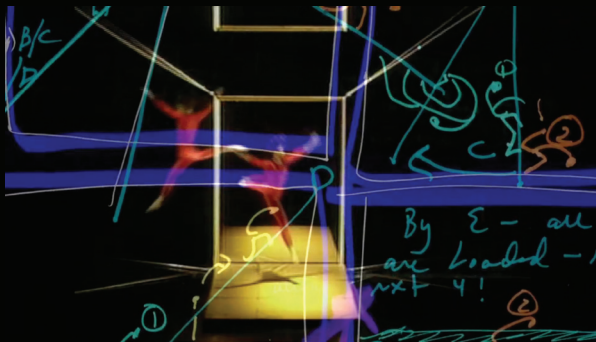
BRIEF SYNOPSIS

BORN TO FLY is infused with Streb's passion for action – to walk on walls; dive through glass; move so fast you disappear; fly.

Sometimes called the Evel Knievel of dance, she is the pioneer of a movement form called "POPACTION," which is couched in the exploration of human potential – both physical and emotional. Through her work, she expands our notions of movement; explores the intersections of dance, performance, and stunt-work; and provokes ideas about how fear might enhance our experiences. Still, Streb's work is not only about bodies and adrenaline. She also uses choreography to demonstrate the power and complexities of age, gender, class, and race - both for her dancers and her audiences. **BORN TO FLY** wrestles with these complexities in order to propagate confidence and bravery among the diverse communities that can be inspired by Streb's philosophy and her punch.



Elizabeth Streb has been pushing the boundaries of action and art for over 40 years. BORN TO FLY layers archival footage, drawings and photographs of Elizabeth and the STREB company from across the years, along with stock footage, graphics, and contemporary performance footage - giving the film a dynamic and mesmerizing texture.



Vérité scenes with the STREB company performers address questions of what it means for an artist to express her vision with a surrogate body and how it feels to be a cipher for another's dreams.

Who chooses such a life? A current company member, John, reveals that as a child he resisted using his inhaler during asthma attacks, to feel the pain and challenge his body to endure it. Was this recklessness or the first sign of a brilliant spark? Like John, each dancer embodies a unique aspect of Streb's personality – the mad scientist, the graceful ballerina, the strong woman. The film also includes an exploration of the company's worst accident: dancer DeeAnn Nelson shattered her vertebrae while performing for STREB in 2007. Although she can walk, DeeAnn can never dance again. Still, she embraces the possibility of magic and celebrates the importance of finding that with STREB.

ELIZABETH STREB'S GLADITORS



JACKIE



JOHN



FELIX and SAMMY



CASSY



FABIO



DEEANN

On its trajectory from ground to air, BORN TO FLY reaches its apex with STREB's "One Extraordinary Day" in London. Streb and her dancers jump, climb, soar, and fall - piercing the sky with seven surprise, public performances on and around cultural landmarks throughout the city.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

BORN TO FLY was sparked at a STREB event when Elizabeth offered me a surprising honor. I got to shimmy 30 feet up a tress and drop a bowling ball into the waiting hands of Zaire Baptiste, emcee extraordinaire. When I scrambled back down, I felt exhilarated, giddy, and eager to celebrate with Zaire. I had tasted the thrill. He gave me a high-five but cautioned, "You hesitated." In that moment, I learned that an extreme action hero has to practice without fear and with trust and devotion. This flood of emotion inspired BORN TO FLY.

Why is one person's circus another person's dance and one dancer's gorgeous flight another dancer's stunt work? Why call it art? Why choreograph it? Why have a role in performing it? Why watch it? What will it change? How has the action architect Elizabeth Streb created a plane of thought; a launchpad in a theater; a spectacle of provocation for the mind and the street, for the art world and the sky? What comes of live action, live thought, a live wire being recorded, edited, reconfigured, and represented? How can the film BORN TO FLY - my "art about art" - jumpstart viewers' lives, take them to the edge? How does my collaboration with Streb inspire a broad audience, hungry for a more tactile and fierce existence in the world?

BORN TO FLY declares the power and necessity of art in practice. The film approaches Streb and her Extreme Action Company with the same curiosity, openness, and questioning that Streb exhibits with regard to physics, risk, power, fear, and beauty. By interpreting Streb's story, BORN TO FLY dares us all to prioritize the extraordinary in our everyday lives.

The optimism you hear is real. Look and see how powerful, unique, and scary it can be. Everyday I encounter a person or have an experience that demonstrates how much our society needs to be injected with a sense of confidence, agency, and creative intelligence. The world climate of economic and social inequality can too often leave people feeling completely powerless, apathetic, desperate, or lost. By investigating potential limitations imposed by age, gender, and injury (among other things), I'm making this film to incite viewers to challenge the boundaries of their imagination: those we set for ourselves and those that are set for us.

SELECTED PRESS

"ASTONISHING!" "MASTERFUL!"

"ADRENALINE-PUMPING!" "FANTASTIC!" "MAGNIFICENTLY CAPTURED!"

"STUNNING!"

THE CREDITS

Exhilarating and terrifying...a fantastic documentary...director Catherine Gund has done a masterful job of introducing viewers to Streb, her dancers and her movement philosophy.

- Bryan Abrams

VARIETY

Fascinating... Intriguing...Likely to generate fascination and uneasiness in equal measure... breathtaking...teasingly suggests that some displays of avant-garde virtuosity could be enjoyed equally by venturesome aesthetes, dance enthusiasts and devotees of World Wrestling Entertainment.

- Joe Leydon

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

Catherine Gund's BORN TO FLY works very well as a portrait of a maverick artistic sensibility...Whether one calls it art, sport, or mere entertainment, some of it makes for jaw-dropping viewing.

- John DeFore

THE AUSTIN CHRONICLE

BORN TO FLY captures fully both the danger in the work and the exhilaration the dancers get from it. Watching these athletic paragons perform gets the pulse racing, but not just from the risk; it's seeing bodies move in ways you know they never have in human history.

- Robert Faires

TO READ MORE VISIT WWW.BORNTOFLYMOVIE.COM/PRESS

THE MAKERS

Catherine Gund
Director and Producer



Catherine Gund is an Emmy-nominated producer, director, writer and organizer. Her media work focuses on arts and culture, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, the environment, and other social justice issues. Her films have screened around the world in festivals, theaters, museums and schools; on PBS, Discovery's Planet Green, and the Sundance Channel. Gund's most recent project, *What's On Your Plate?*, is a critically-acclaimed, multi-media project about kids and food politics, featuring a documentary, book and curriculum.

Her previous works include *Motherland Afghanistan* (AFI Fest Official Selection; PBS broadcast); *A Touch of Greatness* (Best Documentary Award: Hamptons Film Festival, Ohio Film Festival, and Denver International Film Festival; PBS broadcast; Emmy nomination); *Hallelujah! Ron Athey: A Story of Deliverance* (Best Documentary Award, Chicago Underground Film Festival).

In 1996, she co-founded the Third Wave Foundation, which targets grants and programs to young women between 15 and 30, as well as Aubin Pictures, a non-profit media production company, which promotes cultural and social awareness and change. She has served on the boards of numerous non-profit organizations including Art Matters, Working Films, MediaRights.org, Vera List Center for Art and Politics at The New School, and the Astraea Foundation.

Gund lives with her four children in New York City.

Tanya Selvaratnam
Producer



Born in Sri Lanka and raised in Long Beach, CA, Tanya Selvaratnam is a writer, producer, actor, and activist. As a producer, Selvaratnam's recent projects include artist Mickalene Thomas's Happy Birthday to a *Beautiful Woman* (forthcoming on HBO); Chiara Clemente's *Beginnings* (Sundance Channel, Webby Award); and the Rockefeller Foundation-funded *MADE HERE*. Currently in development are a documentary by Chiara Clemente about the artist Alex Katz and a documentary by Albert Maysles and Shola Lynch about civil rights activist Myrlie Evers-Williams. Past film productions include Catherine Gund's *What's On Your Plate?* (Discovery Channel's Planet Green); Chiara Clemente's *Our City Dreams* (Sundance Channel); and Jed Weintrob's *The F Word* (Independent Film Channel).

As an activist, Selvaratnam has worked for the World Health Organization, Ms. Foundation, and NGO Forum on Women; served on the boards of the Third Wave Foundation, Groundswell Community Mural Project, and The Wooster Group; and organized tsunami relief and book drive benefits for Sri Lanka. She received her graduate and undergraduate degrees in Chinese language and history from Harvard University. Her book, *THE BIG LIE: Motherhood, Feminism, and the Reality of the Biological Clock*, was released in January 2014 from Prometheus Books, distributed by Random House. www.tanyaturnsup.com

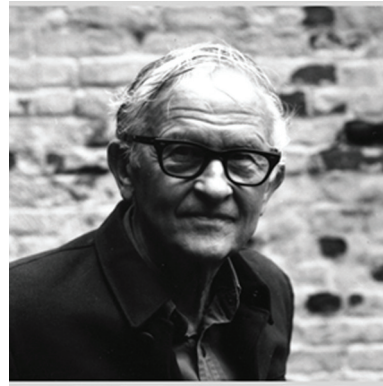
THE FILMMAKERS

Kirsten Johnson
Cinematographer



Kirsten Johnson works as a cinematographer and a director. She is currently at work on *A Blind Eye*, a Sundance Documentary Fund supported film that she shot and directed in Afghanistan. Her shooting appears in the 2013 Academy Award nominated, Sundance 2012 Audience Award winner, *The Invisible War*. As the supervising DP on Abby Disney and Gini Reticker's 2011 series, "Women, War and Peace," she traveled to Colombia, Bosnia, and Afghanistan. She shared the 2010 Sundance Documentary Competition Cinematography Award with Laura Poitras for *The Oath*. She shot the Tribeca Film Festival 2008 Documentary winner, *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. Her cinematography is featured in *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Academy Award-nominated *Asylum*, Emmy-winning *Ladies First*, and Sundance premiere documentaries, *A Place at the Table*, *This Film is Not Yet Rated*, *American Standoff*, and *Derrida*. A chapter on her work as a cinematographer is featured in the book, *The Art of the Documentary*. Her previous documentary as a director, *Deadline*, (co-directed with Katy Chevigny), premiered at Sundance in 2004, was broadcast on primetime NBC, and won the Thurgood Marshall Award.

Albert Maysles
Cinematographer



Albert Maysles is a pioneer of Direct Cinema. He and his brother David were the first to make nonfiction feature films (*Gimme Shelter*, *Salesman*, *Grey Gardens*) where the drama of life unfolds as is without scripts, sets, interviews or narration. His first film, *Psychiatry in Russia* (1955) he made as he transitioned from psychologist to documentary filmmaker. In 1960 he served as co-filmmaker of *Primary*. His 36 films include *Primary* (1964), five films of the projects of Christo and Jeanne-Claude (1972 to 1995), and a sixth, *What's Happening? The Beatles in the USA*, *Meet Marlon Brando* (1965) and three documentaries for HBO. He received a Guggenheim Fellowship (1965), a Peabody, an Emmy, five Lifetime Achievement Awards, the award for best cinematography at Sundance (2002) for *Lalee's Kin* which was also nominated in 2001 for an Academy Award and the Columbia Dupont Award (2004). In 1999 Eastman Kodak saluted him as one of the 100 world's finest cinematographers.

Alexander Meillier
Editor



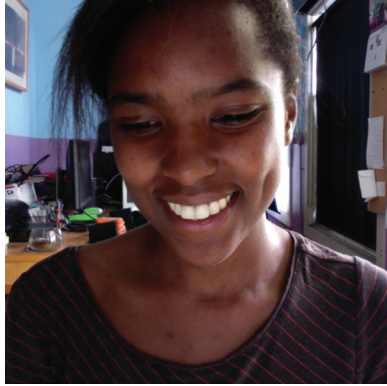
Alex Meillier's work has shown widely in cinematic release, television and film festivals, including the Toronto International Film Festival and the Sundance Channel.

Alex Meillier's most recent project, *Alias Ruby Blade* premiered at the 2013 Tribeca Film Festival. In 2007 Alex was Producer and Director of Photography for the feature film *Obscene*, which premiered at the Toronto International Film Festival. Alex also contributed the unique motion graphics sequences to *Obscene* which have led him to become a sought after motion graphics artist. As an editor, his work can be seen in Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* and in the ultra-indie doc *Beijing Punk*. For Ager Meillier Films Alex alternates freely between directing, shooting, editing and designing.

He currently resides in New York City with his wife Tanya Ager Meillier.

THE MAKERS

Jessica Ruffin
Associate Producer



Jessica Ruffin's background is in film history and theory, and aesthetic philosophy, with degrees from Stanford University (BA, 2007) and University of Chicago (MA, 2008). She has conducted grant and fellowship supported research on cinematic spectatorial theory; the portrayal of youth and body in Weimar and Nazi era film; and live video editing communities in N.Y.C.

Jessica Ruffin joined Aubin Pictures as the office and projects manager in June 2012. As the Associate Producer for BORN TO FLY, she applies her perspectives and experience in crafting the grant and outreach language for the film, along with strategizing and implementing day- to-day production.

Jessica is also the Narrative Short Programmer for Brooklyn Film Festival.

She has a strong belief in the transformative power of art and aims to facilitate that transformation in each aspect of her work, as well as her life.

Adam Crystal
Music Supervisor



Adam Crystal is a composer and musician. His versatile work spans scoring films, documentaries, commercials, art installations & videos, fashion shows, and modern dance and ballet pieces. His most recent compositions in film includes pieces for Errol Morris' short doc, *Team Spirit*, and the Tribeca Film Festival Audience Award winner, *Give Up Tomorrow*, Adam's recent ballet commission include *Final Dress* for the Royal New Zealand Ballet, *Balloon Dance*, for Works and Process at the Guggenheim, and a new piece entitled *Canvas* which will premier at the Vail International Dance Festival in August 2013.

Classically trained in violin, he has performed on piano and keyboards for various bands including Fischerspooner, My Chemical Romance, The Citizens Band, The Pierces, Jena Melone, Beirut, Vanessa Mae, among many others.

KEY CREDITS

DIRECTOR

Catherine Gund

PRODUCERS

Catherine Gund and Tanya Selvaratnam

CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Kirsten Johnson, Albert Maysles, and Ian McAlpin

EDITOR

Alex Meillier

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER

Jessica Ruffin

MUSIC BY

Adam Crystal

AUDIO POST FACILITY

Dig It Audio, Inc.

POST PRODUCTION SERVICES

Final Frame

PRODUCTION COMPANY

Aubin Pictures, Inc.

WITH FUNDING AND SUPPORT FROM

The National Endowment for the Arts
The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts
Chicken and Egg Pictures
Archer Gray Productions
IFP

FEATURING

Elizabeth Streb

THE STREB EXTREME ACTION COMPANY

Fabio Tavares – Associate Artistic Director

Sarah Callan

Jaclyn Carlson

Leonardo Giron

Felix Hess

Samantha Jakus

Cassandre Joseph

John Kasten

Daniel Rysak

REMAINING CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

Zaire Baptiste (STREB emcee)

Laura Flanders (Elizabeth Streb's partner)

Bill T. Jones

Bjorn Amelan

Anne Bogart

Catharine Stimpson

A.M. Homes

Gina Garan

Hope Clark (former STREB dancer)

Donald J. Rose, M.D.

DeeAnn Nelson Burton (former STREB dancer)

ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

Otto M. Berk - Tom Caravaglia - EJ Camp Photography

Kate Fisher - Danita Geltner - Lois Greenfield

Andrea Hicks - Robert Kilman - David Papas

Peter Reitzfeld - Tony Whitfield

Scott Heiser

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