

# THE TRIBECA TRIB

## Tribeca Arts Pioneer Karen Bernard Reaches a Milestone in Movement



Karen Bernard performs a segment of her piece called "Rheumatica." She will present the work at her New Dance Alliance's Performance Mix Festival. Photo: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib

By **CARL GLASSMAN**

Posted Jun. 02, 2026

Karen Bernard and Scott Wixon were quintessential Tribeca artist pioneers when, in 1975, they moved into their 2,500-square-foot Duane Street loft, a former tinsmith shop. Wixon had plenty of room to paint large in the rear and Bernard, an experimental dancer and choreographer, could move freely in the front. On the floor in the center space lay their mattress.

Living conditions, said Bernard, "were not a priority. The studio was the priority."

Fast forward half a century, long since Wixon's own labor turned the space into a truly livable home, and three children, including twins, grew up and moved out. Much, of course, has changed.

But the art never stopped.



Karen Bernard with Scott Wixon in his studio. Wixon pulls out a 1977 painting shown in the Exxon Young American exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum and typical of his former large-scale works. Wixon's canvases are much smaller these days. Photo: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib

[Wixon](#), 78, still paints and shows his work, and Bernard, 77, not only continues creating and performing her own movement pieces, but she has reached a milestone in supporting others who do the same.

This week marks the 40th anniversary of the [Performance Mix Festival](#), created by Bernard, 77, under the umbrella of her non-profit [New Dance Alliance](#) (NDA). When launched in 1986, the festival was Lower Manhattan's only festival dedicated to performance art. This week's four-day event takes place June 4 to 7 at [Abrons Arts Center](#), 466 Grand St. Over the years the festival has given over 1,000 artists opportunities to show new and developing work.

“Because it's our fortieth I'm doing a combination of bringing back people we've shown over the years and those who are performing through the application process,” Bernard said, adding, “I show the unexpected.”

In an interview with the Trib back in 1995, Bernard said her own work was about many disparate things: body and aging, reassessment of work, marriage, motherhood, sexuality, art—and the endless struggle to make it all work together. Asked if those themes have changed, she replied, “Maybe I got the equation of the children out of the way. Everything else would stay the same.”



Nikkie Samreth and Celine Abdallah (top), and Liam McLaughlin (above), perform for Bernard and others during a feedback session of the New Dance Alliance LiftOff Residency program. Photos: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib Though not quite. For the festival on June 6 she will take the stage with a piece of her own that she calls “Rheumatica.” It is the first

work that she has been physically able to perform since a brutal attack of rheumatism. “All of a sudden, for no rhyme or reason,” she recalled, she could not get out of bed. It would take a year, and the help of a “miracle drug,” she said, before Bernard was physically capable of performing her own choreographed moves. She describes the new work as “celebrating the lifeblood of returning to movement after a debilitating disease.”

Along with the festival, Bernard and her New Dance Alliance also sponsor [LiftOff Residency](#), which twice a year provides six “physical-based performance artists” with 36 hours of rehearsal space, a \$500 stipend, and two feedback sessions. Those in the program call it a huge boost in the pursuit of their art.

“Living as an artist in New York, it’s very tough to find a place to rehearse, and even think creatively when you’re making art,” said Maho Ogawa, a native of Japan and one of the LiftOff Residency artists.

“So, this,” she added, “is such a gift to have the opportunity to sit in a very quiet place and think art purely.”

These days Bernard is in the process of documenting the Performance Mix Festival’s archives as well as her own work, a mammoth job of digitizing videos, oral history interviews, photos and more.

Looking back over those 40 years, she said, “makes me feel that I have given so much to the performance and experimental community. And even though the current work I’m performing in the festival could be my last, it just never seems to stop.”