



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

Co-Directors: Adriana Davis and Margaret Beals

Executive Producer: Margaret Beals

Producer/Editor: Adriana Davis

Original "Conversations" Concept Director/Producer: Margaret Hunnewell

Associate Producer/Creative Consultant: Kathleen Drinane Davis

Cinematographer: Sebastian Piras

Production Sound: Roger Phoenix

Post-Production Sound Editor: Glenn Navia

Produced in Association with:

D-Squared Media

"Conversations" recorded at the CloudHouse Studio, NYC

Website: www.Dancingwithoutsteps.com

Reviews:

Impressions: Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals – A Documentary by Henning Rubsam in The Dance Enthusiast

<https://www.dance-enthusiast.com/features/impressions-reviews/view/Margaret-Beals-Documentary-The-Art-of-Improvisation->

Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals World Premieres at New Jersey International Film Festival by Sarah Ventola in New Jersey Stage

<https://newjerseystage.com/articles/getarticle2.php?titlelink=dance-with-steps-the-art-of-improvisation-with-margaret-beals-world-premieres-at-the-2023-new-jersey-international-film-festival>

Podcast:

Movers & Shapers: *A dance podcast by The Moving Architects*

The personal stories, experiences, and ideas from those who shape the dance field.

Erin Carlisle Norton interviews Margaret Beals in episode 153, released on March 27, 2023.

<https://themovingarchitects.org/podcasts/>

Interview:

Insightful Documentary on Dancer Margaret Beals World Premieres at the New Jersey International Film Festival on June 10! By Al Nigrin in New Jersey Stage

<https://www.newjerseystage.com/articles/getarticle2.php?titlelink=insightful-documentary-on-dancer-margaret-beals-world-premieres-at-the-2023-new-jersey-international-film-festival-on-june-10>

Film Freeway: <https://filmfreeway.com/projects/2313821>

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/margaretbeals/dwstrailer>

Instagram Handles: [margaretbeals](#) and [dsquaredmedia212](#)



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

For Immediate Release

Impulses Dance Theatre Arts, Inc. Announces New Film “Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals”

New York – October 19, 2022 – Impulses Dance Theatre Arts, Inc. announced the release of “Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals” introduced by National Medal of Art recipient Meredith Monk.

This short documentary represents a life’s journey for Margaret Beals, a solo performer since the 1960s best known for her improvisational artistry in dance and theatre. It is under consideration for art, dance, and women-centric film festivals with a premiere in late 2022.

“Dancing without Steps” ignites a discussion of the power of improvisation to influence dancers and artists in other mediums such as painting, music and poetry through the words and actual footage of Ms. Beals’ pioneering works. Ms. Beals, Jackson Pollock, Keith Jarrett and others reveal their creative process, offering young artists an opportunity to explore the freedom and authenticity of improvisation.

Born in Boston, she self-trained, dancing without steps until the age of 17. Arriving in New York, she had the privilege of studying with luminaries Martha Graham and Jose Limon. In 1976, Olwyn Hughes gave Ms. Beals the rights to choreograph the “Ariel” poems of Sylvia Plath. A three-year National Endowment for the Arts grant enabled her to create *Improvisations to Chopin* with pianist Thomas Hryniv. She also has written and performed two one-woman evenings, *The Teak Room*, directed by Tony award winner Tony Tanner, and *Pathways*, directed by Obie Award winner Lee Nagrin. She continues to coach and teach in her New York studio.

Ms. Beals says, “*Dancing Without Steps* has given me a platform to express the philosophy that has informed my life’s work. Improvisation in performance is like surfing. You must jump in without hesitation and keep swimming.”

About the Film and Film Information

“Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals”

2022 USA 25 minutes Copyright ©2022 Impulses Dance Theatre Arts, Inc.

Co-Directors - Adriana Davis & Margaret Beals

Margaret Beals - Executive Producer

Adriana Davis/D-Squared Media NYC – Producer/Production Company

Kathleen Drinane Davis – Associate Producer/Creative Consultant

Impulses Dance Theatre Arts, Inc. previously produced the award-winning film “Impulses.” ©1974, *Impulses Dance Theatre Arts, Inc. All Rights Reserved*

For more information, go to: <https://dancingwithoutsteps.com>

About Margaret Beals

Margaret Beals has performed her solo evening, “Margaret Beals in Concert,” appearing at Jacob’s Pillow; the NY Dance Umbrella; the Delacorte Theatre; The Place, London; the International Festival de Danse, Paris; and the Het Theatre Festival, Holland, among other venues. For more information, go to: www.margaretbeals.org

About Adriana Davis

Adriana Davis has worked in film, television and radio as a writer, producer, editor and voice actor since 1991, founding the production company D-Squared Media in 1995. Credits include documentaries THE LIFE OF FRANK INY (1999), SEARCHING FOR BAGHDAD” (2002), THE LAST JEWS OF BAGHDAD (2005) and SAVING THE IRAQI JEWISH ARCHIVES (2020) airing on PBS and at world-wide film festivals; the romantic comedy PLAY IT BY EAR (2005) starring EGOT Rita Moreno. She has received Telly Awards and Cine Golden Eagle Awards for her work with A&E and the History Channel.



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

Synopsis

Join acclaimed dance innovator, Margaret Beals, on her exploration of the art of improvisation. In this short documentary, Ms. Beals demonstrates the power and authenticity of improvisation as performance and as a tool of discovery for any creative endeavor.

Throughout **Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals**, audiences are offered glimpses of Ms. Beals' extensive career in improvisational dance. One of the first solo dancers to perform whole concerts without set choreography, she started her early career in the free-wheeling atmosphere of the 1960's club and cabaret scene and continued her pioneering journey through five more decades.

In this film, Ms. Beals draws from various artists to give fuller context to her thoughts on improvisation. Keith Jarrett, renowned jazz pianist, reveals insights into his own creative process. The action paintings of Jackson Pollock and the powerful black and white abstractions of Franz Kline are used to further illustrate Ms. Beals' ideas and techniques. Also included are brief excerpts from the works of the great modern dance choreographer Martha Graham and the celebrated dance/theatre choreographer Valerie Bettis.

Meredith Monk, award-winning composer, singer and creator of music-theater-film works, gives an insightful introduction to this latest documentary from Impulses Dance Theatre Arts, Inc. The company's previous award-winning film, "Impulses" (1974) gave audiences their first experience of a collaborative concert featuring improvisational artists from the different fields of music, dance and theatre.

Dancing Without Steps expresses the principles that animate Ms. Beals' art while offering her experiences of improvisation to a new generation of dancers and artists from all disciplines.

Meet the Moment that is **Dancing Without Steps**.



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

SCREENING HISTORY

October 2022

San Diego Art Film Fest, San Diego, California: Official Selection

November 2022

Vegas Shorts, Las Vegas, Nevada: Official Selection

December 2022

Amsterdam Short Film Festival, Amsterdam, Netherlands: Official Selection

Cannes International Cinema Festival, Cannes, France: Official Selection

Boston Independent Film Awards, Boston, MA: Official Selection

Dumbo Film Festival*, New York, New York: Official Selection & **Semi-Finalist**

Munich Short Film Awards, Munich, Germany: Official Selection & **Semi-Finalist**

Canada Shorts - Canadian and International Short Film Festival,

Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: **Quarter Finalist & Award of Commendation**

<https://canadashorts.com/2022.php>

Best Shorts Competition, La Jolla, California: **Official Selection and Award of Recognition**

<https://bestshorts.net/award-of-recognition-december-2022/>

January 2023

London Filmmaker Awards, London, England: Official Selection

Dancinema (online/awards), Washington, DC: Official Selection

The Impact DOCS Awards, La Jolla, California: Official Selection

Los Angeles Independent Women Film Awards, Los Angeles, California: Official Selection & **Winner Best Short Documentary** [LA Independent Women Film Awards](#)

New York Independent Cinema Awards*, New York, NY: Official Selection &

Winner Best US Short Documentary <https://www.nycinemaawards.com/17th>

February 2023

Valkyrie International Film Festival*, Cheektowaga, New York: Official Selection

Oniros Film Awards*, New York, NY: Official Selection &

Double Award Winner Best Short Documentary and Best Editing

[Oniros Film Awards Feb 2023](#)

New York International Film Awards*, New York, NY: **Double Finalist: Best Short Documentary and Best Editing** [NY Int'l Film Awards](#)



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

May 2023

WRPN Women's International Film Festival, Rehoboth Beach, Delaware:

Official Selection & **Double Award Winner**

Exceptional Merit (Loose Shorts) and Merit (Viewer Impact/Entertainment Value)

June 2023

New Jersey International Film Festival, New Brunswick, NJ: Official Selection &

Jury Award Winner at in-person festival premiere - Honorable Mention

September 2023

Dance Camera Istanbul – Impro Dance Fest Edition, Istanbul, Turkey: Official Selection Sept 22–
Oct 2, 2023

October 2023

Exeter Dance International Film Festival, Exeter, United Kingdom: Official Selection

November 2023

Sans Souci Festival of Dance Cinema, Boulder, CO: Official Selection Virtual Showcase

“Documenting Our Times” Nov 27- Dec 17, 2023

**(Screened for Jury Panel Only)*

For more information and future screening dates please visit <https://dancingwithoutsteps.com/> or <https://www.margaretbeals.org/>

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Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

Artist's Statement: Margaret Beals

Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals has given me the rare opportunity to express the ideas and philosophy that have informed my work in dance, and especially in the art of improvisation as performance.

This film would not have been possible without the astute and caring vision and skill of my director/editor, Adriana Davis and the constant and creative support of my associate producer, Kathleen Drinane Davis.

The title of this film is a metaphor for my approach to the art of improvisation. Meeting the moment fully, in any art form or life endeavor, is, in essence, a spiritual act. It demands that your most aware and complete self be present, to meet and create that moment when your being and the ever present “now”, collide.

Being open and vulnerable to the moment takes a very different kind of discipline than that required for set work where steps, words, and notes have been pre-planned. The disciplines demanded for successful improvisational performance are three. First, the continual practice of “meeting the moment” in many different circumstances. Second, the development of a technically proficient, easily available personal “language” of expression. And third, the constant effort of translating instantly what happens in that powerful “now” moment to the audience.

The art of improvisation in performance is like surfing. You must jump in without hesitation and keep swimming. You must meet each new wave, the constant “now” over and over, afresh. Sometimes you shape it. Sometimes it shapes you. Sometimes you are lost in it. Sometimes you are exultantly, found. But, at the end of the ride, something authentic, alive, and arresting, in its immediacy has been created and leaves its smoky, indelible trail on the consciousness. The process has become the performance and the performance has revealed the process that is improvisation.



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

Director's Statement: Adriana Davis

When I first became aware of Margaret Beals' artistry and her pioneering efforts to further the art of improvisation I was struck by the ways she stayed true to the movement, message and methods of letting dance flow through her work. It was the most compelling factor that informs the meaning of this short documentary. The intensity. The dedication. The possibilities. Experiencing Ms. Beals' dedication to living in the moment of self-expression as she accepted the risks, and rewards, of improvisation has given me a new take on directing and producing documentaries.

Over the last 25 years, I have most often directed fact-based, historical films rooted in personal stories of persecution, escape and survival of entire communities. "Dancing Without Steps" offered me an opportunity to connect an audience to one artist's emotional journey driven by the music, sounds and words in the moment they are conveyed. I reversed my usual process of using history as a foundation for storytelling and instead allowed Ms. Beals' natural storytelling abilities to convey her thoughts on improvisation alongside historical footage from her long and acclaimed career as a dancer and performance innovator. Luckily for me, Ms. Beals maintains a well-preserved storehouse of archival material documenting her more than four decades of performing life. Though some of the images and footage had been utilized in previous productions, those archival resources gave me a way to do more than just show examples of Ms. Beals dancing. Rather, in this film I endeavor to establish a foundation to encourage young improvisational dancers and artists to find new dimensions in their work sustaining the life of an art form that may soon be lost to time. Today, technology makes it very easy for us to constantly revise our work, performances and messages. It has been so refreshing to create a film that celebrates creativity in and of the moment and see how those performances connected Ms. Beals to her future growth as an artist.

The best documentaries let an audience enter the subject's world and mindset while entertaining and informing. I hope "Dancing Without Steps" creates questions in viewers' minds about incorporating improvisation into different aspects of their lives all while being entertained by the diverse performances of Margaret Beals. As she often comments, "Dancing without steps doesn't mean you have no plan or discipline. It means you allow the energy within us to shine beyond a planned series of steps or movements, so the audience feels more than sees or hears where you are."

I hope you will enjoy that "in the moment" feeling throughout this documentary.



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

Margaret Beals: Biography

Margaret Beals, an American dancer, choreographer and theatrical performer, was self-taught during her early years. She later studied choreography with Louis Horst and Lucas Hoving, modern dance with Martha Graham, Jose Limon, and Paul Sanasardo; African-Caribbean dance with Syvilla Fort and ten years of ballet with Maggie Black. She developed an individual approach to dance through improvisation and later added the use of her speaking voice, developing a technique of performing poetry by speaking and moving simultaneously. This skill was used in her dramatic presentations of the works of Edna St. Vincent Millay, Sylvia Plath and Carl Sandburg.

In the 60's, she continued her exploration of dance improvisation, performing at cabarets and nightclubs in New York and Chicago. She worked with the jazz musicians Collin Walcott, Badal Roy, Sam Rivers and Stan Strickland, among many others. Her continued passion for improvisation led her to form her own company, **Impulses** - three musicians, singer, dancer and lighting designer. Between 1969 and 1976 the group created fully improvised evenings in the style of jazz sets.

During the 70's, Ms. Beals appeared with the modern dance companies of Jose Limon, Anna Sokolow, Jean Erdman, Lucas Hoving and Valerie Bettis. She is acclaimed for her interpretation of Ms. Bettis' classic dance solo, *The Desperate Heart* (1974).

As a solo artist, she performed her own work, **Margaret Beals in Concert**, appearing at Jacob's Pillow; the NY Dance Umbrella; the Delacorte Theatre; The Place, London; the International Festival de Danse, Paris; and the Het Theatre Festival, Holland, among other national and international venues.

Her full-length works include *Stings* (1976), based on the Ariel poems of Sylvia Plath; *39 Margarets* (1980), a revue directed by Broadway's Donald Saddler; *The Teak Room, stories from a dancer's life* (1982), written and performed by the artist and directed by Tony Tanner; and *Improvisations to Chopin* (1985) with pianist Thomas Hryniv. In the 90's, she created *4 Images* (1993) an evening of poetry, music and dance, with flautist Judith Pearce, directed by Tony Tanner; and *Pathways* (1997), written and performed by Ms. Beals and directed by Obie award-winning playwright Lee Nagrin.

Recently, Ms. Beals presented *Films and Stories*, a series of evenings in which she shared films from her extensive career interspersed with stories about the creation of the works and her collaboration with other performing artists involved. *"The films are a remarkable record of a remarkable career."* – Jean Tait, May 2016



Dancing Without Steps: The Art of Improvisation with Margaret Beals

Adriana Davis: Biography

Filmmaker, Director, Producer, Editor, Writer, Voice-Over Artist & Coach

Adriana Davis has worked in film, television and radio as a writer, producer, editor and voice-over artist since 1991. She is the founder of D-SQUARED MEDIA, a full-service production company based in New York City with corporate and film clients.

Ms. Davis is the co-director, producer, writer and editor of an acclaimed quartet of documentaries about Iraq's Jewish community and history: "THE LIFE OF FRANK INY" (1999), "SEARCHING FOR BAGHDAD" (2002) and "THE LAST JEWS OF BAGHDAD" (2005), "SAVING THE IRAQI JEWISH ARCHIVES" (2020). The films have screened at over 80 premiere film festivals in the US, Canada, Israel and Europe and was featured on Jewish Life TV (JLTV) and PBS (MetroArts 13) where it had two separate airings and was introduced by Peter Bogdanovich and Mandy Patinkin, respectively.

The last installment in the Iraqi Jewish film series, "SAVING THE IRAQI JEWISH ARCHIVES: A JOURNEY OF IDENTITY", follows the fate of over 20,000 Iraqi Jewish religious and cultural artifacts, discovered in the basement of Saddam Hussein's secret police headquarters in 2003. The future of the Archives mirrors the survival and remembrance of Iraqi Jewish community itself, now living throughout the world.

Autumn 2022 saw the release of DANCING WITHOUT STEPS: THE ART OF IMPROVISATION WITH MARGARET BEALS, a short documentary directed, produced and edited by Ms. Davis which has already garnered numerous festival acceptances and awards at festivals throughout the US.

In addition to documentaries, Ms. Davis has produced several narrative films including the romantic comedy, "PLAY IT BY EAR" (2005) starring Academy Award® winner Rita Moreno and a noir thriller, "KILL JOHNNY MILLS" (2010), for the festival circuit.

She is currently in production on two other documentaries: "A GRAND IDEA" memorializing one man's quest to mount a Broadway production of his own Yiddish version of Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance" and "WHAT'S FOR LUNCH" profiling the struggles of the NY City school lunch program.

Prior to founding D-Squared Media in 1995, she worked as a field producer and assignment desk editor for electronic news gathering houses (NETWORK VIDEO SERVICES) and as a production manager at production companies (BROADCAST NEWS NETWORKS, CAMERA PLANET) and cable/broadcast/radio stations (A&E, HISTORY CHANNEL, CNN, PBS, CBS, NBC, COURT TV, ESPN, BET) producing award-winning television documentaries on varied subjects from biker gangs to baby beauty pageants.

(Continued on next page)



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Productions include: "Generation H - National History Day" for The History Channel, "Life in a War Zone" (Life on the Edge: West Bank Settlers) for A&E and Israeli based Noga Communications, "The Junkie Next Door", "Baby Beauty Queens" also for A&E, "Crimes in the Name of God" for Court TV, "Baby Beauty Queens", "Road Warriors: The Biker Brotherhood" also for A&E. In 2001, she produced a weekly radio talk show series for WNEW-FM ("Courageous Radio").

In the Corporate realm, D-Squared Media counts among its clients engineering, finance, broadcasting, legal and publishing firms. Ms. Davis has produced promotional packages, commercials and corporate videos for: A&E Television Networks, BNN-TV, The History Channel, Smith Barney Television, The American Bar Association, Chadbourne & Parke LLC, New York

Methodist Hospital, BlueSwitch Web Design, Trifekta Films, CDM/Smith of Cambridge, Hachette Book Group, McKesson, McGladrey LLP, The Insight Works, McCann, Mullen, Publicis, Saatchi & Saatchi, DataSpan, Litigation Strategies, Inc., The Great Voice Company, Corporate Lawyering Group LLP; The NY Food Museum, Debevoise & Plimpton, Enduro Systems of Houston, Texas, Hues of Blue Press, Conway Department Stores, The Knowledge Project, Yohalem Gillman & Company LLP, Diageo, Mouton Rothschild, Rocca Wear, Wine Enthusiast Companies.

As a voice-over artist, Ms. Davis has lent her voice to numerous videos, communication systems and live events for corporate and commercial promotions and productions. She is a sought-after voice-over director and coach having trained hundreds of voice actors worldwide. She has been a frequent guest speaker at filmmaking and voice acting workshops and podcasts and has written several published articles for print and online publications on those topics.

Adriana Davis received a B.A. in political science and completed all but her dissertation for her M.A. in Congressional Studies from The Catholic University of America. She holds a Producing Certificate from The Hollywood Film Institute along with editing coursework in Final Cut Pro, Adobe Suite and numerous other programs. Productions she has worked on have won Ciné Golden Eagle and Telly awards.