



2007
San Francisco Film Society
Education Program
Study Guide

Developed by  JUST I THINK

PHOENIX DANCE

FILM SYNOPSIS

It seems impossible — but after losing a leg to cancer, accomplished dancer Homer Avila returns to the stage without crutches, performing with Andrea Flores a duet choreographed by Alonzo King. The rehearsal process is fierce and tender. Solo or intertwined, Homer collaborates in his now “imperfect” body — and his “one-leggedness” turns into transcendent beauty.

FILMMAKER**Karina Epperlein (Producer, Director, Cinematographer)**

Award-winning filmmaker Karina Epperlein has thirty years of experience as a dancer, theater artist, teacher, and filmmaker.

The past fifteen years she has been a “dependent” documentary filmmaker who has been very fortunate to follow the lead of her fiercely independent spirit, often defying conventions and the notion of art as commercial enterprise. She has been working in all her artistic media with tremendous support from foundations, donors, collaborators, audiences, and friends.

Karina’s work is always looking into dark corners, finding the light, addressing the themes of transformation and healing. Her films are strongly influenced by her background in dance and theater, as well as her lifelong teaching of movement, voice and creative expression (also in drug rehab and prison), including 25 years of teaching T'ai chi, breath & sound.

Her earlier video pieces *Labyrinthian* (1984) and *i.e.Deutschland* (1988) were followed by the documentaries *Voices From Inside* (1996, women in prison & their children), *Women's Rites* (2000, Anna Halperin’s Expressive Art Therapy), *I Will Not Be Sad In This World* (2001, portrait of 94 year old Armenian woman surviving genocide), *We Are Here Together* (2003, charter high school experiment & the young people’s growth), and *Phoenix Dance* (2006).

Phoenix Dance has been screening in more than 40 different festivals and theatres all over the United States. The film won a Golden Gate Award at the San Francisco Int’l Film Festival, and was one of eight “shortlisted” for Oscar Nomination for Best Short Documentary.

PHOENIX DANCE

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES**Homer Avila**

Homer connected with dance as his life's passion while studying at the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. Prior to dance, his love of movement was realized through competitive gymnastics in his hometown of New Orleans. After moving to New York, Homer performed with Twyla Tharp, Mark Morris, Ralph Lemon and the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Homer was known best for work with Avila/Weeks Dance, a modern-dance company he directed with Edisa Weeks. His pieces covered a wide variety of topics, standing out for the most part for strong visual imagery.

Homer's choreography was commissioned by Adelphi University, Ailey II, Hofstra University, NYU's Washington Square Repertory Ensemble, and Agnes Scott College. His work has been performed at the Guggenheim Museum, Massachusetts International Festival of the Arts, the National Black Arts Festival, and Summer Stages Dance. He taught at, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, Oberlin College, Spelman College and Wesleyan College.

In 2001 Homer was diagnosed with chondrosarcoma, a rare form of cancer; shortly thereafter, his right leg and hip were amputated. Buoyed by the support of the worldwide dance community, Homer returned to dance seeking to further explore his potential. Out of that exploration came his "Not/Without Words" and "(Body of) Works In Progress". He also performed new work choreographed by Vicky Marks, Alonzo King, and Dana Casperson at P.S.122, Ballett Frankfurt, the Millennium Stage at the Kennedy Center and other venues. At the time of his death on April 25, 2004, Homer was creating a solo for Cleveland's Dancing Wheels dance company.

Andrea Flores

Andrea is a Bay Area dancer and has performed with Alonzo King's Lines Contemporary Ballet Company, Kunst-Stoff Dance Troupe, Lawrence Pech Dance Company, San Francisco Ballet, Smuin Ballet, and most recently, The Foundry. Andrea teaches ballet, jazz, and hip-hop at the Debbie Allen's Early Bird Summer Intensive, the LINES Ballet School's Pre-Professional Program, and the Rhythm and Motion Dance Center in San Francisco. Andrea is also a professional photographer specializing in the performing arts and special event.

*PHOENIX DANCE***Alonzo King**

Alonzo has works in the repertoires of companies throughout the world including Frankfurt Ballet, Joffrey Ballet, Dance Theater of Harlem, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, and Hong Kong Ballet. He has worked extensively in opera, television, and film and has choreographed works for prima ballerina Natalia Makarova and film star Patrick Swayze. Renowned for his skill as a teacher, Mr. King has been the guest ballet master for National Ballet of Canada, Les Ballets de Monte Carlo, San Francisco Ballet, and others.

In 1982, Mr. King founded Alonzo King's LINES Ballet, which has developed into an international touring company. Seven years later, he inaugurated the San Francisco Dance Center, which has grown into one of the largest dance facilities on the West Coast. In 2001, Alonzo King started the LINES Ballet School and Pre-Professional Program to nurture and develop the talents of young dancers.

Alonzo King is a recipient of the NEA Choreographer's Fellowship, Irvine Fellowship in Dance, and the National Dance Residency Program. He has received five Isadora Duncan Awards. Alonzo King has served on panels for the National Endowment of the Arts, California Arts Council, City of Columbus Arts Council and Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Arts Partners Program. In 2005 he was named a Master of African-American Choreography by the Kennedy Center. He is a former commissioner for the city and county of San Francisco, and a writer and lecturer on the art of dance.

Film synopsis and artist biographies taken from Karina Epplerlein's website
www.karinafilms.us/phoenix.html

PHOENIX DANCE

Director's Statement

Interview conducted by the International Documentary Association for IDA's 10th Annual Docweek.

IDA: How did you get started in documentary filmmaking?

Karina Epperlein: In the 1980s, still in my theater days, I made a couple of short art videos. I produced, directed and performed in the video *Labyrinthian*, based on a work by Greek poet Nanos Valaoritis, as well as the short video version of my solo theater piece *i.e. Deutschland*, which were both shown in festivals here and abroad.

I enjoyed the medium, but did not get fully into it until I started a theater, sound and poetry class in a federal women's prison in 1992. These women needed to be heard and seen; people only knew stereotypes from the mass media. I had unsupervised access (a miracle!) because of my reputation as the crazy "screaming lady" from "Berzerkeley" who wanted to "only document her class." The prison would not have allowed regular media to film what I did. Subversion and inventiveness--with support from the women prisoners--helped me succeed in making my first one-hour documentary. Four years later, in 1996, I completed *Voices from Inside*, about women in prison and their children on the outside. *Voices* won the PASS Media Award from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

This got me hooked. As an artist I liked the raw energy of real life, the making-do with what is, the art of listening, inquiring, learning--all my previous skills seemed to come to fruition here.

IDA: What inspired you to make *Phoenix Dance*?

KE: In October 2002--totally by chance--I saw Homer Avila perform as a guest dancer with Andrea Flores at an AXIS Dance Company event of integrated dance. The duet started off with a man on the floor, dim lighting. He began moving, and a minute into his dance I thought I was hallucinating: he had only one leg! How was that possible? When Andrea entered, a creature with three legs and four arms emerged. The traditional roles were reversed: the man's vulnerability and the woman's strength complemented each other, sweetly. And in their solo outbursts they spurred each other on to great heights, like the flames of their souls' fire. I had tears streaming down my face; I was on fire. And I urgently asked myself how I could help to bring this utterly inspiring effort to the world. Having been a professional dancer, [I knew that] this was too beautiful to not be seen by everybody!

AXIS Dance Company's mission is to create and perform high quality contemporary dance that is developed through the collaboration of dancers with and without disabilities.

More information can be found at:

www.axisdance.org

Then I woke to the reality of being a filmmaker. At intermission I ran to ask Homer if he would be interested in a film about himself and this particular pas de deux, which, for me,

PHOENIX DANCE

spoke about the essence of the human experience. I knew nobody would be able to imagine a dancer on one leg like Homer without seeing it. He said yes, and took me on a journey, too.

IDA: What were some of the challenges and obstacles in making this film, and how did you overcome them?

KE: That Thanksgiving Homer told me that the cancer in the hip that had caused the amputation was recurring in his lungs. He disclosed this news only to a few very good friends. He wanted to be known as living, dancing, re-inventing himself as a dancer and artist. I needed to hurry to find the money! And it was difficult to get the busy schedules of Alonzo King, the choreographer, and the two dancers freed up for a week of rehearsals, performance and interviews. I knew what I wanted and I wanted it to be limited, precise.

More information about Alonzo King and his Lines Ballet Company can be found at:

www.linesballet.org

The week of filming finally happened in April 2003, and much went wrong. We rented a theatre, but the lighting designer did not appear that day. Alonzo and I kept tweaking the lighting until we were satisfied, but the filming schedule was getting messed up. And at the end of that week I felt I had not gotten the emotional and technical quality that I had envisioned. I put the footage aside, crying with despair, hardly looking at any of it. A month later I had a serious back injury, and felt crippled, literally. It took months to recover. I was going through my own burning to ashes and rebirth.

When I came back to the material in January 2004, I questioned deeply: How could I stay true to my original being "on fire," my enthusiasm? How could I make the magic that I experienced when seeing Homer and Andrea for the first time into a film that would give audiences a similar experience? It was all up to me to recreate this in the editing room. I prepared the script and sequences meticulously, drawing, sketching, weighing the words. And the first cut came easily, like a miracle. Fundraising and my own health were a more difficult matter. I tried to show Homer the 15-minute rough cut. But he was in Frankfurt, and the next thing I heard he was dead. He had danced on a Friday night, checked himself into the hospital on Saturday, and died Sunday morning surrounded by friends, his new girlfriend in Holland singing him a lullaby over the phone.

Homer died on March 26, 2004, at age 48, three years after his amputation. The last three years of his life he had lived to the fullest, doing what he loved most: dancing, one-legged, on stage internationally, having pieces choreographed for him not only by Alonzo King but also by Victoria Marks and Dana Casperson from the Frankfurt Ballet. The urgency in Homer's dancing (reflected as well in his busy schedule of rehearsing, performing, traveling, lecturing) was palpable. He inspired all who came into contact with him. His death did not affect the making of the film; all the footage needed had been shot. It only made it more essential that the legacy of Homer live on.

PHOENIX DANCE

IDA: As you've screened *Phoenix Dance* --whether on the festival circuit, or in screening rooms, or in living rooms--how have audiences reacted to the film? What has been most surprising or unexpected about their reactions?

KE: When I first shared *Phoenix Dance* with an audience at a private fundraising event in 2005, I noticed the long silence at the end. Nobody could talk, there was sniffing, tears were wiped, and no words for a long time. I sat with this, stunned; I had not expected such a deep response. Was this not what I had experienced when seeing Homer and Andrea dance for the first time?

Despite this, fundraising still proved very difficult, and it took me another year to complete the film, and I often lost hope, wondering whether the film would really be able to get out there and do what I had envisioned.

Since *Phoenix Dance's* release in January 2006, the audiences' feedback has been tremendous. Whatever people's hardships are, they can identify with the film and they see Homer as an inspiration. People of all walks of life have come up to me, be it the girl with the war veteran father, the man with ALS, the mother with the autistic teenage son, the daughter with the mother with Parkinson's, just to name the more dramatic cases. Or just the everyday person with the difficulties we all encounter in staying human in a rapidly changing world! Even the lucky ones feel they need the encouragement of the film. They all say basically the same thing: The film gives them courage, it opens possibilities for them, it's a "yes" to life, they love the beauty and inspiration, it is like food to them, they feel moved, they want many people to see it! Therapists want it for their clients, teachers for their students. Some people take a DVD home and call me the next day, how they kept watching it over and over. Homer puts life and hardship into perspective. Homer shows no self-pity, viewers see his skill and determination.

People get it when Alonzo says in the film, "It's often when these obstacles come, that you have to reveal to yourself who you are. Who you are is forced to come forth!" And people are struck how Homer turned his "imperfect" body--his "one-leggedness"--into beauty, how he was not ashamed, did not hide--he showed courage. Audiences love Homer's playfulness at the end of the film when he dances with crutches on the sidewalk. By now they are endeared to him, knowing him for only 13 minutes--then comes the big collective sigh of sadness when they read of his death. I love it most that everybody comes away with some slightly different point of inspiration.

IDA: In general, what docs or docmakers have served as inspirations for you?

KE: For me documentary filmmaking is about how we experience the world, and I am very interested in the inner life, what's under the surface, underneath the image, the stereotype. Poets, writers and journalists as well inspire me, and all kinds of artists who penetrate the obvious, can hold complexity and highlight the transcendent and transformative aspects of life.

PHOENIX DANCE

Tarkovsky and Kieslowski have been big inspirations, some of Herzog's and Fassbinder's films. *Night and Fog* by Alain Resnais. I love everything about *The Fast Runner* --the documentary quality, storytelling, camera, acting, taking the audience on a journey that is unknown, and yet so familiar and universal.

PHOENIX DANCE

Artists Redefine Ability

by Nicole Gluckstern

According to statistics released by the American Association of the Disabled, 48.5 million Americans--almost one in five--have a disability. Less than 15 percent were born with their disabilities; most acquired spinal cord injuries, vision or hearing loss, heart conditions and the like later in life. Despite these sheer numbers, the theatrical world is not especially set up with access in mind. Disability seating is limited, stages are elevated, dressing rooms are too small for wheelchairs and sign language interpreters are under-utilized by theatres of all sizes. Furthermore, professional training tailored to persons with disabilities is almost nonexistent, and many traditionally minded instructors find it difficult to comprehend the adjustments a physically impaired student might need to make within the classroom setting, whether it is bringing a note taker to read the chalkboard, or incorporating a prosthesis into a dance routine. Despite these challenges, a determined core of performers with disabilities in the Bay Area is changing these traditional attitudes, one show at a time.

Bonnie Lewkowicz and Judith Smith

Hailing, as they do, from every possible social, cultural and economic demographic, persons with disabilities represent possibly the most diverse minority group in the country. Still, within such diversity there exists an impulse to discover common ground, and Axis Dance Company may well be at the forefront of this movement. Begun as a side project by a small group of able-bodied and mobility-impaired artists curious to explore their physical limits in a dance context, Axis has since developed into one of the most recognized "physically integrated" dance companies in the world. By collaborating with choreographers like Bill T. Jones and Sonya Delwaide and being persistently vocal about the importance of their work, the mixed-ability dancers of Axis continuously challenge the preconceived notions of what it means to be mobility impaired for all involved: those of the audience's, those of the choreographer's and even their own.

Though she'd studied dance from the age of 5 until she was 15 when an accident with an all-terrain vehicle left her paralyzed from the upper chest down, Bonnie Lewkowicz thought her dancing days were behind her. Determined to remain physically active despite the severity of her impairment, she studied recreation therapy and was additionally involved in wheelchair sports before contact improvisation reopened the door to dancing with a disability, and Axis was born in 1987. As a founding member and core repertory dancer (as well as a professional travel writer and guidebook author), Lewkowicz has watched the company grow in artistry and visibility to its current status as a professional, modern dance company with an international reputation.

Committed to the concept of access to dance regardless of body type, Axis also offers a range of classes and workshops in movement for the mobility impaired and able bodied alike. Lewkowicz relishes her role teaching youth classes in creative dance, especially as most of her students are able bodied. "Having a person with a disability as their teacher demonstrates to them that people of all abilities can and want to dance," she explains.

PHOENIX DANCE

Artistic director and founding member Judith Smith is especially excited about the BA program in physically integrated dance that Axis is helping develop with CSU East Bay, a process she describes as "crucial" to the preservation and development of the art form. "Most people can't even imagine that a disabled person could or would even want to dance...opportunities for disabled dancers to take classes and workshops outside of their companies are extremely limited, which has been a constant source of frustration for myself and others." Smith hopes that the increased educational opportunities for physically impaired dancers will improve access to training, and stave off the recruitment crisis some mixed-ability companies are facing with the eventual retirement of their core members. Artist retention on the other hand might be a different story, for as Lewkowicz puts it, "I won't still be dancing in 10 years... I can't however imagine not having some kind of role with Axis."

Mark McGoldrick

Mark McGoldrick is not a man who minces words. His answering machine is pithy and blunt, "George Bush is a war criminal, beeeep," and when asked about his wheelchair he'll tell you frankly that he broke his neck. A high-functioning paraplegic for over 20 years, what McGoldrick may lack in leg strength he more than makes up for with stubborn fortitude. Deputy public defender by day, solo performer by night, McGoldrick's latest show *Countercoup* opened at The Marsh in September. In it, with quiet ferocity, he relates the series of events that led to his catastrophic injury as a hell-raising teenager in Arizona, as well as the lengthy recovery and rehabilitation process.

It's not the first time he's told the story on stage: in 2002 he wrote a piece called *Tom and John* to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the car wreck that permanently altered his life. But McGoldrick doesn't spend a lot of time otherwise dwelling on the circumstances of that night or its arduous aftermath. He has a life to live after all, and prefers to fill his time sea kayaking in Southeast Asia, canoeing in Australia or performing before an audience of strangers--an adventurer's rush of a more stealthy kind. But while it may have been this rush that first compelled him to take to the stage, it is his greater love for the creation process that has kept him on it.

"I'm intrigued by people's lives," he states. "I want to give a voice to people who don't always get a lot of stage time, who are often overlooked by society." Among those voices are those of the convicts he defends in court, fellow survivors of severe spinal-cord injuries and his own patient family. Although limited to a certain extent in terms of physical action, McGoldrick's easy facility with vocal mimicry and subtle gesture render him eminently capable of conveying character and nuance. And the understated power of his storytelling resonates with audiences of all abilities.

From occasional spoken-word poet hitting the open-mic circuit to performer of full-length solo works, McGoldrick's artistic progression in some way mirrors the slow but steady grace of his rehabilitation process he describes in depth in *Countercoup*. While he doesn't necessarily consider himself to be an advocate per se for disability awareness, he relishes the public visibility that solo performance, along with his day job as a defense attorney, grants him. Especially since, as he points out, "almost everybody will acquire a disability before they die...whether it's a mobility impairment or something you can't necessarily see, like diabetes. It's not an 'us vs. them' situation."

PHOENIX DANCE

Marilee Talkington

I knew Marilee Talkington for over a year before I knew she was losing her vision. Like many people with disabilities, Talkington's particular condition isn't immediately evident. Besides which, she'll be the first to tell you, while it's true her encroaching blindness does present certain challenges for a stage director and performer, she doesn't feel it hinders her ability to do either. Nor does she allow it to define her.

Just one of two blind actors in the country to have received an MFA in acting, Talkington graduated from ACT in 2004 and moved to New York, where she founded Vanguardian Productions (formerly Tearany Theatre) and has been creating her own works ever since, among them her solo show *Truce*, which traces the arc of her visual impairment as well as her relationship with her similarly impaired mother. Back in the Bay Area for an extended visit, she is premiering her latest work at the Exit on Taylor. An exploration of life-altering moments in the lives of four characters, *Attrition* is the latest installment of Talkington's penchant for creating senses-based theatre, and the first she has written the text for in its entirety before the rehearsal process.

Born with rod-cone dystrophy, genetically passed on by her mother, Talkington currently sees only with her peripheral vision--and only at 20/400, twice the limit of legal blindness, despite her corrective lenses. She has no central vision and has trouble distinguishing certain colors. And yet, she describes herself as "extremely visual." "All my plays start with an image," she explains. "I see the show in my head as I write it.... I'm into colors, movement; I want things to be striking." It's tempting however to conjecture that her theatrical aesthetic is informed by her visual impairment when she goes on to describe the creation of what she terms "visceral theatre."

By engaging the audience's other senses besides sight, Talkington hopes to put them as physically close to the characters' experience as possible. An example of this sensory engagement was with her New York production of *Sugarville: A Little Death*, during which the audience was exposed to strong smells, such as disinfectant, and forced to move from room to room--one designed especially to resemble the interior of a womb--for each of three acts. In *Truce* she used a scrim to occasionally hide behind and strategically fading lighting to allow the audience to experience the creeping progression of her vision loss themselves. *Attrition* incorporates fans to simulate high winds through the theatre and swaths of muslin to create wave patterns on stage. "I don't do realism," she points out. "I want to provoke a reaction in the audience. It's an invitation to wake up parts of their bodies in ways they might not have otherwise had the opportunity to experience."

Nicole Gluckstern is a freelance culture writer and theatre critic for the *San Francisco Bay Guardian* and a contributing editor for *Other* magazine.

Original article appears in *Theatre Bay Area*, November 2007 issue
(<http://www.theatrebayarea.org/mag/article.jsp?thispage=archives.jsp&id=371>)

PHOENIX DANCE

What is a documentary?

- A documentary is a non-fiction work such as a film or TV program that presents political, social or historical subject matter in a factual and informative manner.

(from the American Heritage Dictionary)

Short History of the Documentary

- The term was coined by film critic John Grierson in 1926 while reviewing Robert Flaherty's film *Moana*.
- Grierson defined the documentary as "creative treatment of actuality."
- Robert Flaherty, an American prospector, is widely considered the "father of the documentary." His feature length documentary, *Nanook of the North (1922)* follows the struggle of an Eskimo family.
- Prior to this, nonfiction cinema had existed for over two decades. The earliest works were shorts called "actuality films" which were often single shots or moments captured on film. An example

SCREENING WITH MEANING

Media Literacy is the ability to analyze, evaluate and understand media messages.

The following concepts and questions provide a foundation for evaluating films (and other forms of media) with your students.

Core Concepts of Media Analysis

1. All media messages are constructed

Questions to ask: *Who is the producer of the message? Who is the message constructed for? (Who is the target audience?) How do you know?*

Media messages are created by producers, and everything that you see in a media message – the size, shape, and color of the actors, the camera angles, the sounds, the fonts – have been selected by the producers to achieve a desired effect. And those same producers are bringing their own views and personal histories into that message, whether they do it deliberately or not.

2. Media messages are created with a purpose

Question to ask: *Why is this message being sent?*

Media messages can: express an opinion or point of view, educate through factual content and information, persuade an audience to buy a product or act in a certain way, or entertain.

3. Media messages are constructed use a unique language

Question to ask: *What methods or techniques are used to attract and hold my attention?*

PHOENIX DANCE

of this type of film is *Workers Emerging from a Factory* (1894) by Louis and Auguste Lumière.

Very specific techniques are used in the creation of media. These techniques (lighting, sound, talent, editing choices, camera angle, design, etc.) are used to relay the intention (or purpose) of the creator/producer of the message.

Some examples of documentary forms:

- Biographical films
- Concerts or live performances
- Sports Documentaries
- Sociological or ethnographical examinations
- Nature or Science films
- Historical films

4. *Media messages are representations*

Questions to ask: *What has been left out of the message? What information, perspective, or representation is absent? Who might benefit or be harmed by this message?*

It is impossible to represent an experience, perspective or any part of reality in its totality. As a result media messages are generalizations of an experience or point of view. Often times this leads to misinformation, over-generalizations, and stereotypes.

Discussion Questions

- *How are documentary films different than fiction films?*
- *How are they different than the news?*
- *How is watching a film about a social issue different than reading about it?*

5. *Different people experience the same media messages in different ways.*

Question to ask: *How might different people understand this message differently than I do?*

You get out of a media message what you bring to it. Who you are (your age, race, class, experience) greatly affects your point of view and how you will interpret any given media.

6. *Media have embedded values and perspective.*

Question to ask: *What values, lifestyles or points of view does this message reinforce or support?*

No media message is completely objective. The author or producer of any message is going to be influenced by his/her own point of view, beliefs, and value system.

PHOENIX DANCE

CLASSROOM USE

To enrich the students' experience, we recommend pre-viewing and post-viewing activities for **Phoenix Dance**. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the study guide to meet their own learning objectives for their students.

Grade Levels

This film is recommended for middle and high school students.

Subject Areas

Health/Physical Education
Language Arts
Media Studies
Visual and Performing Arts

Pre-Viewing

You can share the film synopsis and introduce information from Screening with Meaning.

Post-Viewing Discussion

To help facilitate discussion, the following questions are broken up into 3 categories: thinking/feeling questions, knowledge questions, and media literacy questions.

Thinking/Feeling Questions:

- How did you feel after you first saw Homer dance?
- Despite his physical limitations, Homer wants to continue dancing immediately. Why? What helps him overcome the obstacles he encounters?
- Alonzo King says that dancing is "ultimately beyond the body." What do you think he means? Why is it significant to Homer's situation?

Knowledge Questions:

- What is a ***pas de deux***? Give some examples of pas de deux in popular ballet.
- What characterizes the **modern dance** form? Who are some popular modern dance artists/choreographers?
- Define **symbolism**. Discuss the use of symbols in the film.

Media Literacy Questions:

- What characterizes a **performance film**? How is this film different from/similar to a performance film? How is viewing a live performance different from viewing a recorded one?

PHOENIX DANCE

- Much of film shows the main characters during both rehearsal and performance. Give examples of how the filmmaker used the movements of the pas de deux, the character's facial expressions and music to set the **mood** in different parts of the film.
- The filmmaker, Karina Epperlein, is also a dancer, choreographer and theater artist. How can a director's own experience shape the films they make? In what ways does Ms. Epperlein's experiences shape this film?
- What is a **phoenix**? What is its significance in the title of the film?

Post-Viewing Activities

- Explore expression and movement. Making sure there is enough open space, have students move around the room. You will choose a feeling (such as sadness, joy, fear etc.) and have student express this feeling with body movements only. Encourage students to use all of their body and avoid pantomiming actions. *Variation:* Students are asked to express the chosen feeling with their body movement but with some limitations. For example, they cannot use their legs, arms, etc.
- Exploring and pushing limitations is an important theme in this film. Have students write a short essay in which they describe an experience that tested their limits and what they did to overcome.
- There are many narrative films that highlight a character with a disability. (For a list of these see www.disabilityfilmsco.uk or search www.imdb.com) View one of these films (or selected clips from a few) and discuss the way disability is represented in popular culture. What are the stereotypes or inaccuracies? What is accurately portrayed?