

Once-in-a-Lifetime
Dance Experience

Requiem Reprise

Urban Eyesore Transformed into Concrete Cathedral

Story by Deborah Hamilton-Lynne

DRIVING BY THE LIFELESS SHELL of the unfinished Intel Building in downtown Austin, most Austinites simply saw an abandoned urban eyesore. It was a painful reminder of the high-tech downturn and lost revenue for the city. The Intel Building was doomed and destined for demolition. One visionary Austinite, Sally Jacques, saw something entirely different.

Jacques, founder of and choreographer of Blue Lapis Light, saw an

opportunity to transform light into beauty...to turn empty concrete pillars into a cathedral. A master of site-specific operatic dance performances, Jacques searched for the soul of the space and created her most ambitious performance to date. The result was a critically acclaimed spectacular performance featuring dancers and climbers ascending and descending the five-story structure. They flew, twisted and twirled

gracefully, reverently and often precariously, performing without a net, using ropes, 50' sheets of cloth, bungee cords and rappelling equipment. Overwhelming word-of-mouth acclaim led to sold-out performances with over 8,000 people in attendance during the three-week run in June. Fortunately, the city granted Jacques and Blue Lapis Light permission to reprise the work with five weeks of performances of *Requiem Reprise*

throughout October and the first week of November.

Jacques believes in angels and angelic compassion. She also believes in transcendence. These beliefs became rooted in her soul at a very young age. Jacques spent the first eight years of her life in an orphanage, a painful time in which she transcended her lack of nuclear family and connected to a larger family - a global vision of the interconnectedness of humanity

Jacques, founder and choreographer of Blue Lapis Light, saw an opportunity to transform light into beauty... to turn empty concrete pillars into a cathedral. In the performances, dancers and climbers ascend and descend from the five-story Intel Building.



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and nature. These connections have formed the core of her 25+ year body of work. Producing only one or two large scale works per year, Jacques' performances have been performed from Barton Springs to an empty warehouse; from an abandoned swimming pool to Deep Eddy; from the Congress Avenue Bridge to the Texas Capitol. Closely connected to the site, Jacques' works are truly unique. Missing *Requiem Reprise* would mean missing a

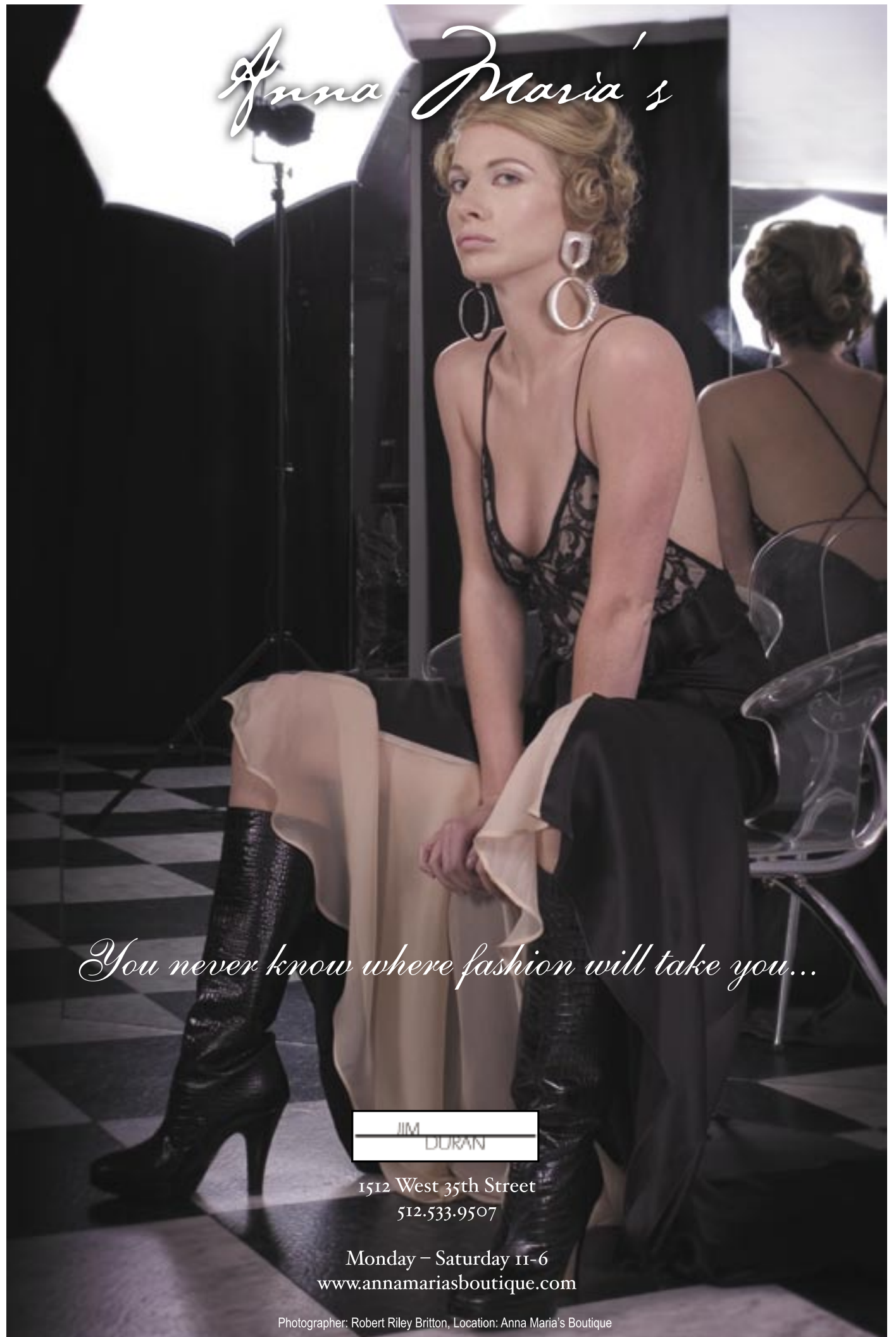


once-in-a-lifetime event, punctuated by the fact that the building is scheduled for demolition in November following the performances.

For Jacques, *Requiem* is a prayer... a chance to offer hope to audiences bombarded daily with disturbing images. "Death and loss are all around us. You simply cannot ignore the heartbreaking images of Darfur, Iraq, Lebanon and the suffering of those who lost everything in Katrina and the Asian tsunami. In *Requiem* I have tried to befriend mortality. I am always searching for ways to inspire

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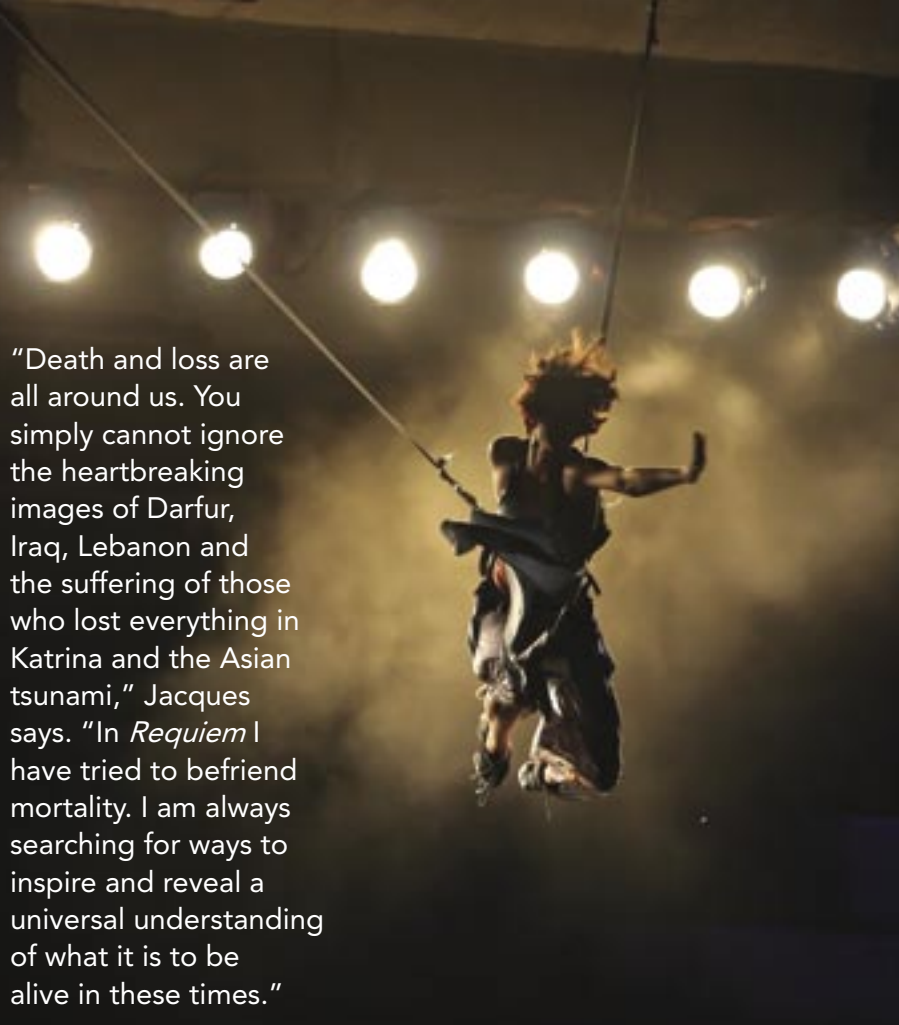
and reveal a universal understanding of what it is to be alive in these times. Creating a performance piece is my most profound form of prayer and my deepest path to spiritual connection with others. My hope is that the images of flight and beauty will reach into the heart of the audience and provide the tranquility to transcend and balance the very disturbing images we see on television every day."

Jacques' work is always collaborative, with the dancers being encouraged by Jacques' vision but allowed to contribute their own movements. Eighty feet below the performers, the audience holds its breath as dancers leap out and periodically rush just to the edge of the skeletal building. The ensemble beautifully conveys the sense of the precariousness of life and the transcendence of death by defying gravity, suspended high above the ground held by cables, harnesses and cloth. The performances take place at night, highlighted with dramatic lighting by Jason Amato. The music is ethereal, ranging from the haunting lyrics of Eliza Gilkyson's *Requiem*, a hymn to the tsunami from which the piece takes its name, to the sublime beauty of Mozart's *Laudate Dominum*. As the work progresses, the image of an empty hulking concrete shell is replaced by the image of a great cathedral...a place of reverence, grace, and meditation.

Jacques' aerial performances have been compared to *Cirque du Soliel*, but they are much more than acrobatics and high-wire thrills. Jacques' performances reach deeper, touching the audience with not only a sense of urgency

but also with an intensity that appeals to both the mind and the heart. The dancers move with an almost supernatural air and remind the audience that there is beauty in life and death, with a transcendent appreciation for each. The death of Jacques' mother three years ago had a profound effect on her work. She has been exploring the meaning of death and loss, as well as appreciation for life with each performance piece. Jacques volunteered at the Austin Convention Center as the Katrina refugees flooded in. "These were people whose entire lives had been washed away. Repeating the trauma of the Asian tsunami, they had experienced death and overwhelming material losses and yet there was an amazing sense of connection and gratitude just for having survived. I was extraordinarily moved. *Requiem* is about that deep kind of mourning and that kind of prayer."

Although the images of the performance give a sense of what is to come, nothing can convey the magical feeling of watching dancers become angels swept away, ascending and descending through the air. Jacques is fond of quoting the *Mahabharata*, in which God is asked to describe the greatest wonder and answers, "Each day, death strikes, and we live as though we are immortal. This is the greatest wonder." The impending demolition of the Intel Building is a stark reminder that nothing is immortal. The building will cease to exist; however, for a lucky few it will live in their memories as a concrete cathedral backlit against the night sky. That is the wonder of *Requiem* and the work of a talented visionary, Sally Jacques. ★



"Death and loss are all around us. You simply cannot ignore the heartbreaking images of Darfur, Iraq, Lebanon and the suffering of those who lost everything in Katrina and the Asian tsunami," Jacques says. "In *Requiem* I have tried to befriend mortality. I am always searching for ways to inspire and reveal a universal understanding of what it is to be alive in these times."

Requiem is sponsored by *austinwoman* magazine.

Performances at 8 p.m.

October 5th – 8th, 12th – 15th, 19th – 22nd, 26th – 29th, November 2nd – 5th

The Intel Building

400 W. San Antonio St.

Tickets: \$20 and \$30 available
474.8497 and at the gate if available.

Blue Lapis Light Opening Gala
Friday, October 6th

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Food by Málaga and Blue Water Café

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