



BY RAYMOND L. GHEWEK

# An Artistic Leap

## Local Dance Troupe Takes to a Skateboard Park

By LISA TRAIGER  
Special to The Washington Post

**D**ancers and skateboarders will collide downtown this weekend, but no one will get hurt.

On Saturday at a raw indoor facility on Ninth Street NW, dancers with the Arlington-based Jane Franklin troupe will let loose with leaps, runs and slides in a space usually reserved for skateboarders performing ollies, kickflips and pop shove-its. It's all part of Franklin's multimedia piece "Breaking Ground," in which dancers perform on a multidimensional surface and a skateboarder joins them on the "stage."

The work grew out of Franklin's desire to engage with a new community, and skateboarders fill the bill. After meeting a group of them, she began exploring the possibility of a collaboration and dancing on a bowl-like surface. Taking inspiration from the daredevilry and fluidity of the skateboarders, she and her dancers spent the spring and summer creating and rehearsing.

"When we looked at the bowls we thought, 'Yeah, that will be really transferable from the studio to the bowl,'" dancer Brianne Barrow Little says of the concrete, pool-like structures skateboarders relish. "But when we got in there [a skateboard park] and saw how steep the angles were, it was a little off-putting.

**Breaking Ground** dancers Stacey Tytler and Mike Nadolski.

"We were trying to test things like running across the bowl sides," she says. "It's really fun

but really scary. We would make these rounds, and I was running supported. I learned that you don't want shoes with too much traction, but you don't want them to slip either."

Rehearsals became a lesson in sharing. Ben Ashworth, a skateboard park designer who will skate with the dancers Saturday, says he learned from the experimental work how skateboarding and dance share conceptual qualities, if not necessarily a movement vocabulary.

"What was similar was . . . that improvisation and the reinterpreting of space inherent in skateboarding is essential," he says. "And I think [improvisation] is also an important part of especially modern dance. I thought it was very interesting that dancers came into our space. When I think of dance, it is traditionally performed on a flat plane, and for them to be in a curvilinear environment with waves, ramps and dips . . . I thought that was really interesting."

"Breaking Ground" includes video that Franklin shot of some of the city's skateboarders, and the work is accompanied by a musical collage featuring performance artist Monsta' Black and Jonathan Matis's Low End String Quartet.

For Barrow Little, dancing in a different kind of space was a challenge, but, she says, "if we can do it in a bowl we can dance anywhere."

**BREAKING GROUND** Saturday at 8 p.m. 1250 Ninth St. NW (Metro: Mount Vernon Square-UDC). \$20. 703-933-1111. [www.janefranklin.com](http://www.janefranklin.com). Seating is limited, but Franklin will offer additional performances that evening if necessary.