

Jane Comfort and Company is currently creating *Beauty*, a provocative dance/theater work exploring the American notion of female beauty through the lens of Barbie. The performance will include sound design by Brandon Wolcott, lighting design by David Ferri, costume design by Liz Prince, dramaturgy by Anne Davison, and movement and text by Jane Comfort and the company of six performers. The forty five-minute piece will be performed in repertory with the company's Bessie Award winning *Underground River*.

Why Barbie? As the thousands of images of models and celebrities that are projected onto the cultural landscape daily attest, we have collectively moved toward Barbie as our beauty model: anorexic body with huge breasts, voluminous long straight hair (but no body hair), no wrinkles, no pores--no aging, in fact--and a generic all American white look, with only a few "ethnic" Barbies cropping up from time to time.

No one can actually look this way naturally, but through Photoshop, the women seen in ads and magazines are all magically thin and flawless. It is amazing that in the third wave of feminism we would accept this Photoshopped beauty as valid, but we do; and as we do, we are left with a dilemma: how can we ordinary mortals look like that?

Women and girls today engage in obsessive dieting and eating disorders, exhaustive exercise regimens as well as Botox, lip plumping collagen treatments, wrinkle filling Restalyne, skin beaching, chemical peels, teeth whitening, hair extensions, highlights, body waxing (brow, upper lip, armpit, belly, legs, and of course, bikini), eye liner tattoos, eyelash extensions, mani/pedis, tanning booths, ear pinning, liposuction, and the extensive plastic surgeries available, including labiaplasty for a "prettier" vagina.

We wear heels we can't walk in, jeans we can't breath in, Spanx undergarments to further suck it in, push up bras, and tight little tops.

And, as Barbie was based on a German sex doll, Bild Lilli, is it any wonder that American women and girls are pushed to a more and more sexualized standard of beauty? Eight year olds are being offered practice Brazilian pubic waxes, six year olds are regularly seen on YouTube gyrating to hip hop tunes, and a toddler bikini bathing suit with a padded bra recently hit the market.

The movement vocabulary of *Beauty* will toggle between Barbie's limited robotic abilities (she and Ken get intimate as best as their stick-like limbs allow) and the rounded, weighted, full bodied movement of dancers. There will be a beauty contest with random members of the audience acting as judges. During the course of the evening, we will get to know the performers as Barbies, as contestants, as characters with beauty aspirations, and as the dancers behind all these personas.

Throughout the performance, one dancer, separate from the world of the contest, will be seated at a dressing table on the side giving herself a facial, putting on make-up, blow drying her hair, giving herself a mani/pedi, waxing her legs, and trying on different outfits. This real-time beauty regimen will complete just as the performance ends.