

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY

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History Matters: A Living Archival Presentation
Merce in the 1980s
Monday, March 24 at 7 PM

The fourth in a series of evenings dedicated to exploring the history of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and examining the creative life of Merce Cunningham.

New York, NY—Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC) presents its fourth installment of *History Matters*—a series developed by Assistant to the Choreographer Robert Swinston—on Monday, March 24, 2008 at 7 PM in the Merce Cunningham Studio. MCDC and distinguished artists will examine the creative life of Merce Cunningham during the 1980s by discussing dances, film dances and videodances of that period. Noted panelists Merce Cunningham, MCDC Archivist David Vaughan, Patricia Lent (MCDC dancer 1984–1993) and filmmaker Elliot Caplan will guide audience members through a program including excerpts of film dances *Channels/Inserts* (1981 Charles Atlas) and *Coast Zone* (1983 Charles Atlas), and videodances *Points in Space* (1986 Caplan) and *Changing Steps* (1988 Caplan). In addition, members of MCDC and the Repertory Understudy Group will perform excerpts of *Fielding Sixes* (1980), *Trails* (1982), *Roaratorio* (1983), and *Doubles* (1984).

History Matters is held in the Merce Cunningham Studio (55 Bethune St., 11th Floor). Tickets are \$15 general admission and \$10 for students. Press can reserve seats by contacting Avianna Perez at avianna@merce.org or 212.255.8240 x14. The general public can reserve seats in advance by calling 212.255.8240 x25. Pay at the door, cash or check only.

Merce Cunningham received his first formal dance and theater training at the Cornish School (now Cornish College of the Arts) in Seattle. From 1939 to 1945, he was a soloist in the company of Martha Graham. He presented his first New York solo concert with John Cage in April 1944. MCDC was formed at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1953. Since that time Cunningham has choreographed nearly 200 works for his company. His work has been presented by Ballet of the Paris Opéra, New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Boston Ballet, White Oak Dance Project, Pacific Northwest Ballet, Pennsylvania Ballet, Zurich Ballet, and Rambert Dance Company (London), among others. Cunningham has worked extensively in film and video, in collaboration first with Charles Atlas and later with Elliot Caplan. Cunningham's interest in contemporary technology has led him to work with the computer program DanceForms, which he has used in making all his dances since *Trackers* (1991). In 1997 he began work in motion capture with Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar of Riverbed Media to develop the décor for *BIPED*, with music by Gavin Bryars, first performed in 1999 at Zellerbach Hall, University of California at Berkeley. Another major work, *Interscape*, first given in 2000, reunited Cunningham with his early collaborator Robert Rauschenberg, who designed both décor and costumes for the dance, which has music by John Cage.

In the 2002–03 season MCDC celebrated its 50th anniversary, beginning with performances in the Lincoln Center Festival 2002 in New York City and ending in the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival in October 2003, when a new work with music by two rock bands, Radiohead and Sigur Rós, *Split Sides*, was presented. The décor was by the photographers Robert Heishman and Catherine Yass, with costumes by James Hall and lighting by James F. Ingalls. In the summer of 2005 MCDC again appeared in the Lincoln Center Festival, presenting a revival of the 1994 work *Ocean*. Cunningham’s latest work, *XOVER*, had its world premiere at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH in October 2007. At the end of March, the revival of *Second Hand* (1970) will be presented at the Washington Performing Arts Society in Washington, DC.

David Vaughan is the archivist of the Cunningham Dance Foundation and the author of *Frederick Asbton and his Ballets* (revised edition, Dance Books, 1999) and of *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years* (Aperture, 1997). At the Dancing in the Millennium Conference in Washington DC in July 2000, he received the 2000 CORD (Congress on Research in Dance) Award for Outstanding Leadership in Dance Research, and in September 2001 he received a Bessie Award for sustained achievement. In June 2007 he was honored as Senior Critic by the Dance Critics Association.

Patricia Lent was a member of MCDC from 1984–1993, and has been teaching technique classes and repertory workshops at the Merce Cunningham Studio for 20 years. She performed with White Oak Dance Project from 1994–1996. From 1998–2007, she taught second and third grade at P.S. 234 in lower Manhattan. She has brought several of her classes to visit the Studio, and in 2002 a group of her students performed with MCDC in a series of downtown *Events*. That same year, Lent had the privilege of working with MCDC on the reconstruction of *Fabrications* for the Company’s 50th anniversary season. She recently moved to upstate New York, but comes to the city regularly to teach classes and workshops, and to study with Merce.

Filmmaker, producer/director **Elliot Caplan** was appointed professor of Media Study and director, Center for the Moving Image at SUNY Buffalo in fall 2004. His work in documentary, art filmmaking, and performance with Merce Cunningham, composer John Cage, and video artist Nam June Paik is internationally recognized. His films and videos are in museum and film collections throughout the world. Caplan also designs and directs theatrical presentations incorporating media as décor. Caplan received an Emmy Award for “Outstanding Cultural and Historical Programming” for his work on the PBS Network. He is the recipient of numerous grants and awards. In 1996, Caplan founded Picture Start Films to facilitate his artistic work. The *Washington Post* said of *Cage/Cunningham*, “One of the things which makes the film remarkable is that although the ingredients are familiar with other documentaries...the tapestry that Caplan has woven from these threads is not like any you’ve seen before.”

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