

# MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY

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**Experiments in the Studio: an MCDC new music series**  
**George Lewis, Fast Forward, Zeena Parkins, John King**  
**Monday Jan. 7 at 8:30 PM, Merce Cunningham Studio**

**New York, NY**—Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC) presents the third concert of “Experiments in the Studio” on Monday January 7 at 8:30 PM in the Merce Cunningham Studio. This concert unites four New York City-based experimental composer/performers for the first time as a group: **George Lewis** (MCDC composer/performer 2004–05), **Fast Forward** (MCDC composer/performer 1994–97), **Zeena Parkins** (for her first MCDC-presented performance), and **John King** (MCDC composer/performer since 1985). Additional performers include pianist Jenny Lin and soprano Charlotte Dobbs for John King’s *Triple Unity*. The program includes **three world premieres**, Fast Forward’s *Empathetic Hyperbola* (2008), Zeena Parkins’ *Opus Araneum*, and John King’s *Triple Unity* (2008), in addition to the **NYC premiere** of George Lewis’ *Artificial Life 2007* (2007).

## **Notes from the composers:**

George Lewis’ *Artificial Life 2007* is designed to realize a model of group performance as an emergent phenomenon based on negotiation and local intelligence. The work is composed of two parts, which may be performed as desired, consisting of a set of instructions, represented graphically on a grid. The moment of execution and the kind of sounds and silences produced are chosen according to the performers’ considered judgment, unless an instruction indicates otherwise. Although structural components and sonic gestures recur throughout the work, in performance the use of intuition and snap judgments are preferable to teleological thinking, and attempts to articulate or impose global form are entirely eschewed by both composer and performers. All aspects of the performance are achieved through negotiation and consensus, and the success of the performance is less a question of individual freedom than of the assumption of personal responsibility for the sonic environment. Fast Forward’s *Empathetic Hyperbola* uses a time-based instructional score written entirely in text. The instructions lie within time parameters as short as fifteen seconds and as long as one minute. The musicians are asked to adhere to those instructions, but are free to interpret them in any manner they choose. Their individuality and personal approach brings diversity to the music while remaining true to the overall musical direction of the work. The musicians are working independently from each other

unless there is an instruction to do otherwise. Zeena Parkins' *Opus Araneum* is a new work written for the entire ensemble. John King's *Triple Unity* contains settings of French symbolist poets with chance-determined instrumental music from the ensemble of composer/improvisers.

All concerts in the series are free and take place in the Merce Cunningham Studio on the 11<sup>th</sup> floor of 55 Bethune Street in Manhattan. No reservations required; visit [merce.org](http://merce.org) for directions and details.

**George Lewis** serves as the Edwin H. Case Professor of American Music at Columbia University, and the Director of the Center for Jazz Studies at Columbia. The recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship in 2002, an Alpert Award in the Arts in 1999, and fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Lewis studied composition with Muhal Richard Abrams at the AACM School of Music, and trombone with Dean Hey. A member of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM) since 1971, Lewis's work as composer, improviser, performer, and interpreter explores electronic and computer music, computer-based multimedia installations, text-sound works, and notated and improvisational forms, and is documented on more than 120 recordings. His published articles on music, experimental video, visual art, and cultural studies have appeared in numerous scholarly journals and edited volumes, and his book, *Power Stronger Than Itself: The AACM and American Experimental Music*, is forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press in Spring 2008.

**Fast Forward** lived in Northern England until he emigrated to the U.S. in 1976. Strongly influenced by his surroundings, he chooses to use an empirical approach toward pursuing a musical outcome. He is best known for his musical explorations of the Trinidadian steel pan and his music-theater works for diverse instrumentation. His culinary concert *Feeding Frenzy* for five musicians, five cooks, five waiters, and the audience was first performed in New York in 1994 and continues to be performed worldwide. Producing 500 plates of amplified food in 90 minutes, it uses local performers and has been staged for many occasions, including the 15-year celebration of Freunde Guter Musik at The National Gallery in Berlin and the Time of Music Festival in Finland. It also ran for three seasons at The Kitchen in New York. *Trommelfeuer*, an ensemble work produced by the DAAD in Berlin, includes the use of stainless steel oil drums, sewer pipes, truck suspension springs, explosive-hammers, and multiple drummers. The metal walls of a ferryboat in the Sea of Japan were once used as musical collaborators. In solo performances, Fast Forward adopts a sculptural approach to creating sound. He examines the sensual, tactile qualities of the objects, then ties the sound of the objects to the physical gesture that creates the sound. He attended art colleges in Leeds and Newcastle in England, where he studied with Stuart Marshall. From there, he studied electronic music with Robert Ashley and David Behrman at Mills College and moved to New York City in 1981. In conjunction with The Wooster Group, he curated "The Accident," nine evenings of performance music at The Performing Garage in New York City. Fast Forward toured with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company from 1994 to 1997.

**Zeena Parkins**, recent winner of a "Bessie" Award for sustained achievement in composing scores for dance, is a multi-instrumentalist/composer/improviser based in New York City. Her skill on both the acoustic harp and her unique electric harps serves to deconstruct the instrument. Parkins investigates the creative process and digital/analog culture in performance, installation, composition, and collaboratively with video/film and dance. Her work includes large, multi-player ensembles, smaller groups, and solo work, often using extended techniques, electronics, graphic scores, traditional scores, and visual elements of improvisation. Parkins uses Foley, field recordings, analog synthesizers, samplers, oscillators, and homemade instruments to build her compositions. Parkins also creates electro-acoustic sound installations for multiple speakers, often including live performers as

well. Parkins' collaborators include Bjork, Ikue Mori, John Zorn, Thurston Moore, Lee Renaldo, Fred Frith, Douglas Henderson, Matmos, and Christian Marclay. Parkins works with choreographers Jennifer Monson, Neil Greenberg, John Jasperse, DD Dorvillier, and Jennifer Lacey, and visual artists Daria Martin, Cynthia Madansky, and Mandy McIntosh. Parkins has received a "Bessie" Award for the score to *Sender* by Jennifer Monson, and various commissions and awards from Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Rockefeller Map Grant, Meet the Composer, Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, Ars Electronica, and residencies at STEIM, Harvestworks, and Civitella. Parkins was a visiting artist professor at Mills College in fall 2007.

**John King**, composer, guitarist, and violist, has received commissions from the Kronos Quartet; Red {an orchestra}; Ethel; the Albany Symphony/"Dogs of Desire;" Bang On A Can All-Stars; Mannheim Ballet; New York City Ballet/Diamond Project; Stuttgart Ballet; Ballets de Monte Carlo; and Merce Cunningham Dance Company. He was Music Curator at The Kitchen from 1999–2003 and is currently a co-director of the Music Committee at MCDC. He has written two operas: *Herzstück/heartpiece*, based on the text of Heiner Müller, premiered at the 1999 Warsaw Autumn Festival and presented at The Kitchen in 2000; and *la belle captive* based on texts by Alain Robbe-Grillet, premiered at Teatro Colon/CETC in Buenos Aires in 2003, and toured to London's ICA (Fronteras Festival) in 2004 and The Kitchen in 2005. He has two new CD releases of music for string quartet: *AllSteel* (Tzadik) and *Ethel* (Cantaloupe). He currently leads his own quartet, "Crucible," featuring Jennifer Choi and Patrick Doane, violins; King, viola; and Jane O'Hara, cello.

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Experiments in the Studio celebrates Merce Cunningham's commitment to commissioning more new music by American composers than any other single choreographer, and the historic relationship between Merce Cunningham and John Cage, Founding Music Director of MCDC. The composer/performers in this series represent a vibrant history of avant-garde music and multiple generations of contemporary composers working and performing together, from the 1950s through today.

**Experiments in the Studio, spring 2008:**

**Feb 4** An Evening with Christian Wolff

**Mar 31** An Evening with Takehisa Kosugi

**May 5** Richard Teitelbaum, Miguel Frasoni, Marina Rosenfeld, David Behrman

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