

Merce Cunningham Dance Company to Launch Final World Tour in February 2010

*Two-Year Legacy Tour Features Revivals of Seminal Cunningham Works,
And Gives Audiences Around the World Final Opportunity
To See the Company Trained by Cunningham*

*Tour Will Conclude with New Year's Eve Performance at
New York City's Park Avenue Armory in December 2011*

New York, NY (January 27, 2010) – The Cunningham Dance Foundation announced today that the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC) will embark on its final, two-year world tour in February 2010. Envisioned in the Foundation's Legacy Plan as a celebration of Cunningham's lifetime of artistic achievement, the "Legacy Tour" will showcase seminal works from throughout Cunningham's career—including the revival of seven dances from past Company repertory—and will offer audiences around the world a final opportunity to see Cunningham's choreography performed by the company he personally trained.

Currently encompassing approximately 35 cities, the Legacy Tour will bring MCDC to new destinations around the world and will include performances at venues throughout Europe and the United States that have been pivotal in showcasing the Company for the past 50 years. The Tour will culminate in New York City—MCDC's home since it was founded in 1953—on December 31, 2011, with a New Year's Eve performance at Park Avenue Armory. As Cunningham specified, all tickets to the final New York performance will be priced at \$10. The Company will close following this performance.

Organized into three parts, the Legacy Tour will launch its first leg on February 12, 2010, at the Wexner Center in Columbus, Ohio, followed by engagements in Rome, Monaco, Montreal, Berkeley, Los Angeles, Montpellier in France, and Santiago de Compostela in Spain, before MCDC returns to New York in July to rotate its repertory. In August, MCDC will travel to Weimar, Germany, and the fall season will include stops in London and Paris. The final year of the tour includes performances across the United States and Europe. Also in the planning stages are appearances in Australia, Brazil, Hong Kong, Israel, and Russia.

"Merce spent his life exploring new possibilities and transforming the way we experience the arts. Since the Company's first international tour in 1964, he has been recognized around the world as an artistic visionary and leader of the American avant-garde," said Trevor Carlson, Executive Director of the Cunningham Dance Foundation. "The Legacy Tour is a unique opportunity for us to celebrate Merce's creative vision with the audiences who have shared in MCDC's remarkable 55-year journey."

A total of 18 seminal works will be presented during the Legacy Tour, featuring seven newly revived pieces, many of which have not been performed for decades. The tour repertory will highlight the artistic collaborations that characterized Cunningham's creative life, including his work with visual artists Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Mark Lancaster, and Andy Warhol, and musicians John Cage—Cunningham's long-time collaborator and life partner—David Tudor, Takehisa Kosugi, Gavin Bryars, Brian Eno, Radiohead, and Sigur Rós, among others. The MCDC core ensemble will perform

throughout the tour under the leadership of Director of Choreography Robert Swinston, who joined the company in 1980 and served as Assistant to the Choreographer since 1992.

Works to be performed during the tour's first leg include revivals of the playful, athletics-inspired *Squaregame* (1976); *Duets* (1980), which interweaves performances by six couples; and *Roaratorio* (1983), which features an original recording of John Cage's monumental score *Roaratorio, an Irish Circus based on Finnegans Wake*. Current repertory dances will also be performed, including: *Crises* (1960); *Second Hand* (1970); *Sounddance* (1975); *BIPED* (1999); *Split Sides* (2003); *XOVER* (2007); and Cunningham's final work, *Nearly Ninety* (2009) and its alternate iteration *Nearly 90²* (2009). (Detailed descriptions of repertory works follow below.)

Highlights of the second and third segments of the Legacy Tour include the revival of the classic 1958 work *Antic Meet*, an important early collaboration with Rauschenberg and Cage that has not been performed since 1969. The latter parts of the tour will also feature the revival of *Rainforest* (1968), with Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds* as décor; the somber *Quartet* (1982); and *Pond Way* (1998), featuring décor by Roy Lichtenstein and music by Brian Eno.

The Legacy Tour is a component of the Foundation's multi-faceted Legacy Plan, which outlines the future of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and the Cunningham Dance Foundation and ensures the legacy of Merce Cunningham's work. In addition to MCDC's final world tour, the Legacy Plan calls for the creation of Dance Capsules—digital packages containing complete documentation of a Cunningham piece, including performance videos, sound recordings, lighting plots, décor images, costume design, and production notes—to preserve Cunningham's choreography, and provides career transition assistance for dancers and staff upon completion of the Legacy Tour.

Throughout the Legacy Tour, CDF will continue to support the Merce Cunningham Studio, an accredited school that provides professional training in Cunningham Technique, ongoing educational outreach programs, and the Studio Performance Program for Young Artists. The Legacy Plan and CDF's operations are supported by an ongoing \$8 million campaign, of which \$5.5 million has been raised to date. Information about the Legacy Plan can be found at www.merce.org/p/living-legacy-plan.html.

REPERTORY & REVIVALS

Detailed descriptions of each work to be performed during the Legacy Tour follow below. Revived works are indicated with asterisks (*).

Suite for Five (1956)

Music by John Cage, *Music for Piano*

Costumes by Robert Rauschenberg

Noted for its classicism and tranquility, *Suite for Five* adds a trio, a duet, and a quintet to two solos from Cunningham's earlier *Solo Suite in Space and Time*. Cage's music and the choreography rely on chance operations to determine both the musical composition and the movement. Rauschenberg designed the dancers' earth-toned leotards.

****Antic Meet*** (1958)

Music by John Cage, *Concert for Piano and Orchestra*

Décor and costumes by Robert Rauschenberg

Antic Meet captures the exuberant and collaborative spirit that existed between Cunningham and Rauschenberg, who referred to the MCDC as "his largest canvas." Structured like a series of vaudeville scenes, the dance's ten comedic numbers play on the concept of an athletic meet. Cage provided the

musical accompaniment, and Rauschenberg's witty costumes include fur coats, parachute dresses, and, famously, a chair strapped to Cunningham's back. *Antic Meet* was last performed at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1969.

***Crises* (1960)**

Music by Conlon Nancarrow

Costumes by Robert Rauschenberg

First performed at the American Dance Festival, Cunningham described *Crises* as "an adventure in togetherness." Choreographed for four women and one man, the dancers' bodies are intertwined as they hold one another, and elastic bands worn around a wrist, an arm, a waist, or a leg connect them. Nancarrow's musical score reinforces the dance's harsh atmosphere with an assortment of jangling rhythms, and Rauschenberg's costumes, in various shades of red, evoke the romance of the piece.

****RainForest* (1968)**

Music by David Tudor

Décor by Andy Warhol

One of Cunningham's nature studies, *RainForest* derives its title from his childhood memories of the Olympic Peninsula. Warhol's installation *Silver Clouds*—a number of floating Mylar pillows—serves as décor. When asked about costumes, Warhol said he would like the dancers to go naked. Cunningham felt this wouldn't work, so Jasper Johns put them in flesh-colored leotards and tights cut by Johns with a razor blade, to give them a roughened look. Tudor's music evokes the chirping and chattering of birds and animals. *RainForest* differs from Cunningham's other pieces in that, with the exception of Cunningham's role, each of the six dancers performs, then leaves the stage and never returns.

***Second Hand* (1970)**

Music by John Cage, *Cheap Imitation*

Costumes by Jasper Johns

In 1944, Cunningham choreographed a solo called *Idyllic Song* to the first movement of Erik Satie's *Socrate*. Twenty-five years later he choreographed the other two movements, adding a duet to the second and a group dance to the third. When Satie's publisher refused to grant permission for the use of for the use of *Socrate* in any form, Cage composed a new piece, using the structure and phraseology of Satie's original, but otherwise using chance operations to determine what notes would be played. Cage's version was titled *Cheap Imitation*, inspiring Cunningham to name his dance *Second Hand*. The work premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

***Sounddance* (1975)**

Music by David Tudor

Décor and costumes by Mark Lancaster

In the fall of 1973, Cunningham spent nine weeks working with the Ballet of the Paris Opéra, for whom he choreographed *Un jour ou deux*. When he returned to his own company, he "felt like doing something vigorous, fast, complex." The piece he made, *Sounddance*, takes its title from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*: "In the beginning was the sounddance." Dancers emerge one after the other from a tent-like structure, and remain onstage until they are swept back in, as though in a wind tunnel. Tudor's powerful score provides a charged environment for Cunningham's fast-paced choreography.

****Squaregame* (1976)**

Music by Takehisa Kosugi

Décor and costumes by Mark Lancaster

Cunningham described *Squaregame* as a work where "the situations are very playful, on what seems to be an athletic court where there are participants who can also stop and watch." Lancaster's set, a white floor surrounded by Astroturf, is "squared" by the placement of four duffel bags which also serve as props

throughout the piece. The use of props in Cunningham's choreography diminished over time, and the revival of *Squaregame*, last performed in 1980, illuminates this important aspect of his artistic career. *Squaregame* was MCDC's first commission for Kosugi, MCDC's current music director.

***Duets (1980)**

Music by Paedar and Mel Mercier, arranged by John Cage, *Improvisation III*

Costumes by Mark Lancaster

Duets is comprised of six short pieces, originally choreographed to be included in site-specific *Events*. To create the stand-alone piece, Cunningham added a brief appearance by one of the other couples in each of the duets, and ended with all of the couples sharing the stage. As if a still photograph were being taken, the ending consists of three short phrases, each followed by a brief stop, closing with a blackout. Cage's music, *Improvisation III*, incorporates recordings of traditional Irish drumming.

***Quartet (1982)**

Music by David Tudor, *Sextet for Seven*

Costumes by Mark Lancaster

Despite its title, *Quartet* is a dance for five, performed alongside Tudor's score *Sextet for Seven*. Often described as a dark and tragic work, *Quartet* portrays emotional and tangible dependencies and restrictions, with Cunningham in the role of the outsider. The chilling music is a live electronic composition for "six homogeneous voices and one wandering voice," and Lancaster designed somber costumes in sooty hues of crimson, blue and green. *Quartet* premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris.

***Roaratorio (1983)**

Music by John Cage, *Roaratorio, an Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake*

Costumes by Mark Lancaster

Roaratorio features an original recording of Cage's complex 1979 composition *Roaratorio, an Irish Circus on Finnegans Wake*. Cage traveled through Ireland recording sounds in places mentioned in Joyce's novel, which were later assembled to form an hour-long piece. Using lines from *Finnegans Wake*, Cage wrote mesostics (poems constructed so a vertical phrase intersects lines of horizontal text) on "JAMESJOYCE," which were read aloud during the performance, and scored parts based on Irish traditional music—jigs, reels, airs, and songs—that are played throughout his recording of the work. Cunningham's choreography incorporates motifs on jigs and reels, a "hopping" dance, promenades and strolls, and folk dances that suddenly expand into huge communal circles.

CRWDSPCR (1993)

Music by John King, *blues 99*

Décor and costumes by Mark Lancaster

Cunningham explained *CRWDSPCR* as follows: "The use of LifeForms [now DanceForms], the dance computer, brought about the title. Computer technology is changing our language, condensing words. From its original form, Crowdspace, I have utilized two variants—Crowd Spacer/Crowds Pacer." The initial impression of the dance is one of nonstop, even frenetic activity, interrupted only by a long, slow solo. King's score, *blues 99*, utilizes electronic transformations of the sounds of a Dobro steel guitar, played slide. Lancaster's multicolored costumes divide the dancers' bodies into fourteen sections.

***Pond Way (1998)**

Music by Brian Eno

Décor by Roy Lichtenstein

Costumes by Suzanne Gallo

One of Cunningham's nature studies, *Pond Way* evokes the trickling affect of water as the dancers move in wavelike motions across the stage, timing the movements so that one begins just as another ends. The

movement was inspired by Cunningham's childhood game of skimming stones over a pond. An abstract of Roy Lichtenstein's *Landscape With Boat* provides the backdrop for luminous, white costumes by Suzanne Gallo, and an atmospheric score by Brian Eno.

BIPED (1999)

Music by Gavin Bryars

Décor by Shelley Eshkar, Paul Kaiser

For *BIPED*, one of his greatest masterworks, Cunningham collaborated with Eshkar and Kaiser to create computer-generated images that mimic human movement using motion capture technology. The costumes, using a metallic fabric that reflects light, were designed by Suzanne Gallo. Aaron Copp devised the lighting, dividing the stage floor into squares that were lit in what looked like a random sequence, and lit the back of the stage so that the dancers seemingly to appear and disappear at random. Many people have commented on what appears to be the profoundly elegiac nature of the piece, particularly its closing moments. *BIPED* premiered at Cal Performances in Berkeley, California.

Split Sides (2003)

Music by Radiohead, Sigur Rós

Décor by Robert Heischman, Catherine Yass

Costumes by James Hall

Lighting by James. F. Ingalls

As the title implies, *Split Sides* is divided into two parts, each featuring one of two options for the different creative elements of the piece: set design, costumes, lighting, music, and choreography. The order in which each element appears during a given performance is determined by an onstage dice roll before the performance—there are thus 32 possible versions of the piece. *Split Sides* features original scores by Radiohead and Sigur Rós, commissioned by MCDC for this collaboration. *Split Sides* premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on the occasion of the Company's 50th anniversary.

XOVER (2007)

Music by John Cage, *Aria*, *Fontana Mix*

Décor and Costumes by Robert Rauschenberg

In *XOVER*, as the title suggests, dancers cross back and forth across the stage throughout this 20-minute piece. The work consists of duets and quartets, including a duet that lasts seven and a half minutes. Rauschenberg's painted and silk-screened backdrop lends bright color to the stage, offsetting the dancers' white leotards. John Cage's score includes two compositions, performed simultaneously as indicated by Cage as a performance option: *Fontana Mix* (1958) and *Aria* (1958). *Fontana Mix* consists of an open-ended, reconfigurable graphic score composed of dots and curved lines on a transparencies and sheets of paper. Cage's *Aria*, *Aria* was composed to be sung, in its entirety or in segments, by a single vocalist, male or female.

Nearly Ninety (2009)

Music by John Paul Jones, Takehisa Kosugi, Sonic Youth

Décor by Benedetta Tagliabue, with video design by Franc Aleu

Costumes by Romeo Gigli for *io ipse idem*

Lighting by Brian MacDevitt

Cunningham's last work, *Nearly Ninety*, premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on April 16, 2009, in celebration of Merce's 90th birthday. The 90-minute piece, with intermission, features new music commissioned by Led Zeppelin's instrumentalist John Paul Jones, mixed-media sound composer Takehisa Kosugi, and indie rock band Sonic Youth, as well as multi-level structural décor by architect Benedetta Tagliabue and costumes by the acclaimed designer Romeo Gigli.

Nearly 90² (2009)

Music by John Paul Jones and Takehisa Kosugi

Costumes by Anna Finke

Lighting by Christine Shallenberg

Nearly 90² is a restaged version of *Nearly Ninety*, Cunningham's final work, presented against a black backdrop with new costumes and lighting. *Nearly 90²* is performed without intermission and is accompanied by new music from former Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones and mixed-media sound composer Takehisa Kosugi.

Events and MinEvents

Events are Cunningham's signature, site-specific choreographic collages that incorporate excerpts from past and current repertory works, and are often created for unconventional performance spaces such as museums and galleries. Frequently making use of costumes and décor from previous repertory works, *Events* feature live music composed specifically for the occasion. The shorter *MinEvents* are created to be performed as part of a mixed bill program. For the Legacy Tour, Robert Swinston, Director of Choreography, will oversee *Events*.

About the Cunningham Dance Foundation

The Cunningham Dance Foundation is dedicated to sustaining and advancing the creative work of Merce Cunningham (1919 – 2009)—choreographer, teacher and artist—through support of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company and Repertory Understudy Group; the Merce Cunningham Studio, which provides training in Cunningham technique and oversees the Studio Performance Program for Young Artists and Educational Outreach; and the Merce Cunningham Archives. Recently, the Foundation launched *Mondays with Merce*, a pioneering web series that provides the public with unprecedented access to Cunningham's creative process (www.merce.org/mondayswithmerce.html).

Additional information is available at www.merce.org.

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