

MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY

Avianna Perez, Marketing Associate
212.255.8240 x14 / avianna@merce.org
55 Bethune Street, New York, NY 10014
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 6, 2008

Experiments in the Studio: an MCDC new music series
An Evening with Joan La Barbara
Monday, November 17 at 8:30 PM, Merce Cunningham Studio

New York, NY—Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC) opens its second season of *Experiments in the Studio* on Monday, November 17 at 8:30 PM, at the Merce Cunningham Studio. Building off of a successful first season, the series returns featuring an exciting new slate of musicians. This concert celebrates the work of composer/performer **Joan La Barbara**. Recognized as “one of the great vocal virtuosas of our time” (San Francisco Examiner), La Barbara has performed her own music for Cunningham *Events* as well as sung John Cage’s *Aria* in Cunningham’s most recent work, *XOVER* (2007). The program features *Shimmer* (2007), scenes from an opera-in-progress, and *ROTHKO* (1986, revised 2007), a multi-layered sound painting inspired by Mark Rothko’s paintings in the Rothko Chapel. Both pieces will feature video accompaniment by Kurt Ralske.

All concerts in the series are free, no reservations required. Merce Cunningham Studio is located at 55 Bethune Street on the 11th floor. Recent concerts have been filled to capacity; to arrange a press seat in advance, please contact Avianna Perez at 212.255.8240 x14 or avianna@merce.org.

Notes from the composer:

Shimmer is heat rising from the desert floor, shimmer is light sparkling on water, shimmer is wraiths passing along the back walls, shimmer is the aurora borealis, shimmer is in ghostly conversations. *Shimmer* (2007) is the latest scene from an opera in-progress, for multiple voices and layered sonic “atmospheres.” Here, I am exploring sounds inside the mind, impossible sounds, fragile sounds, transparent, ghostly sounds, shimmering voices and modular fragments. A series of inhaled breaths with no exhale, separated by sonic blackness, silences of varying lengths are shattered by a sudden burst of underwater wails, as the work moves from interior to exterior space and back again.

ROTHKO was conceived after my first visit to The Rothko Chapel in Houston. I was so moved and overwhelmed by the majesty, the depth and complexity of Mark Rothko’s exquisite final paintings that I wanted to create a work in homage to those images. In 1985, I composed *A Rothko Study* for voice and chamber ensemble, premiered at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. In 1986, I composed *ROTHKO* for multiple layers of vocal multiphonics and reinforced harmonics interwoven with bowed piano, and premiered the 8-channel work with live vocal overlay in the octagonal space of the Rothko Chapel, as part of the New Music America festival. The performance for RouletteTV was the New York premiere of a new mix combining elements of the original recordings with remixes from the version that appears on track 2 of my New World album, *ShamanSong*. *ROTHKO* is both monochromatic and intricately infinite, as are the paintings that inspired it.

Joan La Barbara, composer, performer, sound artist, has created sound scores for film, video and dance in addition to concert music. Her multi-layered compositions often utilize her signature extended vocal techniques, a unique vocabulary of experimental sounds including multiphonics, circular singing, ululation and glottal clicks that bridge the line between text, soundart and song. She has received the Guggenheim Fellowship in Music Composition, DAAD Artist-in-Residency in Berlin, 7 NEA grants, among other awards, and numerous commissions for concert, theatre and radio. Recordings include *ShamanSong* (New World) and *Voice is the Original Instrument* (Lovely Music), hailed as one of *The Wire's* 10 best reissues of the year. *Messa di Voce*, an interactive media performance work, premiered at ars electronica 2003 and will receive its NY premiere February 23, 2009 at NYU's Loewe Theatre. Her music has been used for choreography by John Alleyne for Ballet British Columbia, Nai-Ni Chen, Jane Comfort, Martha Curtis, Catherine Kerr, and Martha Scott. Joan has also created numerous filmscores and music for films by Richard Blau, Monica Gazzo, Amy Kravitz, Elyse Rosenberg, Steven Subotnick and Harvey Wang. *Immersion*, an underwater dance film by Jodi Kaplan featuring La Barbara's music was shown at the 1999 New Directors/New Films Festival at the Museum of Modern Art and at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. She has premiered landmark compositions by noted American composers and has been soloist in her own and other composers' works with the orchestras of cities across the US and at international festivals. La Barbara's current commissions include a new spoken word opera, *An American Rendition*, a work for solo flute and *sonic atmosphere*, both premiering in 2008, in addition to ongoing work on an opera in-progress.

Kurt Ralske's video installations and performances are created exclusively with his own custom software. His work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Guggenheim Bilbao, Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, and the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Art. Kurt programmed and co-designed the 9-channel video installation that is permanently in the lobby of the MoMA in NYC. In 2003, his work received First Prize at the Transmediale International Media Art Festival in Berlin, as a member of the video ensemble 242.pilots. He is also the author/programmer of Auvi, a popular video software environment in use by artists in 22 countries. Kurt is the recipient of a 2007 Rockefeller Foundation Media Arts Fellowship. Kurt resides in New York City. He is Visiting Professor of Digital Art at The School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and is on the faculty of The School of Visual Arts, NYC, in the MFA Computer Art Department.

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 MDCDC. 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.

Next Up:

December 1 – Takehisa Kosugi, Alex Waterman, Curtis Bahn, Keiko Uenishi

Experiments in the Studio is made possible by a generous grant from The New York State Music Fund, established by the New York State Attorney General at Rockefeller Philanthropic Advisors and through public support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs.

###

Merce Cunningham Studio
55 Bethune Street, 11th floor, New York, NY 10014
tel: 212.255.8240 x14 fax: 212.633.2453

merce.org