

HARVARD DANCE CENTER

66 Garden Street | Cambridge | Massachusetts 02138 | 617 495 8683 | www.ofa.fas.harvard.edu/dance

PRESS RELEASE

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"SEMINAL VOICES" – HARVARD DANCE PROJECT IN NEW EXPERIMENTS WITH MERCE CUNNINGHAM, MARTHA GRAHAM, AND BILL T. JONES AT HARVARD DANCE CENTER ON APRIL 25-27, 2019

(Cambridge, MA) SEMINAL VOICES is an evening of new experiments with the methods of three visionary artists who have expanded the meaning of choreographic practice, and still do. Harvard students perform and engage with work that spans 90 years of dance history, in both installation and proscenium settings. Evocative, idiosyncratic, distinctive and infinitely expressive, each of these works provides dancers and audiences alike the opportunity to encounter dance history and participate in it. The Harvard Dance Project (HDP) is a Theater, Dance & Media academic course that focuses on performance research and is led by Jill Johnson, HDP Founder/Artistic Director, Dance Director, and Senior Lecturer on Theater, Dance & Media, at Harvard University.

Over the course of the Spring 2019 semester, HDP students learned the techniques and choreographic principles of each choreographer from foremost experts in the field: Miki Orihara, teacher, stager, and former principal dancer of Martha Graham Dance Company; Silas Riener, teacher, stager, 2018-19 Cage Cunningham Fellow, and former company member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; and Christina Robson, teacher, stager, and current company member of Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company.

In *Lamentation Variation*, HDP students perform Martha Graham's celebrated solo work *Lamentation* (1930), staged by Miki Orihara. The music used in the original production of *Lamentation*, *Piano Piece, Op. 3, No. 2*, by Zoltán Kodály (1910), will be performed live by Osnat Netzer, Preceptor in the Department of Music at Harvard for Thursday's performance, and Erika Matei, Master's candidate at the Longy School of Music, for Friday's and Saturday's performances. Graham described *Lamentation* as a "dance of sorrow." It is not necessarily the sorrow of a specific person, time, or place, but can be seen as the embodiment of grief itself. HDP presents *Lamentation* in a new environment with three dancers performing the solo simultaneously in its Harvard Dance Center premiere. This reimagining of the work is a part of an ongoing creative project started by the Martha Graham Dance Company called *Lamentation Variations*, an initiative which invites choreographers to interpret and creatively respond to Graham's iconic work, thereby soliciting ongoing contributions to her legacy in new and dynamic ways.

gym dance for Harvard, 2019 is a new work created by the HDP students, under the direction of Silas Riener, in conversation with Merce Cunningham's choreographic methodologies of "chance procedures" and "indeterminacy." Riener led HDP students in a series of intensive creative

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laboratory sessions that presented the history of Merce Cunningham's work and artistic process which served to guide and shape the students' experiments that will happen each performance. At the invitation of Mikhail Baryshnikov, HDP students premiered *gym dance for Harvard, 2019* earlier this year at Baryshnikov Arts Center in New York City, as part of "[Runs the Gamut](#)," an event celebrating Merce Cunningham's centennial, alongside students from the Alvin Ailey School, The Juilliard School, and NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Music for *gym dance for Harvard, 2019* and *Story/Time* (excerpt) will be performed live by electronic musician and composer Nate Tucker.

Story/Time (excerpt), is a reconstruction of excerpts from the original *Story/Time* (2012), choreographed by Bill T. Jones, and performed under the license by New York Live Arts. Originally co-commissioned by Peak Performances at Montclair State, NJ, and the Walker Art Center in MN, the work is inspired by Merce Cunningham and legendary artist and composer John Cage. *Story/Time* is a collage of dance, music, and seventy of Bill T. Jones' own short stories, arranged anew for each performance using "chance procedure." In this reconstruction for HDP, staged by Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company member Christina Robson, the students perform 20 short pieces from the full-length work which span thirty years of Jones' previous repertory. The HDP students have written their own texts, which will be recited throughout the piece. Of special note: in a nod to Merce Cunningham's choreographic methodology, the order of the text, choreography, and location of where the choreography will be performed on stage will be determined by random selection before every performance. Each rendering of *Story/Time* (excerpt) will be completely different.

SEMINAL VOICES is an invitation to explore and consider the connections between three choreographic luminaries, and to fields beyond dance. For example, Merce Cunningham was a member of the Martha Graham Dance Company for many years before founding his own company. Jones' *Story/Time* directly employs the methodologies of "chance procedures" and "indeterminacy" used by Cunningham, and also explores dance as social practice, connecting activism with performance which Graham had pioneered in the 30's and 40's. Echoes of Graham's influences can be seen in all of the works presented, for example, the creation of drama through the minimalist use of space, line, and methods of musical scoring. Each choreographer— Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, and Bill T. Jones— has expanded dance beyond the predominant style of their time and challenged the boundaries of expression and form. SEMINAL VOICES provides student dancers and audiences alike the opportunity to encounter dance history and participate in it.

"It has been a thrill to see the Harvard Dance Project students dive into their research of all three of these works. Each of these choreographic geniuses have widened the field as much as they moved it forward. They redefined dance and continue to provide endless inspiration and vitality to the form. I see this well of inspiration and vitality of thinking, in our students. The agency and tenacity with which they are tackling these dance experiments is remarkable and moving to see."
—Jill Johnson.

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Performances are Thursday-Saturday, April 25-27, 2019, at 7pm at Harvard Dance Center, 66 Garden St, Cambridge, MA. Tickets: \$5 students and \$10 general, available online at ofa.fas.harvard.edu/dance or at Harvard Dance Center.

The Harvard Dance Center is fully wheelchair accessible. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation or have questions about the physical access provided, please contact the Dance Office at 617-495-8683 in advance of your participation or visit.

SEMINAL VOICES is presented by the Harvard Dance Center, Office for the Arts, and Theater, Dance & Media, with support from the Bromley Innovation Fund for Dance and the Provostial Fund for the Arts and Humanities at Harvard University.

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ABOUT HARVARD DANCE CENTER

The Harvard Dance Center is a site that leads through equality and dignity for all, aims to foster agency through dance for students, and promotes the arts as agents of social change in the world. Dance offerings at Harvard Dance Center include curricular courses led by Dance faculty in Theater, Dance & Media, as well as non-credit Harvard community dance classes which span a wide range of genres for students at all levels of dance experience. The Dance Center regularly hosts guest artists and choreographers who teach master classes and hold residencies throughout the academic year, fostering exceptional opportunities for students to work with luminaries and innovators in the field and in disciplines linked to dance. The Dance Center partners with departments and organizations across campus to provide workshops and dialogues that address important campus and cultural issues. It provides mentorship, support, and residency opportunities for student emerging choreographers, as well as for student-led dance groups which represent over 20 traditions from across the globe.

ABOUT THEATER, DANCE & MEDIA

Harvard's concentration in Theater, Dance & Media invites students to become art makers and researchers ranging across theater, dance, and performance-based media. Using Harvard's immense resources, from the [Theatre Collection](#) to the [Dance Center](#) and the [American Repertory Theater](#), students will learn to hone their creative instincts, work collaboratively in small groups, and participate in professional departmental productions. Our courses range from physical movement, directing and design to creative writing, aesthetics and digital humanities and emphasize the combination of theory, history and practice. Equally invested in technical skills and a broad liberal arts education, the concentration aims to launch a generation of graduates who will use their experience in storytelling, performance, and media for careers inside and outside the arts.

Dance studies in the TDM interarts concentration are rooted in tradition, and committed to innovation. Courses support studies in dance composition, improvisation, performance, choreographic design, and history of dance with an emphasis on collaboration and trans-

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disciplinary inquiry. Opportunities to perform wide-ranging repertory, commissioned work, and installations are a focal component of coursework, and digital technology is leveraged to devise new methods for making and capturing the form. Guest artists teach master classes, courses, hold residencies, and create original work each academic year, fostering exceptional opportunities for students to work with luminaries and innovators who engage diverse and dynamic perspectives in the field and in disciplines linked to dance.