



Photo: Anna Finkle

USC Kaufman MinEvent

Friday, November 1, 2019, at 2:30 p.m.
Glorya Kaufman International Dance Center
University of Southern California

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) was one of the most influential choreographers of the twentieth century.
- This event will feature a Cunningham “MinEvent”—a 20-minute uninterrupted sequence of excerpts from Cunningham works—staged on USC Kaufman dancers by Silas Riener, a Cunningham dancer and educator.

MERCE CUNNINGHAM

One of the most influential choreographers of the twentieth century, Merce Cunningham was at the forefront of modern dance for seven decades. He created 180 repertory dances and more than 700 “Events,” in which he combined excerpts from new and old dances into choreographic events that could be performed anywhere.

In 1939, Cunningham was invited to join the groundbreaking Martha Graham Dance Company. He spent years as a leading soloist with the group.

In 1952, he founded his own company, where he developed new forms of abstract choreography, characterized by intense physicality, intellectual rigor, and abrupt changes and contrasts in movement.

Cunningham collaborated extensively with the avant-garde composer John Cage, who was also his life partner. Like Cage, Cunningham was interested in ideas of chance and the use of random phenomena to structure works of art. His “choreography by chance” entailed creating movement sequences by such random methods as tossing a coin to determine the order in which dancers would perform selected movements.

In addition to chance, ideas explored by Cunningham include the role of dancers and the audience, the limitations of the stage, and expanding possibilities for innovative collaboration across art forms. Cunningham and Cage developed the new concept that music and dance could coexist independently within the same performance—rather than having the dancers’ movements tied to the rhythms and mood of the music, each art form could stand alone while sharing a common space and time. Other famous Cunningham collaborators include Robert Rauschenberg, who designed early sets for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company; Andy Warhol; and Roy Lichtenstein.

Cunningham’s *Suite by Chance* (1952) was the first modern dance to be performed to an electronic score (by Christian Wolff). His *Symphonie pour un homme seul* (1952; later called *Collage*), performed to a composition by Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry, was the first performance in the United States of *musique concrète* (music composed of recordings of sounds from the environment).

After 20 years of creating new choreography for his company, in 1974 Cunningham shifted to creating “Events” composed of excerpts of new or old dances. Later in that decade, he created dances specifically for videotape, and began to work with film. Always an innovator, when physical challenges limited his ability to dance in the 1990s, Cunningham started exploring choreography via a computer program called DanceForms.

For his extraordinary impact on the field of dance, Merce Cunningham was awarded Guggenheim and MacArthur fellowships, a National Medal of Honor, the Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale, a Laurence Olivier Award, and many other high honors, including being named a “Living Legend” by the Library of Congress and an Officier of the French Legion d’Honneur.

Photo: Stephanie Berger

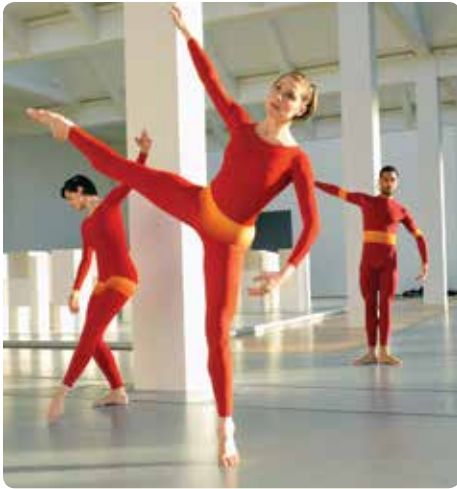


Photo: Marvin Silver



Merce Cunningham, *Suite for Five*, 1963.

MODERN DANCE

The term “modern dance” describes a broad genre of concert/theatrical dance that emerged in the United States and Europe in the late nineteenth century as a rebellion against the classical ballet tradition, and achieved widespread success in the twentieth century. It has been defined and redefined many times, and has evolved with new generations of choreographers. American modern dance can be broadly divided into three eras: early modern (1880–1923), associated with the work of Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller, et al.; central modern (1923–1946), the era of Martha Graham; and late modern (1946–1957), of which Merce Cunningham was a leading choreographer, paving the way to the postmodern era.

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Merce Cunningham innovated constantly throughout his seven-decade-long career. What do you think motivates an artist to keep innovating?
- How does Cunningham’s choreography differ from other choreography you’ve seen?
- Did you respond to this performance more emotionally or more intellectually? Or an even mix of both? Why do you think that is?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- Merce Cunningham Trust on Instagram @mercetrust
- Black Grace: A Visions and Voices Signature Event
November 11, 2019
bit.ly/VVBlackGrace19
- Activated Chambers: A Performance Journey Featuring yMusic and Nadia Sirota
December 4, and December 5, 2019
bit.ly/VVActivatedChambers
- Sean Dorsey Dance: *BOYS IN TROUBLE*
February 8, 2020
bit.ly/VVSeanDorseyDance
- Paul Taylor Celebration
February 26, 2020
bit.ly/VVPaulTaylorCelebration
- Other performances hosted by the USC Kaufman School of Dance
kaufman.usc.edu/events
- Glorya Kaufman Presents Dance at the Music Center
musiccenter.org/tickets/events-by-the-music-center/glorya-kaufman-dance

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

REBECCA MICHELSON of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about Cunningham and today’s event. Those with a call number (e.g., books, CDs, and DVDs) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. journal articles and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

BOOKS

Cunningham, Merce, and Jacqueline Lesschaeve. *The Dancer and the Dance*. New York: M. Boyars, 1985.

Doheny Memorial Library: GV1785.C85 A34 1985

Klosty, James. *Merce Cunningham* [1st ed.]. New York: Saturday Review Press, 1975.

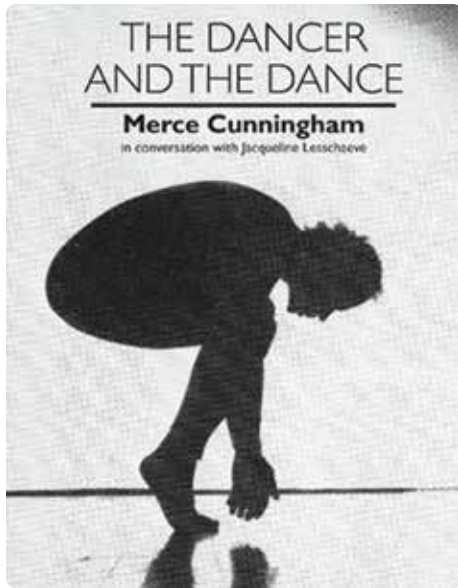
Special Collections: GV1785.C85 K57 1975

Kostelanetz, Richard, and Jack Anderson. *Merce Cunningham: Dancing in Space and Time*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 1992.

ONE Archives: GV 1785.C85 M48 1992

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Preger-Simon, Marianne, Stuart Hodes, and Alastair Macaulay. *Dancing with Merce Cunningham*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2019.

Doheny Memorial Library: GV1785.P693 A3 2019

Vaughan, David, and Melissa Harris. *Merce Cunningham: Fifty Years* [1st ed.]. New York, NY: Aperture, 1997.

Doheny Memorial Library: GV1785.C85 V38 1997

ONE Archives: GV1785.C85 V38 1997

DATABASES

Dance Online: Dance in Video

Contains 500 dance productions and documentaries by the most influential performers and companies of the 20th century.

International Index to the Performing Arts Full Text

This database provides indexing and abstracts for more than 260 international periodicals, plus full text for more than 100 of the indexed journals.

Performing Arts Periodicals Database

Performing Arts Periodicals Database covers a broad spectrum of the arts and entertainment industry—including dance, drama, theater, stagecraft, musical theater, circus performance, opera, pantomime, puppetry, magic, performance art, film, television, and more.

JOURNALS

Dance Research Journal. New York, N.Y.: Committee on Research in Dance, 1975.

PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art. Baltimore, MD: Published for PAJ Publications by the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998.

Doheny Memorial Library: PN2000 .P44

(Also available online as an electronic resource)

Research in Dance Education. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Carfax International Publishers, 2000.

VIDEOS

Cunningham, Merce, and Charles Atlas. *Split Sides*. San Francisco, CA: Microcinema International, 2009.

Leavey Library: LVYDVD 5834

Cunningham, Merce, Cunningham Dance Foundation, and Merce Cunningham Dance Company. *Merce Cunningham*. New York: Merce Cunningham Trust, 1980.

Cunningham, Merce, and Alan Koplín. *Merce Cunningham Teaching*. New York, NY: Merce Cunningham Trust, 1961.

Interview with Merce Cunningham. Arlington, VA: MacNeil-Lehrer Productions, 1999.

