

# **MEREDITH MONK: CELLULAR SONGS**

Saturday, November 5, 2022, at 7:30pm Tryon Festival Theatre

# PROGRAM

# MEREDITH MONK: CELLULAR SONGS

Conceived, directed, and composed by Meredith Monk

# Performed by Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble

Ellen Fisher, voice Katie Geissinger, voice Joanna Lynn-Jacobs, voice Meredith Monk, voice, keyboard Allison Sniffin, voice, violin, piano

# With members of **Central Illinois Youth Chorus**

Andrea Solya, artistic director

Madison Ames-Emrick	Sybil Kammin	Laila Tawfick
Julianna Balogh	Seora Lee	Nadia Tawfick
Grace Christensen	Maggie McCabe	Elaina Webb
Emilie Edwards	London Smith	Bridget Yasunaga

Music: Meredith Monk	Video Design: Katherine Freer
Costume and Scenic Design: Yoshio Yabara	Video Design Realization: Jorge Morales Picó
Original Lighting Design: Joe Levasseur	Cinematography: Ben Stehschulte
Lighting Supervisor: Dan Stearns	Production Manager Supervisor: Meredith Belis
Sound Design: Eli Walker	Production Stage Manager: Kevin Kenkel
Video Scenarios/Direction: Meredith Monk	Score Preparation: Allison Sniffin

Developed in collaboration with Ellen Fisher, Katie Geissinger, Allison Sniffin, and Jo Stewart.

**Bloodline Shrine** installation conceived and directed by Meredith Monk Installation Design by Meredith Monk, Yoshio Yabara Video Editing by Katherine Freer Cinematography by Ben Stechschulte

Thank you to Bonnie Marranca for her eloquent program notes about Cellular Songs and to writers Siddhartha Mukherjee and Atul Gawande for their inspiring work.

This performance of Cellular Songs is dedicated to the memory of Pablo Vela (1923–2021).

All music compositions by Meredith Monk © Meredith Monk Music (ASCAP)

# THANK YOU FOR SPONSORING THIS PERFORMANCE

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# **PROGRAM NOTE**

# PERFORMANCE AS A LIFE SCIENCE

By Bonnie Marranca

"As artists, we're all contending with what to do at a time like this. I wanted to make a piece that can be seen as an alternative possibility of human behavior, where the values are cooperation, interdependence, and kindness, as an antidote to the values that are being propagated right now." After a half-century as an influential figure in the creation of contemporary performance culture, Meredith Monk goes right to the heart of the challenge.

Her spare new work, *Cellular Songs*, is conceived for five women performers—Monk and her vocal ensemble consisting of Katie Geissinger, Allison Sniffin, Ellen Fisher, and Jo Stewart [now performed by Joanna-Lynn Jacobs]. Dressed in layers of white and beige-toned clothes, the women sing, dance, play the piano together, and lie on the floor, all the while modeling behavior of care, comfort, companionship, and collaboration. Glorious colors of sound arise from the intricate musical textures. The only words of the piece are in Monk's song of wisdom, "Happy Woman." Bodies alone make the landscape.

*Cellular Songs* inhabits its own special realm of music-theater in its soulful interweaving of music, theater, image, and movement. Monk describes her process in spatial terms: "Some of the pieces have much more dissonance and chromatic kind of harmonies, and the forms are almost like three-dimensional sculptures. Earlier, my music had much more to do with layering. Now you can almost see or hear the piece rotating as if it were a sculpture in space, though it's just a musical form." A visual architecture is built into its rigorous structure, which may look deceptively simple. The 75-minute work is scored for piano, keyboard, and violin, and the shimmering chorus of women's voices that animate the space.

The work of Monk as composer, performer, director, choreographer, and filmmaker has achieved a singular prominence in the world of performance. Her range extends from solo performance to site-specific works, from theater and opera to compositions for orchestra, chamber ensembles, and solo instruments. Monk's sense of scale is equally versatile in works large and small, as varied as Quarry, Education of the Girlchild, Facing North, The Games, and the more recent mercy, impermanence, and Songs of Ascension. Starting with her own ecological consciousness and recent readings in medicine, she was drawn naturally to the dimensions of the cell. "The cell is the fundamental unit of life, but it can also reflect the fundamental units of the universe, so that it's got this sense of us as part of a much bigger whole. I've become fascinated by their wit and their vibrancy. What is going on in the cell is so complex and it's a real prototype of the possibility of what a society could be if you take those same principles and expand them." Monk has always been interested in the reflective power of microcosm and macrocosm, a theme explored in her most recent music-theater offering, On Behalf of Nature (2013).

What is distinctive in the experience of *Cellular Songs* is to watch its ethical fundamentals unfold over time in the performance on multiple levels: structurally, musically, and thematically. A philosophic worldview is viscerally demonstrated in the way the performers use their bodies to generate a social world. The women literally breathe into the space, creating the feeling of radiance. If, for Monk, the cell is the fundamental unit of life, she also affirms her belief in the purity of perception: "Over the last 10 years I've had this impulse to boil down what I am doing to its essence. It is a very worthwhile thing to take on a theme that you can spend time contemplating, a theme that can never be answered and can only be hinted at and glimpsed. Literally, the process of making a piece is the process of contemplating something. To contemplate the ineffable is a wonderful way to spend your life."

Art takes many forms to address global crises as a way of comprehending reality. Monk's work has chosen a path different than the response that is a direct statement of conditions, following instead her Buddhist grounding in art as spiritual practice. Subtly, in recent years, she has been offering audiences a genre that has a certain luminosity and softness, emotion without sentimentality, sweetness along with the dissonance. Her work honors the human need for the feelings of joy and love and beauty. In the integrity of its regard, *Cellular Songs* is of this world but also beyond this world, like all poetic works of the imagination.

Bonnie Marranca is founding publisher and editor of the Obie-Award winning PAJ Publications and PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art, which celebrated its 40th year in 2016. She has written or edited 15 books on theater and the arts.

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#### Acknowledgements

Special thanks for developmental support through creative residencies and work-in-progress showings to Jim Hodges / Queenslab, Ridgewood, NY; Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT; and Grace Farms, New Canaan, CT.

Commissioning funds for the development of Cellular Songs were provided by the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

Cellular Songs is supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, the NYC Department of Cultural Affairs, the Goodale Family Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Howard Gilman Foundation, The James E. Robison Foundation, Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation, True North Fund, Dunlevy Milbank Foundation, Amphion Foundation, Hechinger Family Charitable Gift Fund, Jewish Communal Fund, and The Nathan Cummings Foundation.

Additional support from Cellular Songs Producers Circle: Roberta Amon, Haruno Arai, Katherine Bradford, Jonathan Caplan, Anthony B Creamer III, Molly Davies and Polly Motley, Dick Denison and David Salkin, Bobbie Foshay, Fredericka Foster, Gladstone Gallery, Katherine Goodale, Glenn Fuhrman, Augusta Gross, Agnes Gund, Jim Hodges, Steven Holl, Alex Katz, James Kelly, Katherine Klutznick, Dorothy Lichtenstein, Anthony Meier Fine Arts, Cole Rogers and Carla McGrath, Karen Nielsen, Laura Owens, Stephan Palma, Meredith Palmer, Lora Reynolds, Jonathan F. P. Rose, Jane Saks, Ruth Lande Schuman, Sheehan Gallery, Ellynne Skove, and Frederieke Taylor.

# PROFILES

MEREDITH MONK is a composer, singer, and creator of new opera, music-theater works, films, and installations. Recognized as one of the most unique and influential artists of our time, she is a pioneer in what is now called "extended vocal technique" and "interdisciplinary performance." Her groundbreaking exploration of the voice as an instrument, as an eloquent language in and of itself, expands the boundaries of musical composition, creating landscapes of sound that unearth feelings, energies, and memories for which there are no words. Over the last six decades. Ms. Monk has been hailed as one of NPR's 50 Great Voices and "one of America's coolest composers." She is the recipient of numerous honors including a MacArthur Fellowship and an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters by the Republic of France. Celebrated internationally, her work has been presented at major venues throughout the world. Monk has made more than a dozen recordings, most of which are on the ECM New Series label, including the 2008 GRAMMY®nominated *impermanence*. Selected scores are available through Boosey & Hawkes. Monk is also the subject of two books of interviews, Conversations with Meredith Monk (now in a new expanded edition), by arts critic and Performing Arts Journal editor Bonnie Marranca, and Une voix mystique, by French author Jean-Louis Tallon, released in January. In conjunction with her 50th season of creating and performing, Monk was appointed the 2014–15 Richard and Barbara Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie Hall. Recently she received three of the highest honors bestowed on a living artist in the United States: induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2019), the 2017 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, and a 2015 National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama. Cellular Songs is the second piece

in a trilogy of music-theater works exploring our interdependent relationship with nature, following the highly acclaimed *On Behalf of Nature* (2013) and preceding the recently premiered *Indra's Net* (2021).

**ELLEN FISHER** is a movement-based performance artist whose work integrates gestural actions with visual elements such as film and shadow play. Fisher's performance work is informed by her ethnographic research in the rituals and trance dances of South Asia, particularly Sri Lanka, for which she has received ACCNY grants and a Fulbright. She has also been granted funding for her solo work from the NEA, NYFA, and Jerome Foundation, among others. Fisher began performing with Meredith Monk/The House in the 1970s and continues today. She also teaches and lectures regularly on dance both domestically and internationally.

**KATIE GEISSINGER** has performed with Meredith Monk worldwide, in concert and in theater pieces such as ATLAS, the Grammy-nominated *impermanence, Songs of Ascension* (all on ECM), and The Politics of Quiet, for which she received an ensemble Bessie award. Other credits include *Einstein on the Beach*, Bang on a Can's Obiewinning The Carbon Copy Building, and Baz Luhrmann's La Boheme on Broadway. She recently sang in Julia Wolfe and Anne Bogart's Steel Hammer and Aaron Siegel and Mallory Catlett's Rainbird. Recent engagements include Vivialdi's Gloria at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, and Monk's MEMORY GAME with the Bang on a Can All-Stars at Big Ears, in London and the Hague.

**JOANNA LYNN-JACOBS** (she/they) is a Santa Barbara-raised, Los Angeles-based singer and mover. She specializes in classical, contemporary and mixed-genre opera and music theater and incorporates gaga dance-inspired improvised movement into her artistic practice. She is currently performing the role of Iphigenia of the Sea in the Real Magic and Octopus Theatricals world premier tour of ...(*Iphigenia*) by Wayne Shorter and Esperanza Spaulding. She recently appeared in Ash Fure and LILLETH's performance installation, *Hive Rise*, produced by the Industry and MOCA, and in Long Beach Opera's production of *Stimmung* under the direction of Alexander Gedeon. Previously, she starred in the Los Angeles Philharmonic production of Meredith Monk's *ATLAS: an opera in three parts* directed by Yuval Sharon.

ALLISON SNIFFIN, a multi-instrumentalist, singer, and composer, has been a member of Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble since 1996, performing in The Politics of Quiet, A Celebration Service, Magic Frequencies, mercy, Turtle Dreams, Book of Days (concert version), impermanence, Songs of Ascension, On Behalf of Nature, Cellular Songs and Indra's Net. She has prepared many of Monk's works for publication (Possible Sky, WEAVE, Realm Variations, Stringsongs, Backlight, Night, Piano Albums I and II) and was the arranger of Tokyo ChaCha for Bang on a Can All-Stars (MEMORY GAME, Cantaloupe Music). Recent compositions include Eko (2019) for SSAA and strings, and Paddywhack South (2021) for marimba, piano, and wind guintet.

**YOSHIO YABARA** (costume and scenic design) received a BA in linguistics in his native Japan, and studied stage design at the German state art universities in Stuttgart and West Berlin. He began his professional career as a costume designer for the Oscar-winning film *The Tin Drum*, directed by Volker Schlöndorf. His first work for stage was in the 1970s and early 1980s at the

Schaubühne, West Berlin, where he first met Ms. Monk and collaborated on her opera Vessel. Their subsequent collaborations include ATLAS, the feature film Book of Days, impermanence, Songs of Ascension, On Behalf of Nature, Bloodline Shrine, Cellular Songs and Indra's Net. Mr. Yabara has also worked as a costume designer, stage designer, or art director for many theatrical and film productions in Europe, USA, and Asia, including the Civil Wars, Robert Wilson's King Lear, Oedipus Rex, Madamme de Sade by Tadashi Suzuki, Don Giovanni, Le Nozze di Figaro produced and conducted by Daniel Barenboim at the Staatsoper Unter Den Linden Berlin, Bin ich Schoen?, Nackt and Bliss by Doris Doerrie, among others. www. yoshioyabara.com

JOE LEVASSEUR (lighting design) has collaborated with many dance and performance artists including: Pavel Zuštiak/Palissimo, John Jasperse, Sarah Michelson, Jodi Melnick, Jennifer Monson, Neil Greenberg, and Beth Gill. He lit both Wendy Whelan's 2013 breakout, *Restless Creature*, and her subsequent collaboration with Brian Brooks, *Some of a Thousand Words* (2016). He has received two Bessie awards (including one with Big Dance Theater) and a Knight of Illumination Award for his work on Meredith Monk's *Cellular Songs*. When not designing, Levasseur also engages in a visual art practice. Instagram: @sirjoelevasseur / www.joelevasseur.com

DAN STEARNS (lighting supervisor) is a lighting designer for theater and dance. He has spent much of the past decade touring globally with companies including A.I.M by Kyle Abraham, LeeSaar The Company, and Pavel Zuštiak/ Palissimo, among others. Other collaborations include Bebe Miller, Bill Young/Colleen Thomas & Co., Jane Comfort and Company, Tami Stronach, Paul Bedard/Theater in Asylum, Scott Ebersold, Tara Ahmadinejad/Piehole, and Sanaz Ghajar/Built for Collapse. He is a graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. www.dan-stearns.com

**ELI WALKER** (sound design) has worked in sound production for almost two decades, both as a studio and live engineer. Over the last few years he has toured extensively with Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble. He's also worked in various roles as a designer, tech, monitor engineer, and FOH engineer for Hall & Oates, Yo-Yo Ma & Silkroad Ensemble, Jay-Z, Natalie Merchant, Thomas Rhett, Florence & The Machine, Lisa Hannigan, The National, Mandy Patinkin, Stevie Wonder, and many others.

**MEREDITH BELIS** (production manager supervisor) has freelanced as a production stage manager for the past ten years in NYC. She has worked with artists including Meredith Monk, Wendy Whelan, Neil Greenberg, Dean Moss, James Whiteside, and Maria Kotchetokova. She is very passionate about her work with musicians and dancers and is thrilled to be working with Meredith Monk on this project. She is a graduate of Bennington College and has worked as a production manager and stage manager for Sarah Lawrence College and the New School.

**KEVIN KENKEL** (production stage manager) is a production manager with over a decade of experience working in the performing arts. He has held positions at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the New School, the Museum of Arts and Design, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. He is also a musician and composer. www.kevinkenkel.info

**KATHERINE FREER** (video design) is a multimedia designer working in theatre, events, and installation. Her work is driven by the love of storytelling and belief in its power to shift reality. Frequent collaborators include Ping Chong, Liz Lerman, Tim Bond, Kamilah Forbes, and Talvin Wilks. Katherine is a Helen Hayes nominee and an Innovative Theater Award nominee. www.katherinefreer.com

**JORGE MORALES PICÓ** (video design realization) is a Puerto Rican actor, musician, and sound designer currently based in New York City. Drawing inspiration from both classical theatre and experimental training, his work sits at the intersection of form and relevance. Apart from acting, he has also worked on sound design and music composition in various projects, including *The Burma Project* (dir. Kate Whoriskey) and his work has been featured in places such as Signature Theatre, Chinatown Soup, and NYTW. He is also the founding co-artistic director of *What Will the Neighbors Say?*, an international theatre company committed to provoking questions through untold stories.

**BEN STECHSCHULTE** (cinematography) is a portrait, editorial, and documentary photographer and filmmaker based in the Adirondacks and New York City. His work is seen in publications including *The New York Times Magazine, TIME,* and *New York Magazine. Cellular Songs* marked his first project with Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble. www. benstechschulte.com

KIRSTIN KAPUSTIK (executive director) has worked for more than ten years as a producer, curator, administrator and educator. She obtained a MFA in dance from Florida State University in 2009, specializing in choreography and performance, then taught at Florida State University, Penn State University, and Montclair State University. Kirstin has worked at Center for Performance Research, The Whitney Museum, New York Live Arts, Byrd Hoffman Foundation/ The Watermill Center, Danspace Project, and Chez Bushwick in Brooklyn. Kirstin joined Meredith Monk/The House Foundation for the Arts as executive director in 2017.

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CIYC presents annual winter and spring concerts, performs with area orchestras and choruses, hosts other children's choirs such as the Lithuanian Boys Choir and the American Boychoir, and sings at choral festivals and at community, corporate, and private events. Recent performance highlights include the Midwest premier of Stacey Garrop's *Terra Nostra*, *Britten's Ceremony of Carols*, Puccini's *La Boheme*, and regular collaborations with the Champaign-Urbana Symphony Orchestra. John Frayne of *The News-Gazette* wrote of CIYC's 2019 Orff's *Carmina Burana* collaboration with CU Symphony, "It was the most successful concert of this ensemble in my memory."

Under the artistic direction of Dr. Andrea Solya, the Chorus staff includes Conductors Ann Marie Morrissette and Emily Kuchenbrod, Collaborative Pianist Simon Tiffin, and Administrative Director Kathy Lee. CIYC is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency, and also by individual and corporate donations. For further information, visit www.CIYCsings.org and facebook.com/CIYCsings.

## MEREDITH MONK/THE HOUSE FOUNDATION

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Incorporated in 1971, The House Foundation for the Arts is a nonprofit organization with a mission to cultivate cultural engagement through live music concerts, interdisciplinary performances, exhibitions and educational initiatives. The House Foundation develops, disseminates, promotes and preserves the work of iconic American artist Meredith Monk and members of Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble.

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As a land-grant institution, the University of Illinois has a particular responsibility to acknowledge the peoples of these lands, as well as the histories of dispossession that have allowed for the growth of this institution for the past 150 years. We are also obligated to reflect on and actively address these histories and the role that this university has played in shaping them. This acknowledgement and the centering of Native peoples is a start as we move forward for the next 150 years.

Krannert Center affirms the commitment by the university to move beyond these statements, toward building deeper relationships and taking actions that uphold and preserve Indigenous rights and cultural equity.

As we gather to experience this performance, we have an opportunity to reflect on the ways that systems of oppression have shaped our society. We can work together to create systems that support human dignity, establish equity, strengthen cross-cultural relationships, and draw upon the creative capacity of all people that make up this community, state, nation, and world.



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ANONYMOUS November 2006



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Center for Advanced

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We gratefully acknowledge these individuals and businesses for their generosity and commitment to the arts. Their support enabled the Center to welcome back in-person audiences for Music, Theatre, Dance, and visiting artist productions this past season. Krannert Center continues to make accessibility improvements, co-commission works to help support artist partners, and focus on engagement work within the community. If your membership has lapsed and you'd like to renew, please contact Krannert Center Advancement at 217.333.6700 or advancement@krannertcenter.illinois.edu.

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We work to create the best possible setting for the experiences you seek and find here.

## NECESSARIES

Restrooms are located in the foyers of Foellinger Great Hall, Tryon Festival Theatre, and Colwell Playhouse; the east entrances on the Lobby level; and in each elevator lobby on Level 1 and Level 3. Lobby restrooms and one restroom in each elevator lobby are fully accessible and contain baby-changing stations.

Ushers will be happy to provide you cough drops courtesy of St. Joseph Apothecary, or disposable foam earplugs if the place starts rockin'.

If you or a companion needs medical assistance, contact an usher or other staff member.

Please take a moment before the performance to note the theatre exits nearest to you. If it becomes necessary to evacuate the theatre, please remain calm, follow the instructions of the house staff, and exit in an orderly fashion to the appropriate safe meeting location, which will be announced to you.

# SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

The use of cell phones, cameras, and recording devices during performances is prohibited unless otherwise announced from the stage.

# LATE ARRIVALS

As a courtesy to performers and audience members, latecomers will be seated only at times selected in advance by the artist. Should you find that you've arrived late to a performance, our Patron Services staff will keep you informed about the earliest seating opportunity.

# LOST ITEMS

If you are in need of Lost and Found, please visit the Patron Services counter. We will do our best to reunite object and owner!

# TICKET RETURNS

If you find you can't attend a performance, please contact the Ticket Office in advance, preferably by 6pm the day before the performance (kran-tix@illinois.edu or 217.333.6280). We never charge a handling fee on ticket transactions.

# SERVICES

Krannert Center for the Performing Arts is committed to making experiences accessible for all patrons, and we are delighted to provide a number of services to assist you. Krannert Center is equipped with an assisted listening system, wheelchair-accessible and no-step/few-step seating, and large-print programs, Braille programs, and American Sign Language interpreters are available with three weeks' advance notice.

For assistance regarding your visit, please email: Para ayuda en relación con su visita, favor de enviar un email a:

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