

FOR IMMEDIATE
RELEASE

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DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM

CELEBRATES ITS 35TH SEASON IN BERKELEY WITH THE BAY AREA PREMIERE OF
MICHAEL SMUIN'S *ST. LOUIS WOMAN: A BLUES BALLET*; THE WEST COAST PREMIERE
OF SIR FREDERIC ASHTON'S "MEDITATION" FROM *THAÏS*; AND GEORGE BALANCHINE'S
CONCERTO BAROCCO

JANUARY 28 – FEBRUARY 1 IN ZELLERBACH HALL

SCHOOLTIME: Special 1-hour show for students, Thursday, January 29 at 11:00 a.m.

**CONVERSATION: Dance Theatre of Harlem Artistic Director Arthur Mitchell speaks with
moderators Brad Rosenstein and Sheryl Flatow at San Francisco Performing Arts Library
Wednesday, January 21 at 7:00 p.m.**

BERKELEY, December 19, 2003 – The passion and precision of one of the world's foremost ballet companies, **Dance Theatre of Harlem (DTH)**, returns to Cal Performances for five performances **Wednesday, January 28 - Sunday, February 1** in Zellerbach Hall. Under the artistic direction of choreographer **Arthur Mitchell**, the company has for 35 years set standards for neoclassical ballet, and is recognized as the most successful African-American ballet company in history. Highlighting the Berkeley performances will be the Bay Area premiere of *St. Louis Woman: A Blues Ballet*, a piece choreographed specifically for the company by **Michael Smuin**. Based on the Johnny Mercer/Harold Arlen 1946 musical of the same name, the score features such timeless classics as "Come Rain or Come Shine" and "Any Place I Hang My Hat Is Home." Also included is Sir Frederic Ashton's "**Meditation**" from *Thaïs*, set to the "Meditation" passage from Jules Massenet's opera *Thaïs*. It is the first Ashton ballet to be added to the DTH repertoire, and one of the choreographer's most acclaimed romantic duets. George Balanchine's *Concerto Barocco*, set to Bach's *Concerto in D minor for Two Violins*, completes the program.

Dance Theatre of Harlem will give a *SchoolTime* performance for Bay Area students Thursday, January 29 at 11:00 a.m. in Zellerbach Hall. In addition, DTH Artistic Director **Arthur Mitchell** will speak with Brad Rosenstein and Sheryl Flatow of the San Francisco Performing Arts Library (PALM) about his stellar career, particularly the vital impact of working with George

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Balanchine. The conversation takes place at PALM (401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco)
Wednesday, January 21 at 7:00 p.m.

PROGRAM

The Bay Area premiere of *St. Louis Woman: A Blues Ballet* opens Dance Theatre of Harlem's Berkeley engagement. "The most ambitious ballet we've ever attempted...I think it is destined to become another signature piece for us," comments director Arthur Mitchell. Choreographed by **Michael Smuin**, former director of the San Francisco Ballet, and based on an original concept by **Jack Wrangler**, the work is a one-act ballet reinterpreting the 1946 musical *St. Louis Woman*, featuring the music of Harold Arlen and lyrics by Johnny Mercer. "Gorgeous entertainment," wrote Anna Kisselgoff of *The New York Times* of the sold-out American premiere in July 2003, "No contribution in this collaboration is minor." Based on the basic plot of the musical—a lovers' feud set against the backdrop of a St. Louis racetrack and gambling saloon—Smuin deftly blends jazz, social dancing and ballet vocabulary to capture the musical high spirits of the 1940s and showcase the energy and supreme talent of the DTH dancers. Costumes by **Willa Kim**, lighting by **Jules Fisher**, and sets by **Tony Walton** create a rollicking saloon atmosphere and vibrant display of racehorses in motion. "A visually dazzling fantasy...the Harold Arlen-Johnny Mercer score for *St. Louis Woman* is terrific...[with] the dancers neither last nor least contributing dynamic performances," wrote *The New York Times*. The program continues with Dance Theatre of Harlem's West Coast premiere of "**Meditation**" from *Thaïs*, Sir Frederic Ashton's elegant and stylistically oriental pas de deux set to music from Jules Massenet's opera *Thaïs*. **Anthony Dowell**, who danced the ballet for Britain's Royal Ballet when it was first presented in 1971, staged and costumed the piece for DTH. "A sparkling, romantic work with lush passages that Ms. [Melissa] Morrissey and her partner Duncan Cooper handled sumptuously," wrote the *New York Sun* of the premiere.

And the program would not be complete without a work by George Balanchine, and for their 35th anniversary season in Berkeley Dance Theatre of Harlem delivers *Concerto Barocco*, a ballet in three parts set to Bach's *Concerto in D minor for Two Violins*. "The only preparation possible for this ballet is a knowledge of its music, for *Concerto Barocco* has no 'subject matter' beyond the score to which it is danced and the particular dancers who execute it," wrote

Balanchine of the piece, which was first presented in 1948. “The ballet tries to interest the audience only by its dancing, its treatment of the music, just as Baroque art and architecture interested people not because of their subjects but because of the decorative treatment that embellished those subjects.” An important guardian of the Balanchine legacy, DTH Artistic Director **Arthur Mitchell** was the first African-American male dancer to become a permanent member of a major ballet company when he joined New York City Ballet under Balanchine in 1956. He went on to become one of the company’s most popular soloists, performing many roles choreographed specifically for him by Balanchine.

DANCE THEATRE OF HARLEM

In the summer of 1968 Arthur Mitchell began offering classes at the dance department of the Harlem School of the Arts in a remodeled garage (leaving the door open to encourage new students to enter). The following year, with 250 students and a matching grant of \$150,000 from the Ford Foundation, Dance Theatre of Harlem was incorporated. In 1969, when Mitchell was at the height of his powers as a standout principal dancer with the New York City Ballet, he abruptly quit, deciding instead to act on his dream of providing the children of Harlem with the rare opportunity he had been given in the professional world of ballet. At the time, few schools offered ballet classes to African Americans, and even fewer ballet companies had black members. Co-founded with Karel Shook, DTH was Mitchell and Shook’s personal commitment to the people of Harlem following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

“One of ballet’s most exciting undertakings,” *The New York Times* wrote in 1971, Dance Theatre of Harlem has grown into a world-renowned, multicultural company with a diverse repertory of well over 100 works. The dancers have performed in 40 countries on six continents, including becoming the first arts group to tour China in November 2000, presenting to the country its first performances of *Firebird*. Among other recent touring highlights was DTH’s return to England in 2002 after a 14-year hiatus, opening to critical acclaim in London and Manchester, where they won the Manchester Evening News Award in Dance. Numerous awards and honors have been bestowed upon DTH over the years from political, civic, and educational organizations, including the National Medal of Arts and the Kennedy Center Honors, attesting to Mitchell’s great accomplishments.

ARTHUR MITCHELL

Born the son of a Harlem janitor in New York City in 1934, Arthur Mitchell began his dance training at New York's High School for the Performing Arts, where he became the first male student to win the coveted Annual Dance Award. Mitchell met Karel Shook and, through him, Lincoln Kirstein, director of the School of American Ballet, who offered Mitchell a scholarship. Within a few years he became a leading dancer with the New York City Ballet, and during his 15-year career with the company, Mitchell electrified audiences in a broad spectrum of roles, garnering particular acclaim in Balanchine's *Agon* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (both created for him), *Western Symphony* and *Bugaku*, and in Jerome Robbins' *Afternoon of a Faun*.

Among the many honors and awards conferred on Mitchell are the 1997 Americans for the Arts' Arts in Education Award, the 1996 Independent Sector's John W. Gardner Leadership Award, the 1987 National Medal of Arts, the highest honor awarded by the President of the United States in the arts and humanities, the coveted MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, the School of American Ballet Lifetime Achievement Award, the Barnard Medal of Distinction from Columbia University, and the 1994 Award for Distinguished Service to the Arts from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 1993, Mitchell was one of the youngest recipients of the Kennedy Center Honor. He has been inducted into the NAACP's Image Awards Hall of Fame and the Cornelius Vanderbilt Whitney Hall of Fame at the National Museum of Dance in Saratoga, New York.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Dance Theatre of Harlem, Wednesday-Friday, January 28-30 at 8:00 p.m.** and **Saturday, January 31 at 2:00 p.m. & 8:00 p.m.** in **Zellerbach Hall** are priced at **\$32.00, \$42.00, and \$52.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded).

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Wells Fargo is the corporate sponsor of Cal Performances' presentation of Dance Theatre of Harlem.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Wednesday, January 21 at 7:00 p.m.
CONVERSATION

San Francisco Performing Arts Library
401 Van Ness Avenue, San Francisco

Program:

Arthur Mitchell, founder and artistic director of Dance Theatre of Harlem, will speak with moderator Brad Rosenstein and curator Sheryl Flatow about his stellar career, particularly the vital impact of working with Balanchine. Video clips of Mr. Mitchell's work will be shown as well. Reservations are required; please call (415) 255-4800 for ticket information.

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Wednesday-Friday, January 28-30 at 8:00 p.m.
Saturday, January 31 at 2:00 p.m. & 8:00 p.m.
Sunday, February 1, at 3:00 p.m. [FF]

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

Dance

Dance Theatre of Harlem

Program:

St. Louis Woman: A Blues Ballet (2003): music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by Johnny Mercer;
choreography by Michael Smuin (Bay Area premiere)
"Meditation" from *Thaïs* (1971): music by Jules Massenet, "Meditation" from the opera *Thaïs*;
choreography by Sir Frederic Ashton (West Coast premiere)
Concerto Barocco (1970): music by J.S. Bach, *Concerto in D minor for Two Violins*;
choreography by George Balanchine

Tickets: \$32.00, \$42.00, and \$52.00, available through the Cal Performances ticket office at Zellerbach Hall; (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at www.calperfs.berkeley.edu; and at the door.

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Thursday, January 29 at 11:00 a.m.
SCHOOLTIME PERFORMANCE

Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

Dance Theatre of Harlem

Program: One of the world's foremost ballet companies, **Dance Theatre of Harlem**, will give a one-hour demonstration on the history of ballet and its influence on today's popular dance. Company members will also perform works from their current repertoire.

Tickets: \$3.00 per student or adult chaperone, available in advance only through Cal Performances at (510) 642-1082. *SchoolTime* performances are open to students in grades 2 through 12 in Bay Area public and private schools. Supplemental study guides for the classroom are provided. For more information about the *SchoolTime* program, contact the *SchoolTime* coordinator at Cal Performances by email at eduprograms@calperfs.berkeley.edu, or by phone at (510) 642-0212.

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