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CONTACT:

Lisle Peterson (510) 643-6714
lisle@calperfs.berkeley.edu
Christina Kellogg (510) 642-9121
ckellogg@calperfs.berkeley.edu

**MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY
RETURNS TO CAL PERFORMANCES FEBRUARY 6 & 7 IN ZELLERBACH HALL**

**FEBRUARY 6 PROGRAM FEATURES *BIPED* AND *GROUND LEVEL OVERLAY*;
FEBRUARY 7 INCLUDES *INTERSCAPE* AND *SOUND DANCE***

BERKELEY, December 22, 2003 – One of the most creative and influential artistic figures of our time, **Merce Cunningham** returns to Berkeley when Cal Performances presents the **Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Friday & Saturday, February 6 & 7 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall. The performances feature two distinct programs of four works in the Cunningham canon, including the return of the mixed-media tour-de-force *Biped* and the romantic vision of *Ground Level Overlay* (February 6); and *Interscape*, performed against a luminous painted backdrop by Robert Rauschenberg, and a revival of Cunningham's 1975 opus, *Sounddance* (February 7). "That Mr. Cunningham has changed the way we look at dance is now a given," comments Anna Kisselgoff of *The New York Times*. In 2003 the Merce Cunningham Dance Company celebrated its 50th season, and this visionary American choreographer has never ceased exploring and teaching the possibilities of dance, from the time he began to create pieces in 1943, to the present day.

PROGRAMS

The February 6 program features the return of *Biped*, which received its world premiere at Cal Performances in April 1999. Co-commissioned by Cal Performances, the creation of *Biped* demonstrated Cunningham's dedication to the capabilities of technology to create new dance forms. Through the process of motion capture, sensors on dancers' bodies transmit the information of their movements to a computer. **Shelley Eshkar** and **Paul Kaiser** of New York's multi-media art studio Riverbed then transformed the movements digitally into three-dimensional projections that are the ghostly figures that "accompany" the live dancers on stage. *Biped*'s hypnotic score for cello, guitar and bass clarinet is by **Gavin Bryars**, and **Suzanne Gallo** created the work's shimmering, incandescent

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costumes. Of *Biped*'s world premiere, the *San Francisco Examiner* observed: "A superb marriage of technology and dance...*Biped* again attests to Cunningham's eternal youthfulness and divinely inspired curiosity."

1995's *Ground Level Overlay* completes the February 6 program. To create the unusual score for the piece, musician and composer **Stuart Dempster** recorded 10 trombonists positioned deep inside a 2-million gallon water tank, later adding conch shells and Tibetan cymbals to the tones and sound reverberations of the trombones. Recently staged very successfully for the Rambert Dance Company in England by MCDC members Robert Swinston and Jeannie Steele, *Ground Level Overlay* is considered one of Cunningham's most romantic and deeply emotional works. "[It is] an unusually tender piece in the Cunningham oeuvre. Pas de deux is the work's major motif, the theme on which Cunningham spins his endless variations," writes *Danceview*. The imposing décor is a suspended three-dimensional sculpture by artist **Leonardo Drew**, with costumes designed by **Suzanne Gallo**, and lighting by **Aaron Copp**.

Created in 2000, Cunningham's work *Interscape* may be performed to **John Cage**'s solo for cello, *One*⁸, the eighth piece Cage wrote in his series of number selections for a single performer, or it may also be performed to *108*, an orchestral piece composed for one hundred eight musicians. For the February 7 performance of *Interscape* at Zellerbach Hall, Cage's *One*⁸ will be performed live by solo cellist. Décor and costumes by **Robert Rauschenberg** feature a vivid, imagistic silk-screen back drop—entitled *Interscape Mirage*—and 14 silk-screened unitards, each an individual work of art in its own right. Lighting for *Interscape* is by **Aaron Copp**. Accompanying *Interscape* on the February 7 program is the Cunningham's 1975 opus *Sounddance*, "a turbulent, explosive masterwork" (*The New York Times*) set to a high-velocity electronic score by **David Tudor**, performed by **Takehisa Kosugi**. A fan of James Joyce, Cunningham found his inspiration for this work in the line "In the beginning was the sounddance," from *Finnegan's Wake*. Lighting and stage design are by **Mark Lancaster**.

MERCE CUNNINGHAM

“It was Mr. Cunningham’s vision,” wrote James Klosty, early chronicler of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, “to reconcile precision and the unpredictable.” Following his singular path, Merce Cunningham has achieved a stature in dance that makes him—along with only Balanchine and Graham—one of the three most influential choreographers of the 20th and now 21st centuries, creating work “that has expanded the ways artists and audiences think about dance and even movement itself” (*The New York Times*). He performed as a soloist in Graham’s company from 1939 to 1945, presenting his first independently choreographed solo concert with John Cage in New York in 1944. He presented annual concerts, by himself or with an ad hoc group of dancers, until the formation of Merce Cunningham Dance Company in 1953, and since that time has choreographed nearly two hundred works. Always an innovator and advocate of the avant-garde, Cunningham has championed collaborative art throughout his career, significant among which are those works he created with John Cage, Isamu Noguchi, Morton Feldman, Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Charles Atlas. A significant Cunningham/Atlas collaboration is a film documentary entitled *Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime of Dance*, which aired on public television in 2001. *Merce Cunningham: 50 Years*, is a 320-page literary and photographic retrospective compiled by writer and dance historian David Vaughan, and a personal collection of Cunningham’s animal and plant sketches, *Other Animals: Drawings and Journals*, was published last year by Aperture. The Library of Congress in its bicentennial year (2000) recognized Cunningham as a “Living Legend” for the lasting contribution the choreographer has made to the nation’s artistic heritage. In 2003 he was made an Officer of the French Legion of Honor.

In over a half-century of choreographic work, Merce Cunningham credits four major influences that have led to his artistic identity. The first came in his work with John Cage, whereby the two established a system of creating dance and music independently of the confines of the other’s principles. The second phase began with the use of chance procedures: working out a large number of dance phrases separately, then applying chance to discover the continuity in a particular piece of work. Next, Cunningham explored video and film, the challenges and opportunities presented by the eye of the camera. And finally, the use of the computer, which enabled the choreographer to discover boundless possibilities in exercises, phrases, rhythmic structure, and pace.

TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for the **Merce Cunningham Dance Company** on **Friday & Saturday, February 6 & 7** at Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$26.00, \$36.00** and **\$46.00**. 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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San Francisco Chronicle, *San Francisco* magazine, and KDFC Classical 102.1 FM are season media sponsors of Cal Performances' 2003/04 performing arts season.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Dance

Merce Cunningham Dance Company

Program:

Friday, February 6, 8:00 p.m.

Biped (1999): music by Gavin Bryars, *Biped*; décor by Paul Kaiser and Shelly Eshkar; choreography by Merce Cunningham

Ground Level Overlay (1995): music by Stuart Dempster, *Underground Overlays*; décor by Leonardo Drew; choreography by Merce Cunningham

Saturday, February 7 at 8:00 p.m.

Interscape (2000): music by John Cage, *One*⁸; décor by Robert Rauschenberg (*Interscape Mirage*); choreography by Merce Cunningham

Sounddance (1975): music by David Tudor, *Toneburst*; décor by Mark Lancaster; choreography by Merce Cunningham

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