

DeBartolo Performing Arts Center
Presenting Series

Big Dance Theater

October 24-25 at 7:30 P.M.

Philbin Studio Theatre

Made possible by the Gary A. and Peggy A. Masse Endowment for Excellence

University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Indiana

CAGE SHUFFLE

Created and performed by **Paul Lazar**

Music composed and performed by **Lea Bertucci**

Choreography by **Annie-B Parson**

Movement Coach **Elizabeth DeMent**

Producer **Aaron Mattocks**

Production Manager/Lighting Supervisor **Randi Rivera**

Accumulation (1971)

Choreography by **Trisha Brown**

Choreography Reconstruction by **Brandi Norton**

Music by **The Grateful Dead, "Uncle John's Band"**

INDETERMINACY by John Cage. Copyright 2009 by Henmar Press Inc. Reprinted by agreement with Wesleyan University Press and John Cage Trust. All rights reserved. Used by permission of C.F. Peters Corporation.

Cagey Cage

The twentieth-century American composer John Cage completed the work on which Big Dance Theater's *Cage Shuffle* is based, *Indeterminacy*, in 1958 and recorded it the following year for Smithsonian Folkways. *Indeterminacy* was a watershed moment for Cage; Big Dance Theater's reimagining of it for live performance invokes the composer's revolutionary spirit by doubling down on it.

Cage is known best for his reconceptualization of what it means to compose and perform. Cage studied composition for two years in the 1930s with Arnold Schoenberg. In Schoenberg's estimation, Cage had little formal musical talent—an opinion he shared with Cage with his usual bluntness. Cage seems not to have been

disheartened; indeed, one might say that Schoenberg's judgment opened one door for Cage by closing another. Because he would never count as a harmonic innovator, Cage turned his attention to performance-oriented aspects of music. Beginning in the late 1930s Cage came to concentrate on scoring for dance, first in San Francisco and then at the Cornish College of Art in Seattle, where he met the dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham. Cage moved to New York in the 1940's, where after a time he was able to study with D. T. Suzuki, the most important expositor of Zen Buddhism in the West, then teaching at Columbia University. It is not going too far to say that Cage's exposure to Buddhism was as important for his work in the 1950s and 60s as was his musical activity.

Drawing from Zen, Cage was convinced that art at its most potent taps into a creative energy that courses through all of nature. In order to engage this power in its primordial form, the artist must give herself over to it and become a channel for its transmission. This led Cage to hold that the standard Modernist conception of how best to be artistically creative, through improvisation, was on precisely the wrong track. By its very nature improvisation is bound to the subjective preferences of performers and is captive to habit—two things that Zen teaches hinder enlightenment. Artistic creativity is not personal assertion by way of the imagination; rather, it is a matter of letting the creative patterns in nature coalesce on their own via performance. The performer is like a Stoic sage or a Zen master; she patterns herself after nature in order to be part of its self-creative flow. The surprise and punch of art is, accordingly, not a result of the artist's prerogative. Instead, it is provided by the unpredictable interaction of glancing aspects of creativity. *Indeterminacy* is one of Cage's most successful attempts to create in this mode.

Cage wrote ninety brief prose texts that form one of the two main elements of the work. The selection of the texts, as well as the order in which they are read out, is determined by what Cage called a 'chance procedure', a procedure that inevitably has random and unforeseeable results—like the rolling of dice. (Cage was drawn to the ancient Chinese divination system *I Ching* for such purposes, but he used other means as well.) Each text must be read in precisely one minute, regardless of its word-length. The other main component of the piece is musical—the performance of a combination of acoustic and electronic music. The musician and reader are situated in separate rooms out of the hearing of one another. The convergence of these two 'sectors', text and music, is contingent—that they converge at all is planned, but the way that they converge is not. Moreover—and this is crucial for Cage—the point of intersection of the structures is the audience, not the performers. There are multiple indeterminacies at work: (1) the piece as a whole is indeterminate for each performer, since they cannot hear it developing as a whole, (2) the music and text are indeterminate with regard to each other, as the precise point of their intersection is not dependent on being fixed compositionally ahead of time, but rather occurs randomly in the course of performance, (3) the performers are indeterminate with regard to one another, as they cannot adapt what they are performing in response, and (4) every performance will be utterly different from its predecessors and successors (unless by some miracle everything interlocked in exactly the same way), so that performances are indeterminate with regard to one another. It may be a truism that no two performances of the same piece are ever alike. In the case of improvised art, that is a banal truth. But consider even the case where performances are pinned down to either a score or script: cases of non-improvisatory music or dramatic performance. What one means by saying that no two performances are alike is that there are nuances of interpretation that distinguish one performance from an-

other, even where performance is based in a text or score. In such cases the score or text serves as a fixed point of interpretation—the notes played in the rival interpretations represent the same pitches, the orchestration is alike, the dialogue is spoken correctly, etc. The nuance of interpretation plays out against the background of the stability of the work. In *Indeterminacy*, none of this is the case, and that it is not the case is precisely the point. Once one arrives at this thought, it seems all but inevitable to allow that Cage is challenging the very idea of a work, the very idea of a static core to art. If anything, the work is the performance itself, or perhaps the sum of all possible performances of it.

Cage Shuffle slyly updates and further complicates these multiple indeterminacies. In it, Paul Lazar acts twenty-two of the original Cage texts as he hears them through an earbud from an iPod Shuffle. The texts here are fixed in their selection, but the shuffle technology plays the aleatory role of making sure that Lazar does not know the order in which they will come. This is one part of a double entendre: the 'shuffle' is the shuffling of texts. As Lazar recites the texts, he dances the choreography of Annie-B Parson. This provides the second part of the meaning of the title of the piece: the 'shuffle' is the movement accompanying the texts. The dance is fixed, the text-order is not; so, again, the precise point of intersection of text with movement is neither compositionally prescribed nor a matter of improvisation. Lazar then repeats the sequence of movement to a soundscape by the composer Lea Bertucci, allowing the audience to experience the movement without text and compare it on the go to the movement with text. This introduces indeterminacy along a further dimension. Identical bodily movements with roughly the same duration in time are experienced as differently paced when paired with, on the one hand, text and, on the other, music.

As a coda to the Cage material, Lazar performs *Accumulation*, a short dance by Trisha Brown set to the Grateful Dead song 'Uncle John's Band'. Brown, who died earlier this year, was exposed to Cage's work when she moved to New York in the early-1960s and joined the Judson Dance Theater. Judson was more a collective than a company; its guiding spirit was Robert Dunn, a musician who had attended some of Cage's seminars at the New School for Social Research and wished to investigate the application of Cage's approach to dance. Brown was conversant in Dunn's approach and would later choreograph to music by Cage. After nearly a decade with Judson, Brown formed her own group and brought out *Accumulation* almost immediately. It remains for many her signature work. In it Brown pares down movement to simple flexions, which the performer dances by adding movements sequentially one on top of another, each time revisiting the series prior to the addition. The resulting repetition—the movement forward, back, and then forward anew—is intended to free movement from reasons to move beyond the making of the movement. It is a nested gathering together of motion, in which individual movements are basic even as they are incorporated and reincorporated into the expanding series. What emerges is absolute attentiveness—an unalloyed, trancelike being-present to oneself through movement. Cage and Brown both challenge the inessential in art by rethinking artistic fundamentals: Cage by opening art out to indeterminacy, Brown by pushing determinacy beyond itself.

- Fred Rush, Department of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame

Big Dance Theater

Artistic Directors **Annie-B Parson and Paul Lazar**

Co-Founder **Molly Hickok**

Executive Director **Aaron Mattocks**

Finance and Development Manager **Sara Procopio**

Associate Producer **Jason Collins**

Administrative Management **ArtsPool**

Paul Lazar is a founding member and co-artistic director, along with Annie-B Parson, of Big Dance Theater. He has co-directed and acted in works for Big Dance since 1991, including commissions from the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Walker Art Center, Dance Theater Workshop, Classic Stage Company, and Japan Society. Outside of Big Dance, Paul directed Howard Fishman's *A Star Has Burnt My Eye* at BAM in 2016, Christina Masciotti's *Social Security* at the Bushwick Starr in 2015, *Elephant Room* at St. Ann's Warehouse for the company Rainpan 43 in 2012, and Young Jean Lee's OBIE Award-winning, *We're Gonna Die* in 2011. He directed a new version of *We're Gonna Die* in 2015, featuring David Byrne, at the Meltdown Festival in London. He also directed *Bodycast: An Artist Lecture* by Suzanne Bocanegra starring Frances McDormand for the 2014 BAM Next Wave Festival; and *Major Bang* for The Foundry Theatre at St. Ann's Warehouse. Paul has performed with the Wooster Group in *Brace Up!*, *Emperor Jones*, *North Atlantic*, and *The Hairy Ape*. Other stage acting credits include *Tamburlaine* at Theatre for a New Audience, Young Jean Lee's *Lear*, *The Three Sisters* at Classic Stage Company, Richard Maxwell's *Cowboys and Indians* at Soho Rep, *Richard III* at Classic Stage Company, *Svejk* at Theatre for a New Audience, Irene Fornes' *Mud* at the Signature Theater, and Mac Wellman's *1965 UU*. He has acted in over 30

feature films, including *Snowpiercer*, *The Host*, *Mickey Blue Eyes*, *Silence of the Lambs*, *Beloved*, *Lorenzo's Oil*, and *Philadelphia*. His awards with co-artistic director Annie-B Parson include two Bessies (2010, 2002), the Jacob's Pillow Creativity Award in 2007, and the Prelude Festival's Frankie Award in 2014, as well as an OBIE Award for Big Dance in 2000. Paul currently teaches at New York University. He has also taught at Yale, Rutgers, The William Esper Studio, and The Michael Howard Studio.

Lea Bertucci is an American sound artist, composer and performer whose work describes relationships between acoustic phenomena and biological resonance. Her work often incorporates multi-channel speaker arrays, electroacoustic feedback, extended instrumental/vocal technique, and tape collage. As an instrumentalist, she takes an idiosyncratic approach to the amplification of woodwind instruments, creating organic yet electrified sonic intervention. Her debut solo LP, *Resonance Shapes*, was released in 2013 on the Obsolete Units label and has been praised by *A Closer Listen* as "A grand exploration of the possibilities inherent in sound." She is a 2016 MacDowell Fellow in composition and a 2015 Issue Project Room Artist-in-Residence. Her discography includes a number of solo and collaborative releases on various underground independent labels in the U.S. and Europe, most recently, *Axis/Atlas*, on Clandestine Composition.

Annie-B Parson co-founded the OBIE Award-winning Big Dance Theater in 1991 with Molly Hickok; the company recently celebrated their 25th anniversary at the Kitchen, performed at the Menil Collection, BAM, Berlin, and was honored by PS122. Parson has also made dances for the work of Mikhail Baryshnikov, David Byrne, David Bowie, St. Vincent, Laurie Anderson, Salt 'n Pepa, Jonathan Demme, Ivo van Hove, Sarah Ruhl, Lucas Hnath, Wendy Whelan, David Lang, and Nico Muhly. Her awards include two Bessies, Gug-

genheim Fellowship, Duke Artist Award, Franky Award, USA Artist Award, Foundation for Contemporary Art, and an Olivier nomination.

Trisha Brown (Trisha Brown Dance Company Founding Artistic Director and Choreographer) was born and raised in Aberdeen, Washington, graduated from Mills College in Oakland, California, and studied with Anna Halprin before moving to New York City in 1961. Brown, along with like-minded artists, pushed the limits of choreography and changed modern dance forever. In 1970, Brown formed her company and explored the terrain of her adoptive SoHo. She engaged collaborators who are themselves leaders in music, theater, and the visual arts, including visual artists Robert Rauschenberg, Donald Judd, and Elizabeth Murray, and musicians Laurie Anderson, John Cage, and Alvin Curran, among many others. With these partners, Brown has created an exceptionally varied body of over 100 dance works. Brown is also an accomplished visual artist; her drawings have been seen in exhibitions, galleries, and museums throughout the world, she is represented by Sik-kema Jenkins & Co. in NYC. Trisha Brown is the first woman choreographer to receive the coveted MacArthur Foundation Fellowship "Genius Award." She has been awarded many other honors including five fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Bessie Lifetime Achievement Award, the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, and the Dance/USA Honors Award. She has been named a Veuve Clicquot Grande Dame, and a Commandeur dans l'Ordre des Arts et Lettres by the government of France.

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