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# Cellular Songs

BAM Harvey Theater

Mar 14—17 at 7:30pm; Mar 18 at 3pm

Running time: approx. one hour & 15 mins, no intermission

## **Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble**

Conceived, composed, and directed by **Meredith Monk**

Costume design and scenography by **Yoshio Yabara**

Lighting design by **Joe Levasseur**

Sound design by **Eli Walker**

Video scenarios by **Meredith Monk**

Video design by **Katherine Freer**

Cinematography by **Ben Stechschulte**

*Season Sponsor:*

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*Leadership support for dance at BAM provided by  
The Harkness Foundation for Dance.*

*Leadership Support for the Winter/Spring Season  
provided by the Howard Gilman Foundation.*

*Major support for dance at BAM provided by  
The SHS Foundation.*

*This presentation of Cellular Songs is supported by  
the BAM Harvey Fund.*



Jo Stewart. Photo: Julieta Cervantes

### **Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble**

**Ellen Fisher** voice

**Katie Geissinger** voice

**Meredith Monk** voice, keyboard

**Allison Sniffin** voice, piano, violin

**Jo Stewart** voice

with members of

**Young People's Chorus of New York City**

**Elizabeth Nuñez** Associate Artistic Director

Dea Elezaj, Naya Griles, Maddalena Honablue, Leda Kahn,

Milena Manocchia, Isabel Medina, Jasmine Neal, Adedayo Perkovich,

Thalia St. Hubert, Skye Tarshis, Kaia Yamaguchi

Production/Stage manager **Meredith Belis**

Company manager/Rehearsal assistant **José Rivera, Jr.**

Score preparation **Allison Sniffin**

*Cellular Songs* installation conceived by **Meredith Monk**

Installation design by **Meredith Monk, Yoshio Yabara**

Video design and editing by **Katherine Freer**

Cinematography by **Ben Stechschulte**

All music compositions © Meredith Monk (ASCAP)

Meredith Monk would like to acknowledge and thank the performers and designers for their invaluable contributions in the development of *Cellular Songs*.

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.

These performances of *Cellular Songs* are dedicated to the memory of  
Frederieke Sanders Taylor (1940—2018).





Clockwise from center: Meredith Monk, Katie Geissinger, Ellen Fisher, Allison Sniffin, Jo Stewart. Photo: Julieta Cervantes

**MEREDITH MONK** (composer, director, performer) is a composer, singer, director/choreographer, 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.” Celebrated internationally, Monk’s work has been presented at major venues throughout the world. In conjunction with her 50th Season of creating and performing, she was appointed the 2014—15 Richard and Barbara Debs Composer’s Chair at Carnegie Hall. Recently Monk received two of the highest honors bestowed to a living artist in the United States—the 2017 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize and a 2015 National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama. In 1968 Monk founded The House, a company dedicated to an interdisciplinary approach to performance. As a pioneer in site-specific work, she has created such works as *Juice: A Theatre Cantata In 3 Installments* (1969) and *Ascension Variations* (2009) for the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *American Archeology #1: Roosevelt Island* (1994), and *Songs of Ascension* (2008) for visual artist Ann Hamilton’s *tower*. Monk’s award-winning films, including *Ellis Island* (1981) and her first feature, *Book of Days* (1988), have screened at numerous film festivals and on PBS. Her short films and several of her drawings are also included in MoMA’s collection. In 1978 Monk founded Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble to expand her musical textures and forms. She has made more than a dozen recordings, most of which are on the ECM New Series label, including the 2008 Grammy-nominated *impermanence* and the highly acclaimed *On Behalf of Nature* (2016). Selected scores of her work are available through Boosey & Hawkes. In addition to her numerous vocal pieces, music-theater works, and operas, Monk has created vital new repertoire for orchestra, chamber ensembles, and solo instruments, with commissions from Carnegie Hall, Michael Tilson Thomas/San Francisco Symphony and New World Symphony, Kronos Quartet, St. Louis

Symphony Orchestra, and Los Angeles Master Chorale, among others. Her music can also be heard in films by such directors as Terrence Malick, Jean-Luc Godard, David Byrne, and the Coen Brothers. Since graduating from Sarah Lawrence College in 1964, Monk has received numerous honors including a MacArthur Fellowship, two Guggenheim Fellowships, three Obies (including for Sustained Achievement), and two Bessie Awards, including for Sustained Creative Achievement. More recently Monk was named one of National Public Radio’s 50 Great Voices, the 2012 Composer of the Year by *Musical America*, and an Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters by the Republic of France. She also received a 2012 Doris Duke Artist Award, a 2011 Yoko Ono Lennon Courage Award for the Arts, and an inaugural USA Prudential Fellow Award in 2006. Monk holds honorary doctor of arts degrees from Bard College, Boston Conservatory, Cornish College of the Arts, The Juilliard School, Lafayette College, Mount Holyoke College, San Francisco Art Institute, and University of the Arts. Among the many highlights of Monk’s performances from the last 20 years is her *Vocal Offering for His Holiness the Dalai Lama* as part of the World Festival of Sacred Music in Los Angeles in October, 1999. Several marathon performances of her work have taken place in New York at the World Financial Center (1991), Lincoln Center Music Festival (2000), Carnegie’s Zankel Hall (2005 and 2015), Symphony Space (2008), and the Whitney Museum (2009). In February 2012, a remix and interpretations cd, *MONK MIX*, was released, featuring 25 artists from the jazz, pop, deejay, and new music worlds. She is the subject of two recent books of interviews, *Conversations with Meredith Monk*, by arts critic and *Performing Arts Journal* editor Bonnie Marranca, and *Une voix mystique*, by French author Jean-Louis Tallon. *Cellular Songs* marks her 11th production with BAM; her most recent productions at BAM include *impermanence*, 2006; *Songs of Ascension*, 2009; and *On Behalf of Nature*, 2014.

**ELLEN FISHER** (performer) is an interdisciplinary artist whose work combines dance with visual components. She began performing with Meredith Monk/The House in the 70s, in such works as *The Plateau Series* and *Recent Ruins*, and more recently has appeared in *mercy*, *impermanence*, *Songs of Ascension*, and *On Behalf of Nature*. Fisher's performance work is informed by ethnographic research in trance dance and rituals of South Asia, particularly Sri Lanka. Since 1981, she has toured solo work throughout Europe and the US, also directing large ensemble work reinterpreting myths and legends. Her film work, including documentaries, has been included in festivals throughout the world. She has received funding through the NEA, Art Matters Inc., Jerome Foundation, NYFA, and the Asian Cultural Council, winning a 2004 Humanities Fellowship and a 2005 and 2018 Travel Grant. Fisher continues to teach and collaborate with artists on community intergenerational and intercultural projects, both domestically and internationally, and recently served as a Fulbright Scholar in Sri Lanka. Her work will be presented at MoMA and La MaMa later this spring.

**KATIE GEISSINGER** (performer) has performed with Meredith Monk worldwide, in concert and in theater pieces such as *ATLAS*, *mercy*, the Grammy-nominated *impermanence*, *Songs of Ascension*, *On Behalf of Nature* (all on ECM), and *The Politics of Quiet*, for which she received an ensemble Bessie Award. Other career highlights include the premiere of *Bang* on a Can's Obie-winning *The Carbon Copy Building* (Cantaloupe), touring with Philip Glass and Robert Wilson's *Einstein on the Beach* (Elektra Nonesuch), and performances at Carnegie Hall as a soloist in Bach's Magnificat, Honegger's *Le Roi David*, and Monk's *WEAVE*. Geissinger also

sang in Jonathan Miller's staging of *Bach's St. Matthew Passion* at BAM, John Tavener's *The Veil of the Temple* at Lincoln Center, and Ann Hamilton's *the event of a thread*, with music by David Lang, at the Park Avenue Armory. Her Broadway credits include Baz Luhrmann's production of *La Bohème*, and *Coram Boy*. Recent performances include Julia Wolfe's *Steel Hammer* in collaboration with Anne Bogart's SITI Company and the *Bang* on a Can All-Stars (BAM, 2015), Marisa Michelson's oratorio *Naamah's Ark* conducted by Ted Sperling, and concerts at Lincoln Center's White Light Festival with the Young People's Chorus of New York City. Geissinger is a member of the professional Cathedral Choir of St. John the Divine under the direction of Kent Tritle.

**ALLISON SNIFFIN** (performer, score preparation), 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*, and *On Behalf of Nature*. She has collaborated with Meredith Monk on the orchestration of *Possible Sky*, *Night*, *WEAVE*, *Realm Variations*, and *Backlight*; arranged Monk's music for *Bang* on a Can All-Stars; edited and contributed to two albums of her piano music; and prepared many of her a capella and instrumental works for publication. Sniffin has received grants from Meet the Composer and Concert Artists Guild for her compositions. She is a frequent arranger/orchestrator for the Stonewall Chorale and Melodia Women's Choir, NYC. She was also winner in the New York Philharmonic's 2017 New World Composition Challenge. Sniffin serves as organist at Middle Collegiate Church and Temple Sha'aray Tefila in NYC.



L-R: Jo Stewart, Allison Sniffin, Katie Geissinger, Ellen Fisher. Photo: Julieta Cervantes



**JO STEWART** (performer) is a movement-theater artist and poet. This is her first year performing as a member of Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble. Her work has been presented at the Brick Theater (NYC), MAAS (Nijmegen, NL), and Arts Letters and Numbers (Averill Park, NY). Stewart graduated from Reed College with a BA in English literature in 2014, and currently teaches theater at Pierrepont School in Westport, CT.

**YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHORUS OF NEW YORK CITY** (guest performers) is a world-renowned youth chorus founded in 1988 on a mission of diversity and artistic excellence by Artistic Director Francisco J. Núñez, a MacArthur Fellow. While harnessing the power of music to fulfill the potential of children artistically, academically, and socially, the program has heightened an awareness of the ability of young people to rise to unforeseen levels of artistry. Under the direction of Núñez and Associate Artistic Director Elizabeth Núñez, over 1,700 children ages eight to 18 participate annually in YPC through its after-school, in-school, and community programs. In addition to performing music that ranges from renaissance and classical traditions to gospel, folk, pop, contemporary, and world music, YPC has invigorated the repertoire for young voices by commissioning and premiering more than 100 compositions from today's most distinguished composers. YPC is a recipient of the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award, America's highest honor for youth programs. [ypc.org](http://ypc.org)

**ELIZABETH NÚÑEZ** is the associate artistic director of the Young People's Chorus of New York City, as well as the director of YPC's School Choruses program, which brings its music education curriculum to more than

1,200 children in 17 New York City schools. She conducts YPC choristers in the city's most prestigious venues, as well as at international choral festivals and competitions on four continents, and this past summer led them to first prize at the International Festival of Choral Music in Barcelona, Spain. Núñez is also the founding artistic director of SoHarmoniums, an intergenerational women's chorus based in New York's SoHo neighborhood and is sought after as a conductor and a choral clinician throughout the country. Lee University School of Music recently presented her with its 2017 Distinguished Alumnus Award.

**YOSHIO YABARA** (costume design, scenography) 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 Schlöndorff. His first work for stage was in the 1970s and early 80s at the Schaubühne, West Berlin, where he first met Monk and collaborated on her opera *Vessel*. Their subsequent collaborations include *ATLAS*, the feature film *Book of Days*, *impermanence*, and *Songs of Ascension*. Yabara has also worked as a costume designer, stage designer, or art director for many theatrical and film productions in Europe, the US, and Asia, including Robert Wilson's *the CIVIL warS* and *King Lear*; *Oedipus Rex*; *Madame de Sade* by Tadashi Suzuki; *Don Giovanni*, *Le Nozze di Figaro* produced and conducted by Daniel Barenboim at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin; and *Bin ich Schoen?*, *Nackt*, and *Bliss* by Doris Doerrie, among others. [yoshioyabara.com](http://yoshioyabara.com)

**JOE LEVASSEUR** (lighting design) has collaborated with many dance and performance artists, and is pleased to be working for the first time with Meredith Monk. He has received two Bessie Awards for his lighting design work. Ongoing projects include lighting work for Brian Brooks, Big Dance Theater, Pavel Zustiak/Palissimo. [joelevasseur.com](http://joelevasseur.com)

**ELI WALKER** (sound design) has toured with Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble to such places as Abu Dhabi, Istanbul, and Budapest. He has also worked sound for such musicians as Natalie Merchant, Florence and the Machine, and Jay-Z, throughout the world. He is a graduate of Williams College and lives in Brooklyn.

**KATHERINE FREER** (video design) is a multimedia designer working in theater, 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. Freer is a Helen Hayes Award and an Innovative Theater Award nominee. [katherinefreer.com](http://katherinefreer.com)

**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*. This is his first project with Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble. [benstechschulte.com](http://benstechschulte.com)

**MEREDITH BELIS** (production/stage manager) works as a stage manager and theater technician in performance spaces around New York City. Artists she has worked with include Wendy Whelan, Brian Brooks, Neil Greenberg, Dean Moss, and Gwen Welliver. She is a graduate of Bennington College and is the production manager for the dance department at Sarah Lawrence College.

**JOSÉ RIVERA, JR.** (company manager, rehearsal assistant) is a vocalist, choreographer, and video artist. He is creating his first visual EP entitled *LQKK*, which will have components for both stage and screen. Rivera is the company manager for *Cellular Songs* with Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble, and media and communications manager at Movement Research. [joseishere.com](http://joseishere.com)

## MEREDITH MONK / THE HOUSE

THE HOUSE FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS, INC.  
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Incorporated in 1971, The House Foundation for the Arts is a nonprofit arts organization with a mission to promote, disseminate, and celebrate the work of the iconic American artist Meredith Monk. The House provides development, management, production, and administrative services for Meredith Monk and Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble. In addition to the presentation of new work, The House is committed to building a legacy for Monk and sharing her prolific body of work with future generations of artists, scholars and the general public.

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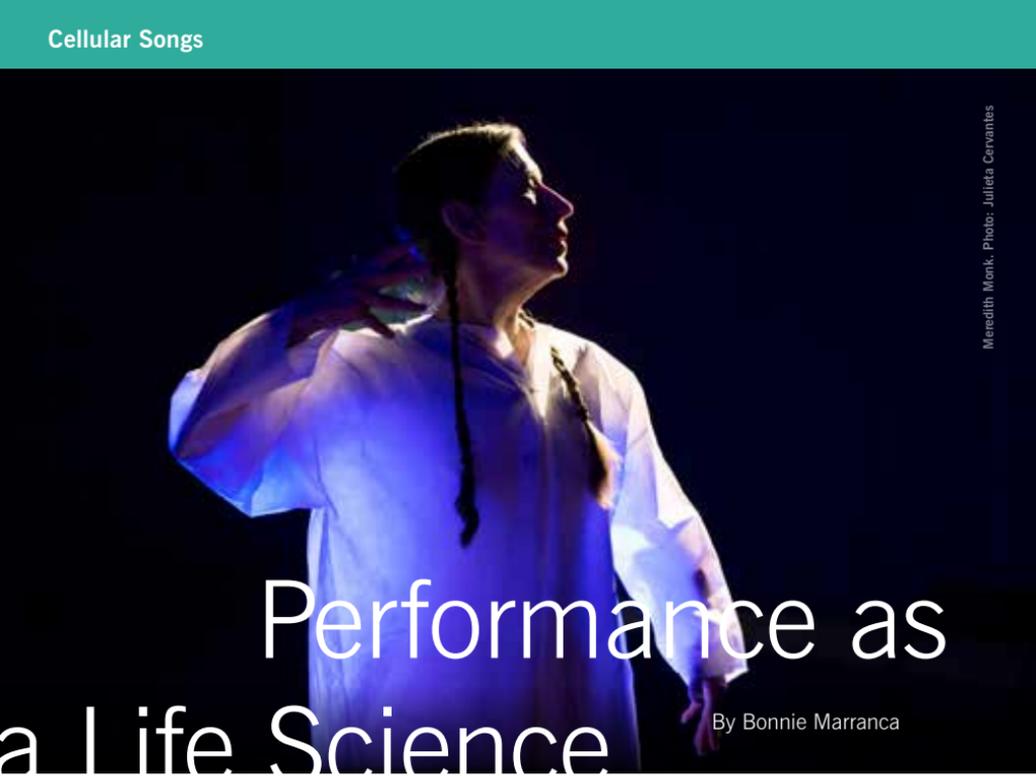
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# Performance as a Life Science

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. 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 *Facing North*, *Education of the Girlchild*, and a number of performances at BAM including *Quarry*, *The Games*, *mercy*, and *Songs of Ascension*. Starting with her own ecological consciousness

