



Presents

CUNNINGHAM

A film by Alla Kovgan

93 mins, Germany / France / USA, 2019

Language: English

Distribution

Mongrel Media Inc
217 – 136 Geary Ave
Toronto, Ontario, Canada, M6H 4H1
Tel: 416-516-9775 Fax: 416-516-0651
E-mail: info@mongrelmedia.com
www.mongrelmedia.com

 @MongrelMedia

Publicity

Bonne Smith
Star PR
Tel: 416-488-4436
Twitter: @starpr2
E-mail: starpr@sympatico.ca

 /MongrelMedia

LOGLINE

A 3D cinematic experience about legendary American choreographer Merce Cunningham.

SYNOPSIS

CUNNINGHAM traces Merce's artistic evolution over three decades of risk and discovery (1944–1972), from his early years as a struggling dancer in postwar New York to his emergence as one of the world's most visionary choreographers. The 3D technology weaves together Merce's philosophies and stories, creating a visceral journey into his innovative work. A breathtaking explosion of dance, music, and never-before-seen archival material, CUNNINGHAM is a timely tribute to one of the world's greatest modern dance artists.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

“A formalist at heart, I am drawn to the genius of Merce Cunningham—the intricacies of his mind; his approaches that he invented making his dances; and his philosophies that he followed living his life and re-defining ideas about being human.

I am particularly moved by his story — an incredible triumph of the human spirit. During the first 30 years of his career (between 1942-1972), he persevered, with great determination and stamina, to make dances against all odds. He was always ready to get outside himself, to place himself in unknown situations, and find new solutions. All this took place in a unique artistic climate, during the 1950s and 1960s in New York, when Cunningham and his collaborators were “united by their poverty and ideas” and art and life had virtually no separation.

Merce’s dances evoke a sense of timelessness—a space in between rational and irrational, intellectual and emotional, immediate and eternal—that truly “renews” us. Yet I never imagined working with his choreography on film because of the complexity of his choreographic structures and his infinite explorations in time and space.

3D offers interesting opportunities as it articulates the relationship between the dancers in and to the space, awaking a kinesthetic response among the viewers. It also favors uncut choreographed shots, moving camera, and multiple layers of action in relation to the setting—everything that will allow working with Merce’s choreography on screen in new ways.

Merce and 3D represent an idea fit, not only because of his use of space but also because of his interest in every technological advancement of his time (from 16mm film to motion capture) and his willingness to adapt and work in unconventional settings/locations, creating over 700 Cunningham “Events,” i.e. performances comprised of excerpts from different dances adapted for a specific location with the audience following the dancers. This made me think that we could draw from many dances that Merce created over time and re-imagine each of them as an ‘event,’ set in a specific location, conveying a unique idea.

The final inspiration came when I saw an iconic photo of Merce’s dancers posing in the Robert Rauschenberg’s pointillist décor of his piece SUMMERSPACE, which was taken by Robert Rutledge in 1958. Merce staged this photograph himself by dropping Rauschenberg’s canvas on both the wall and the floor so it surrounded the dancers. It became clear to me that even back in the 1950s, before Merce developed the idea of an “event,” he had been longing to create immersive environments for his dances. Today, 3D allows for his dream to come true.

I conceived CUNNINGHAM as a 90-minute artwork in itself, which tells Merce's story through his dances. The film is a hybrid, rooted in both imaginary worlds and moving life experiences. It aspires to find a delicate balance between facts and metaphors, exposition and poetry.

We selected excerpts from 14 dances, which represent two-thirds of the film. Each dance communicates an original Cunningham idea and includes iconic sequences adapted for 3D at locations indoor and out. A single camera approach is used to choreograph the viewer's eye, highlighting the dimensional relationships among performers and settings, uniquely enabled by 3D technology. My hope is that the audience will have an experience reminiscent of 'stepping inside' the dances and being immersed in them.

The archival material (photographs, 16mm and 35mm footage, and home movies of performances, rehearsals, tours, and gatherings) – some of it never seen before – evoke the atmosphere of the time, while Merce's diagrams and drawings provide insight into his creative process.

All the archival footage remains in 2D but we work with it as a sculptor would, collaging them in 3D cinema space. The aspiration has been to develop a unique language, integrating all the elements of the film in a subtle, distinct and poetic way – in Merce's spirit.

All the stories in the film are told through archival recordings of Merce, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg, and the dancers. There are no talking heads or contemporary interviews. The voices, layered in an original soundscape, provide yet another pathway into the choreographer's visionary mind."

— Alla Kovgan

DIRECTORS' OF CHOREOGRAPHY STATEMENTS

"Through the process of making this film, I have learned to see Merce's work in a new way. Despite years of working with Cunningham as a dancer and a stager of his work, it wasn't until Alla and I began working together that I started to uncover the nuances of the timing and spacing of Cunningham's dances and began to appreciate more fully their complexity.

Right from the beginning, Alla was interested in the first 30 years of Merce's in NYC. So Robert, Alla and I began by reviewing and selecting the most iconic dances from that period. And from those dances, we then chose segments of Merce's choreography that would both work in 3-D and capture the quintessential moments of each dance.

Seeing a dance through the lens of a camera changes everything. While viewing a dance on a stage you are free to look anywhere in the space, whereas the camera has to be carefully and strategically placed as it guides the eye within the limits of its perspective. The lens often skews a shape. For instance, it can make an arm look lifted when it should simply be horizontal or it can distort the spacing dramatically. With the true artistic collaboration that we developed, these small details could be worked out seamlessly and we developed a true understanding for one another's point of view. Alla taught me about the world of filmmaking and I taught her about the inner workings of Merce's work.

When it came to editing, Alla, who decided to edit herself, given the complexity of understanding of dance on screen, began by assembling the shot material by dance. And we combed through each take, eliminating those with any obvious mistakes and only choosing the best in regards to performance and camera work. This part of the process was tricky in that we both were fighting for perfection and again had to compromise at moments which added another level of understanding for each of our respective expertise. This entire process took place with Alla in Berlin and me in New York, files flying digitally through cyberspace. It is amazing what technology allows.

We continued working with the live action material by piecing the segments of the dances together and finally, Alla edited them into one long sequence, creating a framework for the film. Some of our choices shifted after seeing the takes linked and with more context. I must have looked at each live action take a dozen or more times. One of the joys and mysteries of a live dance performance, is that it is ephemeral. It happens and then it is gone. Film is forever, so there is an enormous amount of pressure for the performers and an enormous responsibility in making the final choices on the takes.

After that, Alla began working with the archival materials, weaving the story and periodically checking in when large segments of the film were complete. We had to trim some of the live action material, which was to be expected, and required little discussion as we understood each other's needs so clearly at this point.

Finally, after months and months of work, I received the 'picture lock' file for review. I carved out some quiet time after my three-year-old was in bed and sat and watched the film from beginning to end. I made a conscious decision to watch it once for any final notes and again a few days later with a clear mind to simply enjoy. I was moved to tears.

There is a certain poignancy in hearing Merce's voice for those of us that knew and worked with him. But beyond that trigger of emotion is the fact that he and his early collaborators and dancers tell the story, in their own voices, which gives a weight and power to this film that is undeniable. The archival materials that Alla uncovered in her research are simply stunning and the live action scenes bring Cunningham's dances into the present tense, displaying how truly ahead of his time he was as an artist.

But what touched me most of all, was being reminded of the perseverance and determination of everyone involved in the formative years of the company and Cunningham's openness to the generations that followed. It is an honor to be part of this history and to be able to share his work once again on such a large scale.”

– Jennifer Goggans

“I was blessed to have worked for and to have followed Merce Cunningham in the various roles of dancer, teacher, assistant and finally director for 32 years. His influence on me is profound and everlasting. I am proud to be able to carry his legacy forward in one capacity, as a Merce Cunningham Trustee, and in another, as the director of the Centre National de la Danse Contemporaine in Angers, France.

In 2011, before the Merce Cunningham Dance Company disbanded, Alla Kovgan imagined creating a 3D cinematic portrait of Merce through his choreography. I immediately wanted to join the team. As we began working together, I became deeply impressed by how lucid Alla's ideas were and how, in the spirit of Merce, her vision is uncompromising and unusual in the world of dance film collaborations.

In CUNNINGHAM, the essence of Merce Cunningham's genius is brought to life through his work and by his former dancers engaging with the technological innovations, which he always embraced. His willingness to break boundaries has been infectious and engendered courage in all of us. This is reason enough that Merce Cunningham's work continues to be alive and growing. Shortly before his passing, he told me, "Find a way to go on." That ambiguity has emboldened my determination to continue. I have the great pleasure to work with and watch his work on a daily basis, but it should be shared with many more. With CUNNINGHAM, we have a precious opportunity to bring some of his greatest works to a wide, general audience."

– Robert Swinston

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

*“I’m a dancer. That’s sufficient for me.”
– Merce Cunningham*

Dance pioneer Merce Cunningham created some of the most iconic, influential work of his generation, incorporating the groundbreaking artistic ideals of mid-century visual arts and music, and redefining his art form. During a lifetime of artistic engagement with such diverse musicians as John Cage, Erik Satie and Radiohead, visual artists Robert Rauschenberg, Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns, architect Benedetta Tagliabue, Comme des Garçons fashion designer Rei Kawakubo, and over one hundred of the world’s leading dancers, Cunningham created a new dance technique and celebrated movement as manifestation of being human and of being alive. After his death in 2009 at the age of 90, many felt uncertain about the future of his legacy and his fearless innovations.

The new documentary *Cunningham*, from Moscow-born filmmaker Alla Kovgan, guarantees that his work will live on, in a stunning immersive experience that preserves some of his greatest works. Neither a straightforward biopic nor a traditional concert film, *Cunningham* was conceived as a 93-minute art piece that would tell the master’s story through his work. Combining Cunningham’s fascinating life experiences with his landmark artistic achievements, Kovgan has forged a delicate balance between facts and metaphors, exposition and poetry.

A tribute to the visionary artist’s creative genius in a journey through the first 30 years of his career in New York City, the film — released in the centennial year of his birth — traces the evolution of his thought and channels his spirit. Unfettered access to the archives allows Kovgan to tell her story in the words of Cunningham, Cage, Rauschenberg and the dancers of his original company. Personal photographs, intimate letters, 16mm and 35mm footage, and home movies of performances, rehearsals, tours and gatherings offer the audience a glimpse of the choreographer’s visionary mind, while excerpts of iconic Cunningham works are performed by the last generation of his dancers and reimagined for 3-D cinema.

“I was drawn as much to the intricacies of Merce’s mind as much as I was to his tremendous talent as a dancer and choreographer,” the filmmaker says. “Everything he did was new, from his approach to making his dances to the philosophies that he followed in his everyday life. I was particularly moved by his spirit. During the years, we highlight in the film, 1942-1972, he made his dances against all odds. He was always ready to place himself in unfamiliar situations and find new solutions.”

Kovgan’s interest in dance began when she moved from Moscow to the United States in 1996 to attend a graduate school. She felt that she could not write dialog-based scripts well enough and turned to working with physical performers and dancers. She then dived into researching dance film collaborations and started KINODANCE in St. Petersburg – a festival dedicated to choreography and cinema collaborations. There, she began to see an affinity between early silent films and modern dance. Coincidentally, both came to life in the late 19th century.) “First filmmakers like Edison invented cinema to capture motion and movement in the purest form. And first film stars came from physical comedy, vaudeville, circus or modern dance,” she notes. “When I began making movies about and with dance, I was primarily interested in the interplay between what cinema could offer dance and what dance could offer cinema.”

Kovgan was intrigued by Cunningham’s intense interest in film and the technological advancements of his time. Throughout his career he embraced new technologies, from 16mm, television and video to the use of computers, body sensors and motion-capture technology.

“He allowed for his work to be documented right from the very beginning, and was open to experiments with film. In the 1960s, Stan VanDerBeek, the major figure of New York avant-garde film world, spent quite a bit of time in Merce’s studio, while Richard Leacock and D.A. Pennebaker, forefathers of cinema verité, got to film “RainForest” – Merce’s collaboration with Andy Warhol and David Tudor,” the director explains. “By the early 1970s, Merce began working with film and video himself primarily with filmmaker Charles Atlas. I had screened some of their work in St. Petersburg. But I thought that to make a film about or with Merce’s dances would be impossible. If he has a dozen dancers going into different directions, how are you going

to capture this dance? I never imagined that I would work with Cunningham choreography on screen myself.”

But when Dance Films Association received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to make a 3-D film about a New York choreographer, Cunningham immediately came to Kovgan’s mind. She proposed a 3-D film about Merce. “I wanted to make a film that would be different from anything I have seen before,” she says. “It was shortly after he died. The company was about to close. I went to one of their last performances and saw 14 Cunningham dancers on stage. I remember sitting there and thinking: There needs to be a 3-D movie with Merce’s choreography. The 3-D format captures space; it favors long choreographed shots and Merce worked with space so much. Besides, Merce was fascinated with new technology. Overall, 3-D and Merce seemed like a great fit. I was convinced had he been alive he would have found a way to work with 3-D.”

Kovgan managed an introduction to Robert Swinston, a trustee of the Merce Cunningham Trust, and pitched him the idea. “Robert said yes,” the filmmaker recalls. “He said, ‘Merce always said yes. So let’s do it.’”

Swinston worked with Cunningham for 32 years as a dancer, assistant and finally Director of Choreography. “Merce’s influence on me has been profound,” says Swinston. “When Alla proposed creating a 3-D cinematic portrait of Merce through his choreography, I immediately wanted to join the team. Shortly before his passing, he told me, ‘Find a way to go on.’ With Cunningham, we have a precious opportunity to bring some of his greatest works to a wide, general audience.”

With that commitment, the Merce Cunningham Trust granted Kovgan a master license for all the Cunningham dances that would appear in the film, and she began immediately. It was critical, she believed, to use dancers trained by Cunningham himself. “The company was closing and soon there would be no more dancers trained by Merce. These dancers carry something essential of Merce in their bodies. They’re his living legacy and if we didn’t make something with them then, it would be gone.”

The next three years were a flurry of research, scriptwriting and fundraising. “Some people thought we were crazy,” she says. “A 3D movie about an avant-garde choreographer? But we had a great committed producing and creative team in the US, who believed in the project. Together we forged forward. And then we got support from France. And after Germany came in really strongly with a great producer, Helge Albers, and soon we had enough funding to film. We shot in May 2018 and I edited until May 2019.”

The Triad

*“I simply decided years ago that I would make a dance free of music.”
– Merce Cunningham*

In the 1940s, the United States, and New York in particular, was becoming the global center of artistic innovation. Abstract Expressionist painters like Willem de Kooning and Jackson Pollock, radical composers including Arnold Schoenberg, and Martha Graham’s revolutionary troupe dominated the cultural scene. Cunningham had arrived in the city in 1939 with an invitation to join Graham’s company.

In 1944, he presented his first solo concert with composer John Cage, who became his frequent collaborator and lifelong romantic partner. Together they explored groundbreaking artistic philosophies, incorporating experiments with chance into their work as a way to free themselves from preconceived ideas. Kovgan transports audiences into the thick of this mid-century artistic community as Cunningham forges artistic alliances with some of the greatest creative minds of their day.

Cunningham and Cage’s personal and professional lives became inextricably intertwined, but as far as the public was concerned, they were simply collaborators, says Kovgan. Although she weaves quotes from their personal correspondence throughout her film, the director declines to explore the relationship in depth. “They never discussed that part of their lives. Merce and John were once onstage in a joint interview. There was a question from the audience about their personal relationship and John Cage said, ‘I do the cooking and Merce washes the dishes.’ Most people didn’t even know they were in a

relationship until they went on the world tour in 1964. Even in the 1990s when they were asked questions about it, they preferred not to engage. I felt like I needed to keep their integrity.”

The pair acquired a third creative partner in 1952 when they met the then-emerging artist Robert Rauschenberg at the experimental, arts-focused Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Like Cunningham and Cage, Rauschenberg resisted labels during his lengthy career, but is widely acknowledged as a forerunner in many art movements that developed after Abstract Expressionism.

The three men forged a deep kinship. Merce refers to Robert Rauschenberg, describing their relationships: “Bob Rauschenberg... said: ‘We have only two things in common -- our ideas and our poverty.’” Without a steady source of income, they collected scrap wood off the street and burned it to keep warm in winter. Cunningham rehearsed in his living space and often alone. As he says in an interview, “It was difficult... as though I were pushing myself in a way that someone else wouldn’t have.” One of the most unusual aspects of the three men’s work together, according to Kovgan, is what she calls “collaboration without collaborating.” “At the beginning, Rauschenberg, Cage and Cunningham would exchange a few ideas about the piece and then work independently,” she explains. “And only at the premiere, they would bring dance, music and décor together to see what would happen. It was common for the dancers to hear the music or see the sets for the first time when the curtain went up.”

Ballet Legs and Modern Dance Torsos

*“Inside all of that is an ecstasy, brief, perhaps, not always released,
but when it is, it is like a moment in balance when all things great and small coincide.”
– Merce Cunningham*

In 1953, Cunningham launched the Merce Cunningham Dance Company – originally with six dancers – so he could concentrate full-time on his explorations.

Cunningham includes a treasure trove of archival materials – a visual record of the dancer’s singular talent, Merce alone and with his company, rehearsing, performing, choreographing, and teaching. Often dressed in rehearsal clothes, he and his dancers

bend, leap, spin and fall with abandon, combining what he thought were the best elements of classical ballet with the most interesting innovations in modern dance. Company member and frequent dance partner Carolyn Brown, describing what made Merce unique as a dancer, says, “I had never seen anyone move like [Merce] from such a quiet center with such animal authority and human passion.”

For the most part, Kovgan allows the dance to speak for itself, just as Cunningham did with his choreography. His training techniques were extremely demanding, but in conversations with his company, their dedication to him and his ideas clearly comes through. “His dancers developed incredible ability because of the training they went through to perform these impossible things, to be constantly pushed beyond their limits,” says Kovgan. “He would make the movement and teach it to the dancers, but he never told them what it was about. Sometimes, it was excruciating for the dancers. But he believed that they should concentrate on simply doing the movement as best as they could. Then their personalities were to come through. His work always came from a physical idea or a physical question, not a psychological or narrative one.”

The Event

*“Any movement is possible for dancing.”
– Merce Cunningham*

Kovgan’s intent was to make a film that would immerse the viewer in the world of Merce’s becoming Merce. “When Carolyn Brown, the last original member of his first company, left in 1972, that, according to Cunningham archivist and historian David Vaughan, marked “the end of an era” and that’s where we stop,” the filmmaker explains. “It had been unimaginable that this man could embark on a more than 30-year journey without any real support. He was not a trust-fund baby. He actually had nothing except for his friendships with incredible people who were around him – Cage, Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns among others and of course, his dancers.”

It is estimated that over the course of his career, Merce Cunningham created 180 repertory dances, as well as more than 700 “Events,” which he defined as performances lasting about 90 minutes and consisting of bits and pieces of dances in the company’s

repertoire. Selections that in lesser hands might have deteriorated into a set of choreographic scraps were transformed into something entirely new.

Inspired by this idea, Kovgan mirrored the 'event' format for her film. "We decided to try and create a Cunningham 'Event' set in cinema, pulling different excerpts from different choreographies. We have taken parts of different dances to create a new work of art."

To help re-create Cunningham's work for the film, Kovgan turned to Swinston as well as Jennifer Goggans, a 12-year veteran of the company and Assistant to the Director of Choreography for their final Legacy Tour. According to Goggans, the team began by reviewing his most iconic dances and choosing those that would both work in 3-D and capture the quintessential moments of each piece.

"The best way to transfer knowledge is from dancer to dancer," according to Kovgan. "Robert and Jennifer know a lot and remember a lot. And there's quite a bit of video recordings of rehearsals and performances because Merce was obsessed with documenting. He also took many notes, but never shared them when he was alive. We had access to those notes and our Directors of Choreography spent a lot of time deciphering them."

The 14 dances selected for inclusion represent two-thirds of the film. Each dance was chosen to illustrate one of Cunningham's original ideas and the iconic sequences were adapted for 3-D at both exterior and interior locations. "We tried to find locations that helped us to translate Merce's ideas into cinema," Kovgan says. "I call them metaphorical locations. We didn't want to put the dance in the theater unless there was a story point about that. We wanted to create a cinematic experience of his ideas and used locations that helped us to communicate them."

One of the most memorable is a Rauschenberg-designed pointillist backdrop used for the original presentation of *Summerspace*, a 1958 collaboration between Cunningham, the painter and composer Morton Feldman. "I had seen an iconic photo of Merce's dancers posing against Rauschenberg's background, which was taken by photographer Richard Rutledge," says Kovgan. "Merce staged this photograph himself by dropping Rauschenberg's canvas on both the wall and the floor so it surrounded the

dancers. It became clear to me that even back in the 1950s, before Merce developed the idea of an ‘Event,’ he had been longing to create immersive environments for his dances. This is the only location in which we used green-screen visual effects. My hope is that the audience will feel like they are stepping inside the dance.”

Goggans, who serves as Director of Choreography for Cunningham, says the filmmaking process has enabled her to see the work in a new way. “One of the joys and mysteries of a live dance performance is that it is ephemeral,” she says. “But film is forever, and seeing a dance through the lens of a camera changes everything. I have worked with this material for years and yet it wasn’t until Alla and I began working together that some of the nuances of the complexity, timing and spacing of his dances became clear to me.”

Both Swinston, who is Supervising Director of Choreography, and Goggans are proud to be part of a project that continues to keep Cunningham’s groundbreaking work alive. “Alla had such lucid ideas on how to accomplish this,” Swinston says. “In the spirit of Merce, her vision is uncompromising and unusual in the world of dance film collaborations. The movie brings his essence to life through his work.”

After seeing the final edit, Goggans admits she was moved to tears. “There is a certain poignancy in hearing Merce’s voice again, but beyond that, the fact that the story is told entirely by him, his early collaborators and the dancers gives this extraordinary impact,” she says. “What touched me most of all was the perseverance and determination of everyone involved in the formative years of the company and Cunningham’s openness to the generations that followed. It has been an honor to be able to share his work once again on such a large scale.”

The dances in the film, newly staged for 3D, are performed by a stellar cast – mostly former members of the Cunningham company trained by Merce himself, including Ashley Chen, Brandon Collwes, Dylan Crossman, Julie Cunningham, Jennifer Goggans, Lindsey Jones, Cori Kresge, Daniel Madoff, Rashaun Mitchell, Marcie Munnerlyn, Silas Riener, Glen Rumsey, Jamie Scott, and Melissa Toogood. One of the pieces features seven guest dancers – a new generation trained by Swinston at the Centre National de Danse Contemporaine-Angers. Live action footage is juxtaposed with

archival materials of the original company members: Marianne Preger-Simon, Carolyn Brown, Viola Farber, Barbara Lloyd Dilley, Sandra Neels, Valda Setterfield, Gus Solomons Jr. and others.

The Legacy

*“You continue. It’s about making something.”
– Merce Cunningham*

In the 1940s, Merce Cunningham, along with John Cage, began a journey that would change the relationship between contemporary dance, music and art. Cunningham proposed the revolutionary idea that dance could exist independent of music, a concept that would dominate his unparalleled career for more than half a century. He popularized the idea of dance as a visual experience and trained some of the greatest dancers of his time, including Paul Taylor, Remy Charlip, Viola Farber, Douglas Dunn, Charles Moulton, Karole Armitage, Deborah Hay, Neal Greenberg, Ellen Cornfield, Steve Paxton, Valda Setterfield, Ashley Chen, Jonah Bokaer, Rashaun Mitchell/Silas Riener and Foofwa d'Immobilitéé, many of whom went on to establish their own acclaimed careers as choreographers.

With Cunningham, Alla Kovgan has created an immersive overview of the first 30 years of Merce’s career in New York City as he becomes both creator and product of the tidal wave of artistic innovation that followed World War II. “Merce was an incredible thinker,” she says. “Sometimes people underestimate him and assume that Merce became Merce only thanks to John Cage. Cage’s influence was very important, but John was not a dancer or dance choreographer. Merce developed his own ideas and theories. He also had a kind of faith in movement itself, as a physical, animalistic, pure shape and form.”

The filmmaker puzzled about different ways to create an experience not only of Cunningham’s journey as a performer, choreographer, and human being but also of his work. “I always say that it is impossible to make documentaries about dance. We can make documentaries about choreographers or dancers as people, about life of a dance company and so on. But how to make a film that will allow the audience to experience

choreographers' work? The only way is to re-think their dance in cinema terms. And that is quite challenging," says Kovgan. "Our idea was not to just film dance. It was to translate Merce's ideas into Cinema with capital "C" and create a visceral experience of his work.

"I also felt that so few people have seen Merce when he was at his prime as a performer," she continues. "We wanted to make sure that audiences would get a chance to see that he was not just a creative genius, he was an incredible dancer."

Something Cunningham said kept her going during difficult moments. "He often said, you continue – you continue no matter what. You have to keep going. I'm still incredibly moved by Merce's spirit. I feel like I have been working on this movie for so long but if you look at the bigger picture, it wasn't that long at all. Merce and John were there for 30 years never knowing whether things would work out or not. They accepted and lived with the sense of uncertainty, and they persevered. I hope that audiences will be inspired by the magnitude of Merce's journey, the strength of his spirit, and his love for dance.

"Here comes my favorite Merce's quote; it summarizes everything I would love the viewers to take away from the film: 'You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive.'"

###

BIOGRAPHIES

ALLA KOVGAN, Director

Born in Moscow, Kovgan has divided her time between Europe and the US, bringing two decades of experience working with dance and film on screen, VR and in theatre, as well as a strong record as a documentary writer/editor. Her film **NORA**, about Zimbabwe-born choreographer Nora Chipaumire, has been presented at over 120 festivals, received 30 awards in every genre, and was broadcast on ARTE/ZDF, PBS, TV3 (Spain), NRK (Norway) and SVT (Sweden). Within the last decade, Alla co-directed, co-wrote and edited an Emmy-nominated **TRACES OF THE TRADE** (Sundance, PBS) and **MOVEMENT REVOLUTION AFRICA** (ZDF/ARTE), which the "Village Voice" described as a "knockout." Alla also edited **MY PERESTROIKA** (Sundance, PBS, Silverdocs, Full Frame). Her first VR piece with Finnish music duo Puuti **DEVIL'S LUNGS** won numerous awards including Grand Prix at the Vienna Shorts Festival which made her an artist-in-residence at Vienna's Museum Quarter 21 in 2019. She is a recipient of many grants and awards including a Poynter Fellowship at Yale University (2012), a Bogliasco Foundation Fellowship (2011), a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship (2009), and the Brother Thomas Fellowship (2009) for artists working at a high level of excellence and creativity.

Filmography:

"CUNNINGHAM" – 3D, 92', 2019 (director/writer/editor)
"DEVIL'S LUNGS" – 3D VR, 10', 2018 (director/writer/editor)
"AFRO PROMO #1 KINGLADY" – 10', 2016 (editor)
"NEW LONDON CALLING" – 10', 2010 (director/writer/editor)
"MY PERESTROIKA" – 87', 2010 (editor)
"NORA" – 36', 2008 (director/writer/editor) with David Hinton
"TRACES OF THE TRADE: A STORY FROM THE DEEP NORTH" – 82', 2007 (co-director/writer/editor) with Katrina Browne
"MOVEMENT (R)EVOLUTION AFRICA" – 65', 2007 (co-director/editor) with Joan Frosch
"AFRICAN DANCE: SAND, DRUM AND SHOSTAKOVICH" – 70', 2002 (co-director/writer/editor) with Ken Glazebrook
"ARCUS" – 4.5', 2003, **"SURFACE"** – 9', 2000,
"ACHING" – 10', 1999, **"BELONGINGS"** – 21', 1998

Website: www.kinodance.com

JENNIFER GOGGANS (Director of Choreography, US)

JENNIFER GOGGANS, a Kentucky native, holds a BFA from SUNY Purchase and performed as a member of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company for 12 years. She was the Assistant to the Director of Choreography during the company's final Legacy Tour. She has taught Cunningham Technique® classes and staged his works across the globe, notably, the Paris Opera Ballet, the Lyon Opera Ballet, the Bayerisches Staatsballet, L.A. Dance Project, the Stephen Petronio Company and the Juilliard School. Goggans has performed with the Louisville Ballet, MOMIX, Chantal Yzermans, and Christopher Williams and has appeared as a guest artist with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. She also studied fashion design at New York's Fashion Institute of Technology and has created costumes for Tere O'Connor and RoseAnne Spradlin. Currently, she is also the Program Coordinator for the Merce Cunningham Trust.

ROBERT SWINSTON (Supervising Director of Choreography, US)

ROBERT SWINSTON joined the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC) in 1980 and became Assistant to Merce Cunningham in 1992. Following Cunningham's death in 2009, he was named Director of Choreography and a Trustee of the Merce Cunningham Trust. He oversaw the MCDC, the Repertory Understudy Group, and the Cunningham Educational Outreach Program until the closure of the MCDC in 2011. Swinston reconstructed many Cunningham dances for the MCDC and staged his works worldwide – for Boston Ballet, White Oak Dance Project, New York City Ballet, and the Paris Opera Ballet. In 2003, Swinston received a Bessie Award for his performance in the revival of Cunningham's *How to Pass, Kick, Fall, & Run*. Since 2013, he has acted as the Artistic Director of the Centre National de Danse Contemporaine in Angers, France and formed a new company that has 8 Cunningham dances in its repertoire, and performed numerous Cunningham Events. His tenure at the CNDC will expire in June 2020, and he is dedicated to continuing sharing the Cunningham legacy throughout the world.

JOSÉPHINE DEROBÉ (Director of Stereography, France)

JOSEPHINE DEROBÉ is one of very few female 3D filmmakers in the industry, Josephine has been an award-winning Director of Stereography for almost a decade. For 3D cinema, she collaborated many years with Wim Wenders (PINA, CATHEDRALS OF CULTURE, EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE...) and continues developing the "Natural Depth Method" devised by her father Alain Derobe, a pioneer of stereoscopic 3D. As a film director and an artist, she explores creating narratives at the crossroads of cinema, visual art, and interactive storytelling.

MKO MALKHASYAN (Director of Photography, US/Armenia)

MKO MALKHASYAN is an Armenian-born cinematographer who relocated to the United States in 2009. For the last 15 years, he has been working on features, documentaries, music videos and commercials in the US, Europe and Russia. Considered the top cinematographer from Armenia, he won multiple awards including the Armenian National Cinema Award (2013) and Best Cinematography at such festivals as KINOSHOCK (2013), GOLDEN EYE (2012), and the Newport Beach Festival (2011). Hailed as a true master of light, he has also a deep understanding of choreography on screen, having worked with Kovgan on all her projects for screen and stage.

HAUSCHKA (Volker Bertelmann) (Composer, Germany)

The Düsseldorf-based composer VOLKER BERTELMANN (HAUSCHKA) is regarded as one of the most remarkable modern proponents of the prepared piano. His most recent scores for film include the music for series such as *Patrick Melrose* (Edward Berger), *The Name of the Rose* (Giacomo Battiato) and *Dublin Murders* (Saul Dibb a.o.) as well as for feature films like *Adrift* (Baltasar Kormákur), *What doesn't kill us* (Sandra Nettelbeck), *Gut gegen Nordwind* (Vanessa Jopp), *Hotel Mumbai* (Anthony Maras) and *Summerland* (Jessica Swale). For their collaborative score for *Lion* (directed by Garth Davis), Bertelmann and Dustin O'Halloran were nominated for the Golden Globe, the BAFTA Award and the Oscars. In 2018, Volker Bertelmann was chosen to become a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

MIEKE ULFIG (Archival Sequences Designer, Germany)

Mieke Ulfig is a Berlin-based artist and co-founder of Riedel&Ulfig GbR, film and graphic arts studio. Her works include conceptualizing and executing visual design for film and television productions (including title design and archival treatment), animation, exhibitions and theatre. Since 1999, she has been also a member of the artist performance group *Superschool*. Her works have been presented at Transmediale, Winterthur Festival, Oberhausen Festival, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein n.b.k., Maxim Gorki Theater Berlin, Tanzhaus NRW Düsseldorf, Carrousel du Louvre, Film and Television Museum Berlin, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz among others.

HELGE ALBERS (Producer, Germany)

HELGE ALBERS co-founded Berlin based Flying Moon Filmproduktion in 1999. Since then he has produced and co-produced more than 25 feature films and documentaries. In 2001, he won his first German Academy Award "Lola" for best documentary with "Havanna, mi amor" by Uli Gaulke. In 2003, "Silent Waters" by Sabiha Sumar won the Golden Leopard at the Locarno Film Festival, and in 2006 "Summer Palace" by Lou Ye was invited to compete at the Cannes Film Festival. Uli Gaulke's "Comrades in Dreams" premiered at Sundance in 2006. In 2011, "The Loneliest Planet" by Julia Loktev was selected for competition at the Locarno Film Festival and later on nominated for an Independent Spirit Award and the Gotham Film Awards. Since 2015, Helge has worked as producer for Achtung Panda! Media. His latest production "Above and Below" by Nicolas Steiner was released by Oscilloscope Labs in the US and won the Swiss and the German Academy Award for Best Doc.

ILANN GIRARD (Producer, France)

ILANN GIRARD was the former Senior VP of Legal & Business Affairs at Pandora Cinema. During his time at Pandora, more than 60 features were produced all over the world, including Academy Award-winners Shine and “Kolya,” on which he served as associate producer. In 2002, Ilann started ARSAM, a one-stop consultancy boutique based in Paris and, in 2003, he launched ARSAM INTERNATIONAL, a production company developing international feature films projects. He has produced and executive-produced over 20 films, including the Academy award-winning feature documentary “March of the Penguins” (Berlinale Cinema for Peace Award); “Goodbye Bafana” (Venice Golden Lion), “Lebanon,” “I, Anna” (Berlinale Official selection, 2012), Omblin (Cannes Junior Prize, 2012), and Stanley Tucci’s “Final Portrait” – a biopic about Giacometti starring Geoffrey Rush and Armie Hammer. Ilann is also the co-founder and CEO of Olffi.com, the N°1 platform enabling filmmaker to search and access public funding and production incentives. It is used by 50,000 professionals worldwide.

ELIZABETH DELUDE-DIX (Producer, USA)

ELIZABETH DELUDE-DIX has produced and directed independent documentaries, including “Why the Face” ((Director, Producer), “Traces of the Trade” (Co-Producer/ Executive Producer) which opened at Sundance Film Festival, POV premiere, Emmy nomination; “Sense the Wind” (Producer/Writer), among others. Her work screened at festivals in the US, Europe and Russia and broadcast nationally on PBS. She is the recipient of the Rhode Island Leadership Award for her role in founding the state’s first public radio station, WRNI. She currently serves as a board member of RI Public Television, is a past Vice-President of the Flaherty International Film Seminar and Chair of the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities, a founding member of the Jamestown Arts Center Advisory and founder of the production company DocWorks.

DERRICK TSENG (Producer, USA)

DERRICK TSENG has worked in N Y film and television production for over 25 years. He has produced, among other projects, David Gordon Green’s “Red Oaks” (Pilot), “Manglehorn,” “Joe,” and “Prince Avalanche”; Todd Solondz’s “Wiener-Dog,” “Dark Horse,” “Life During Wartime,” and “Palindromes”; Comedy Central’s “Stella”; and Braden King's "The Evening Hour." He has co-produced or line produced numerous feature films including Adrienne Shelly’s “Sudden Manhattan,” Kevin Smith's “Chasing Amy,” Brad Anderson's “Happy Accidents,” Patrick Stettner’s “The Business of Strangers,” Bertha Pan’s “Face,” David Gordon Green’s “All the Real Girls” and “Snow Angels,” Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato’s “Party Monster,” Steve Buscemi’s “Lonesome Jim,” Robert Altman’s “Tanner on Tanner,” David Wain’s “The Ten,” Clark Gregg’s “Choke,” Andrew Lau’s “Revenge of the Green Dragons,” and Tom Shadyac's "Brian Banks."

KELLY GILPATRICK (Producer, USA)

KELLY GILPATRICK is a Minneapolis-based producer with credits including the Independent Spirit Award Winner Sweet Land, Robert Altman's A PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION, SXSW premiere OLDER THAN AMERICA, NOBODY, STAY THEN GO AND THREE CHRISTIS. Working for the film production and finance company, Werc Werk Works, she contributed to Todd Solondz' film LIFE DURING WARTIME and Bela Tarr's THE TURIN HORSE and served as Associate Producer on Robert Epstein & Jeffrey Friedman's HOWL and Jill Sprecher's THIN ICE. Kelly also produced the Teddy Award winning feature film, OPEN (Berlinale 2010); short film, FRAY; THE KNIFE: LIVE AT TERMINAL 5; and is one of seven US producers selected for Trans-Atlantic Partners producer program (2013). She had a year tenure as a Deputy Director of Provincetown Film Society & International Film Festival and currently produces for the award-winning creative agency, Periscope.

LAURA WEBER (Associate Producer, Germany)

LAURA WEBER is a Berlin-based film producer, line producer and production manager. Her line-producing credits include: DAS FREIWILLIGE JAHR (2018) by award-winning directors Ulrich Koehler and Henner Winckler; documentary WAITING FOR MOMMY (2016) by Lea Pool; documentary THE MYTH AND ME (2014) about Nelson Mandela by Khalo Matabane; the NYC unit of the BBC drama-documentary UNDER MILK WOOD about Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, among others. For four years, Laura was based in New York and worked for Belladonna Productions, associate producing and line-producing a number of feature-length movies and commercials. Laura holds a Master's Degree in Cultural Studies from the universities of Hamburg and Barcelona.

MERCE CUNNINGHAM:

For more info: <https://mercecunningham.org/>

Merce Cunningham (1919-2009) was a world-renowned choreographer unequalled for innovation in both the 20th and 21st centuries. Merce persevered against all odds and developed a new dance technique and a new way of thinking in collaboration with seminal visual artists and composers such as John Cage (who was also his life partner), Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, Frank Stella, and Andy Warhol. The Merce Cunningham Dance Company was founded in 1953 and disbanded in 2011 after Merce's death. Throughout his seventy-year career, Merce choreographed more than 180 dances and over 700 "Events," which combined excerpts from diverse works in novel contexts. Known for his experimentation with "chance operations," he also worked with the cutting-edge technologies of his time—including film, video, TV, computer programming, and motion capture—to explore his work in different contexts. Merce's story, commitment to innovation, and ideas continue to influence generations of artists and choreographers worldwide.

Quotes about Merce Cunningham:

"A revolutionary choreographer, Cunningham challenged nearly every assumption about how dances are made and perceived." —Los Angeles Times

"The world's greatest choreographer" —New York Times

"Cunningham is speaking in the voice of today." — The Observer

"A great innovator and a born humorist, and knows a great deal about the trap-door of social insecurity and the fears of western society." —New York Times

"[Cunningham] stimulates by rejecting the most solemn precepts about the art of dancing..." - The Times

"Cunningham...brought into dancing the ordinariness, the vexations, the adventures and the sudden glories of life..." - The Times

"Tirelessly innovative..." – The Telegraph

QUOTES by MERCE CUNNINGHAM:

"The only way to do it is to do it."

"You have to love dancing to stick to it. It gives you nothing back, no manuscripts to store away, no paintings to show on walls and maybe hang in museums, no poems to be printed and sold, nothing but that single fleeting moment when you feel alive."

“I think of dance as a constant transformation of life itself.”

“If you really dance, there is no past, there is no future, the mind is caught in the mid-air.”

"Our ecstasy in dance comes from the possible gift of freedom."

"The dancer strives to transmit the tenderness of the human spirit."

“Dancing much more relates to everyday experience like watching people as they move in the streets.”

QUOTES by John Cage:

“There is no such thing as silence.” – John Cage

“I have nothing to say and I am saying it. And that is poetry as I need it.” – John Cage

QUOTES by ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG:

“We only have two things in common – our ideas and our poverty.” - Robert Rauschenberg

"It was the most excruciating collaboration but it was the most exciting and the most real because nobody else knew what anybody else was doing until it was too late." - Robert Rauschenberg

CREDITS

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY **ALLA KOVGAN**

SUPERVISING DIRECTOR OF CHOREOGRAPHY **ROBERT SWINSTON**

DIRECTOR OF CHOREOGRAPHY **JENNIFER GOGGANS**

PRODUCED BY **HELGE ALBERS, ILANN GIRARD, ALLA KOVGAN**

PRODUCERS **ELIZABETH DELUDE-DIX, KELLY GILPATRICK, DERRICK
TSENG**

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY **MKO MALKHASYAN**

CONSULTING EDITOR **ANDREW BIRD**

3D SUPERVISOR / WORKFLOW DESIGNER **SERGIO OCHOA**

EDITOR **ALLA KOVGAN**

DIRECTOR OF STEREOGRAPHY **JOSÉPHNE DEROBE**

ARCHIVAL SEQUENCES DESIGNER **MIEKE ULFIG**

COSTUME DESIGNER **JEFFREY WIRSING**

SOUND DESIGN AND MIX **FRANCIS WARGNIER**

SOUND ENGINEER **OLIVER STAHN**

ORIGINAL MUSIC BY **VOLKER BERTELMANN (HAUSCHKA)**

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS **STEPHANIE DILLON, ANNA GODA, OLI
HARBOTTLE, LYDA E. KUTH, ANDREAS ROALD**

CO-PRODUCERS **DAN WECHSLER, SILVANA BEZZOLA RIGOLINI,
ANNIE DAUTANE, GALLIEN CHALANET QUERCY**

ASSOCIATE PRODUCER **LAURA WEBER**

FEATURING:

**ASHLEY CHEN, BRANDON COLLWES, DYLAN CROSSMAN,
JULIE CUNNINGHAM, JENNIFER GOGGANS, LINDSEY JONES,
CORI KRESGE, DANIEL MADOFF, RASHAUN MITCHELL,
MARCIE MUNNERLYN, SILAS RIENER, GLEN RUMSE, JAMIE SCOTT,
MELISSA TOOGOOD**