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For immediate release:

Dance Legend Merce Cunningham to Visit Mondavi Center for Residency and Performances

April 1, 2008; Davis, California—**Merce Cunningham**, a legendary figure in American dance and one of the most influential choreographers of the twentieth century, will visit **UC Davis** in April for **Merce@Mondavi**, a series of events culminating in two performances by the **Merce Cunningham Dance Company** (MCDC) at the **Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts**. The residency will include a series of master classes and workshops with students from UC Davis, **Sacramento State University**, and several local high schools; two free **Forum@MC** events examining Cunningham and his work; and two spectacular evenings of dance with the MCDC. The April 25 performance will feature *MinEvent* with live music by the acclaimed **Kronos Quartet** as well as *Split Sides* with recorded music by **Radiohead** and **Sigur Rós**. On April 26 the program will include *BIPED*, one of Cunningham's most acclaimed works, together with *eyeSpace*, in which audience members listen to **Mikel Rouse**'s score via their own iPods or iPod shuffles loaned to them by the company.

The performances will begin at 8 pm on April 25 and 26 in the Mondavi Center's Jackson Hall on the UC Davis campus. Tickets are available from the Mondavi Center Ticket Office at 530.754.2787 or online at MondaviArts.org. The events are presented as part of the Mondavi Center's **Dance Series**. There will be a **Pre-performance Lecture** featuring **Elizabeth (Shelly) Gilbride**, teaching assistant, UC Davis Department of Theatre and Dance, at 7 pm on April 25 in the Mondavi Center's Studio Theatre. There will also be a **Post-performance Q&A** session with members of the company after each performance. The performances and all events related to the Merce Cunningham residency are part of the Mondavi Center's **Creativity Project**, a season-long exploration of the creative process and how artists create.

The Mondavi Center's Forum@MC program will host two free Merce Cunningham-related events. The first is a screening of **Charles Atlas**' film *Merce Cunningham: A Lifetime in Dance*, which *The New York Times* called "an hour-long primer on one of the most influential avant-gardists of the twentieth century." The film screening will begin at 4 pm on April 15. The second Forum@MC event is a panel discussion entitled *The Creativity Project: How Human Creativity Happens in the Arts and the Sciences*, a discussion of creativity in the context of Merce Cunningham's work, featuring MCDC archivist **David Vaughan**, UC Davis faculty members **Della Davidson**, **Laurie San Martin**, **Bob Ostertag**, and others, moderated by **Jeffrey Callison**, host of KXJZ's *Insight* program. The panel discussion begins at 5 pm on April 23 in the Mondavi Center's

Studio Theatre. As with all Forum@MC events, the film screening and panel discussion are free and open to the public.

The Merce Cunningham residency will also include a screening of *Beach Birds for Camera*, a 1992 film by **Elliot Caplan** featuring Cunningham's choreography and music by **John Cage**. The 28-minute film will be shown continuously from 10 am-1 pm on April 19 in the Mondavi Center's Studio Theatre as part of the Mondavi Center's celebration of UC Davis' **Picnic Day 2008**.

"Merce@Mondavi is a fine example of what the Mondavi Center does best," said **Don Roth**, the Mondavi Center's executive director. "We are not only presenting one of the best and most important modern dance companies of our time, but also surrounding those performances with events that offer the audience members a series of opportunities to learn more about the artist and gain insights that can lead to an even greater enjoyment of the performances."

Merce Cunningham, who will turn 89 years old on April 16, is widely recognized as one of the greatest living choreographers and one of the most influential American artists of the past century. A tireless innovator who, like his long-time artistic partner, the late composer John Cage, pioneered the use of chance procedures in his works, Cunningham began his career as a lead dancer with the **Martha Graham Dance Company**. He went on to become one of our greatest choreographers and most innovative artists, inventing his own unique form of dance that broke away from traditional narrative structures. With Cage, he created a new kind of choreography in which the music and dance elements were developed independently, which led to the abandonment of conventional elements of dance composition such as cause and effect and climax and anti-climax. Cunningham has won countless honors for his contributions to the art of dance, including being named an Officer of the French Legion of Honor, a recipient of the Arts and Business Council Kitty Carlisle Hart Award, and the National Medal of Arts.

Cunningham and his company, which he founded more than 50 years ago, offer audiences an experience unlike anything else in dance, and critics frequently comment on the unique nature of his conceptions. *The New York Times* has called him a "master and avant-gardist," and hailed MCDC performances as "riveting enactments of chaos theory."

Born in Centralia, Washington, Cunningham received his first formal dance and theater training at the Cornish School (now **Cornish College of the Arts**) in Seattle. From 1939 to 1945, he was a soloist in the company of modern dance icon **Martha Graham**. He presented his first New York solo concert with **John Cage** in 1944, and formed the Merce Cunningham Dance Company at **Black Mountain College** in 1953. Since that time, Cunningham has choreographed nearly 200 works for his company, including *Un jour ou deux* (1973) for the **Ballet of the Paris Opéra**, with music by Cage and design by famed visual artists **Jasper Johns**. His work has also been presented by **New York City Ballet**, **American Ballet Theatre**, **Boston Ballet**, **White Oak Dance Project**, **Pacific Northwest Ballet**, **Pennsylvania Ballet**, **Zurich Ballet**, and **Rambert Dance Company** (London), among others.

Cunningham also has worked extensively in film and video, and an abiding fascination with technology led him to work with the computer program DanceForms, which he has used in making all his dances since *Trackers* (1991). In 1997, he began work in motion capture with **Paul Kaiser** and **Shelley Eshkar** of Riverbed Media to develop the decor for *BIPED*, with music by **Gavin Bryars**, first performed in 1999. Cunningham also has collaborated on two books about his work: *Changes: Notes on Choreography*, with **Frances Starr** (Something Else Press, New York, 1968), and *The Dancer and the Dance*, interviews with **Jacqueline Lesschaeve** (Marion Boyars, New York and London, 1985).

Dancers slated to perform with the company in its Mondavi Center engagement include **Lisa Boudreau**, **Julie Cunningham**, **Brandon Collwes**, **Emma Desjardins**, **Holley Farmer**, **Jennifer Goggans**, **Daniel Madoff**,

Rashaun Mitchell, Koji Mizuta, Marcie Munnerlyn, Silas Riener, Daniel Squire, Robert Swinston, and Andrea Weber.

The program for the April 25 performance includes *MinEvent*, a 2008 work by Cunningham that will feature John Cage's *Thirty Pieces for String Quartet* performed live by the Kronos Quartet, one of the most acclaimed and popular new music ensembles on the international concert circuit. Also on the program that evening will be *Split Sides*, a Cunningham work from 2003 that features music by Radiohead and Sigur Rós. In *Split Sides*, the composition is divided into several design elements, with the order of presentation to be determined by chance procedure—the rolling of dice—on the day of the performance.

The program for April 26 includes *BIPED*, which is an exploration of the choreographic possibilities of the “motion capture” technology used in computer animation, with music by Gavin Bryars. Also on the program is *eyeSpace*, a 2006 Cunningham work that also utilizes chance procedures. The score, a suite entitled *International Cloud Atlas* by **Mikel Rouse**, whom Mondavi Center audiences will remember from his 2005 performances of *The End of Cinematics* (a piece co-commissioned by the Mondavi Center and dedicated to Cunningham), will be heard by audience members in randomly shuffled order via their own iPods or through iPod shuffles that the company will loan them the night of the performance. (There will also be ambient music for those who do not wish to utilize an iPod.)

“Merce Cunningham is truly one of the great American artists of our time, and it is with extraordinary pride that we will host his residency and these performances by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company,” said Roth. “For everyone with an interest in the best and most innovative modern dance, this is a not-to-be-missed event.”

What: Merce Cunningham Dance Company
When: April 25 & 26 • 8 pm
Where: Jackson Hall
Robert and Margrit Mondavi Center for the Performing Arts
University of California, Davis
Admission: \$43/\$37/\$29 Adults • \$16/\$14/\$12 Students & Children
Tickets/Info: 530.754.2787
866.754.2787 (toll-free)
<http://www.MondaviArts.org>
530.754.5402 [TDD]

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