

“Dance is the hidden language of the soul of the body” – Martha Graham

Martha Graham and American Music

A program curated especially for Valley Performing Arts Center

Martha Graham Dance Company

***wild Up* Christopher Rountree, Conductor**

***Diversion of Angels*, Dello Joio (1948)**

***Cave of the Heart*, Barber (1946)**

***Dark Meadow*, Chavez (1946)**

***Maple Leaf Rag*, Joplin (1990)**

Plus a community performance of Graham’s *Panorama* (1935) opens the show

Saturday, May 13 at 8pm

(Los Angeles, CA) March 23, 2017 - Valley Performing Arts Center will present *Martha Graham and American Music*, a program curated especially for Valley Performing Arts Center, performed by the Martha Graham Dance Company and *wild Up*, the classical music ensemble, conducted by its artistic director Christopher Rountree. Martha Graham Dance Company returns to VPAC after a sold-out performance in 2015.

This rare, one-night-only performance on Saturday, May 13, draws attention to an important aspect of Martha Graham’s unique contributions to American culture. During her career, she commissioned many major orchestral and chamber music works, by American composers, to accompany pieces of Martha Graham Dance Company’s repertoire.

The program includes *Diversion of Angels* (1948) with music by Norman Dello Joio and costumes by Martha Graham; *Cave of the Heart* (1946) with score by Samuel Barber, set by Isamu Noguchi, and costumes by Edythe Gilfond; and *Dark Meadow* (1946) to music by Carlos Chavez with set by Mr. Noguchi and costumes by Ms. Gilfond.

Graham’s final ballet *Maple Leaf Rag* (1990) to music of Scott Joplin, with costumes by Calvin Klein completes the program.

The program will also include Martha Graham’s classic, *Panorama*, first performed at the Bennington School of Dance in 1935. *Panorama* uses numbers and geometric design to drive home Graham’s intense socio-political themes, with a score by Norman Lloyd. In the spirit of the *Panorama* premiering at a school of dance, VPAC is bringing together CSUN, CSUN Alumni, select high school, and other community dancers to perform the 10-minute piece that will open the performance *Martha Graham and American Music* on VPAC’s Great Hall stage. This collaboration between a visiting dance company and the CSUN community, resulting in a main stage performance, will be the first of its kind at VPAC.

Thor Steingraber, Executive Director of VPAC said, "When I spoke with Janet Eilber, Artistic Director of Martha Graham Dance Company, she had always dreamed of doing a program with the important pieces of American music Martha Graham has commissioned. This not only gave us the opportunity to highlight Graham's significant role in Mid Century American music and dance, but to also add the fresh perspective to the performance by the company and to be able to include conductor Christopher Rountree and his explosive chamber ensemble, *wild Up*. Chris recently conducted *wild Up* in an incredibly memorable program celebrating John Adams' 70th here at VPAC."

Steingraber continues, "Pairing dance and live music was the norm in Graham's time and how she conceived her work. Not only does live music provide audiences with a more visceral experience, it gives the dancers an air of spontaneity that doesn't exist with recorded music. We are so excited for this evening as we've been working with Martha Graham Dance and Christopher Rountree and *wild Up* for two years to make it happen."

Mark Swed in the *Los Angeles Times* wrote of that concert, "Rountree happens to be a very wound-up conductor, and the intensity of the musicians proved incredibly visceral, making everything that was played feel fresh and immediate."

Christopher Rountree conducted VPAC's first live music and dance evening in 2015 with DIAVOLO – Architecture in Motion and New West Symphony.

Janet Eilber, Artistic Director of Martha Graham Dance Company explains the genesis of the company, "Martha Graham was part of a movement in all the art forms to find our country's own voice. She took America's Frontierism and created a new forceful style of dance that was so influential that around the world today, directors and choreographers, even if they don't know it, have built upon techniques that Martha Graham pioneered."

Eilber continues, "Her movement is very percussive, geometric. She was also interested in sculpting the space. This was part of her revolution to not just dance on an empty stage. The sets would create pathways and levels to enhance the emotional language of her work. Three of the works performed on this program are from 1946 to 1948, showing us a snapshot of that time in her choreographic career; the fourth work *Maple Leaf Rag*, was her final one."

Anna Kisselgoff in *The New York Times* said, "Graham's dances are chiefly dances of immediate impact. [*Maple Leaf Rag* is] a rollicking romp ... it embodies the quest that has colored every Graham work - the search to unite emotion and form. Hence the signatures that makes it recognizably Graham - the inevitability of the right gesture and also the power to come up with the unexpected."

Kisselgoff again wrote, "What is *Dark Meadow*? Perhaps only students of Carl Jung like Miss Graham can provide the answer to the specifics in the symbolism that she created while engrossed in Jung ... [while] the action can be summed up schematically such an outline cannot begin to do justice to the richness of the choreography and the disturbing way in which Miss Graham so effectively touches at the root of everyone's experience."

Kisselgoff said that *Diversion of Angels* is "Martha Graham's celebrated and luminous ode to love." Frances Herridge, writing for the *New York Star* (August 17, 1948) said the work "Is an appropriate curtain raiser to a week of modern dance ... essentially it is an exhibition piece for her group. As such it is superb."

Jennifer Dunning in *The New York Times* wrote, "*Cave of the Heart* takes Greek legends as a pretext for its explication of the female heart. Set to an urgent score by Samuel Barber, *Cave of the Heart* presents the sorceress Medea at a time when, abandoned by her lover, Jason, for a young princess, she murders the child and returns to her father, the Sun. The ballet's costumes and set by Isamu Noguchi are knockouts, in sheer visual terms as well as for their clear purveyance of symbolic content."

Martha Graham and American Music is sponsored by Elizabeth Purcell and is supported, in part, by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

About the Repertoire

Panorama (1935)

Music: Norman Lloyd

Panorama is divided into three parts, "Theme of Dedication," "Imperial Theme," and "Popular Theme." Mobiles for this work were designed by Alexander Calder and the set was created by Arch Lauterer. *Panorama* premiered on August 14, 1935, in Bennington, Vermont. The work was danced by Martha Graham and Group, with student dancers.

Diversion of Angels (1948)

Music: Norman Dello Joio

Costumes: Martha Graham

Diversion of Angels is a lyric dance about the loveliness of youth, the pleasure and playfulness, quick joy and quick sadness of being in love for the first time.

Diversion of Angels, originally called *Wilderness Stair: Diversion of Angels*, premiered on August 13, 1948, at Connecticut College, New London.

Martha Graham explains, "*Diversion of Angels* was done to bring out two things: the love of live and the love of love. It's the meeting and parting, for the first time – the girl in the white, the girl in red, the girl in yellow. They are different aspects of a woman, of a girl, of the experiences, the excitements, the sorrows, the tenderness of love."

Cave of the Heart (1946)

Score: Samuel Barber

Set: Isamu Noguchi

Costumes: Edythe Gilfond

Cave of the Heart is a shattering study of the destructive power of love inspired by the story of Medea.

Cave of the Heart premiered on May 10, 1946, at Columbia University's McMillin Theater, New York City. Originally called *Serpent Heart*, the work was revised in 1947 as *Cave of the Heart*. The original cast list included Graham, Erick Hawkins, Yuriko, May O'Donnell, and other members of the Martha Graham Dance Company. Harriet Johnson, writing for the *New York Post* (May 11, 1946) said, "*Serpent Heart* should be seen many times before it can be truly absorbed as a work of art."

Martha Graham explains, "*Cave of the Heart* is a dance that comes out of the past, in more than one way. It's the legend of the sorceress. It's the myth of a woman who is obsessed and maddened by love. When I did it in Asia for the first time, I remember in Burma, they didn't understand what *Medea* was. But they understood exactly what I meant by it. The glory of evil and the passion of jealousy is there."

Critic John Martin, writing for the *New York Times* (January 27, 1946), noted, "*Dark Meadow* is a curious work, indeed, which at first pretty thoroughly defies comprehension. An hour or so later, however, it suddenly begins to assume form in the memory, to take on cohesiveness and direction, and to send me hurrying back for a second view by way of confirmation.

Dark Meadow (1946)

Music: Carlos Chavez

Set: Isamu Noguchi

Costumes: Edythe Gilfond

One of Graham's most psychological and abstract works, and noted for its extraordinarily poignant and intricate work for the danced chorus.

Dark Meadow premiered on January 23, 1946, at New York's Plymouth Theater. The work, commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge Foundation of the Library of Congress, originally was to premiere along with *Appalachian Spring* in 1944; however, Chávez was unable to deliver the score in time for the performance. The cast list included Martha Graham, May O'Donnell, Erick Hawkins, and other members of the Martha Graham Dance Company. Critic John Martin, writing for the *New York Times* (January 27, 1946), noted, "*Dark Meadow* is a curious work, indeed, which at first pretty thoroughly defies comprehension. An hour or so later, however, it suddenly begins to assume form in the memory, to take on cohesiveness and direction, and to send me hurrying back for a second view by way of confirmation."

***Maple Leaf Rag* (1990)**

Music: Scott Joplin

Set: American Folk Art

Costumes: Calvin Klein

An instant audience favorite and a humorous and loving tribute to the choreographic muse and the music of Graham's youth.

Maple Leaf Rag had its premiere at the City Center in 1990. Critic Anna Kisselgoff, writing for the *The New York Times* (October 4, 1990) said, "The new piece is an entertaining poke by a genius at her own clichés, tersely and wittily stated. Yet its delightful self-parody remains within the Graham canon – using form for maximum expressiveness. Miss Graham as a conjuror has rarely come up with a more surprising bag of tricks. The most unexpected is the set, a joggling board from Charleston, S.C. This narrow board, stretched between posts mounted on two rockers, becomes a dynamic second stage for the dancers."

About Martha Graham Dance Company

Martha Graham and her Company have expanded contemporary dance's vocabulary of movement and forever altered the scope of the art form by rooting works in contemporary social, political, psychological, and sexual contexts, deepening their impact and resonance.

Always a fertile ground for experimentation, Martha Graham Dance Company has been an unparalleled resource in nurturing many of the leading choreographers and dancers of the 20th and 21st centuries, including Merce Cunningham, Erick Hawkins, Pearl Lang, Pascal Rioult, and Paul Taylor. Graham's repertoire of 181 works has also engaged noted performers such as Mikhail Baryshnikov, Claire Bloom, Margot Fonteyn, Liza Minnelli, Rudolf Nureyev, Maya Plisetskaya, and Kathleen Turner. Her groundbreaking techniques and unmistakable style have earned the Company acclaim from audiences in more than 50 countries throughout North and South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

Today, the Company continues to foster Graham's spirit of ingenuity. It is embracing a new programming vision that showcases masterpieces by Graham alongside newly commissioned works by contemporary artists inspired by Graham's legacy. With programs that unite the work of choreographers across time within a rich historical and thematic narrative, the Company is actively working to create new platforms for contemporary dance and multiple points of access for audiences.

Martha Graham Dance Company's repertory includes Graham masterpieces *Appalachian Spring*, *Lamentation*, *Cave of the Heart*, *Deaths and Entrances*, and *Chronicle*, among other works. The Company continues to expand its mission to present the work of its founder and her contemporaries, and remains a leader by catalyzing new works with commissions that bring fresh perspectives to dance classics, such as *American Document* (2010) and *Lamentation Variations* (2009). Multimedia programs like *Dance is a Weapon* (2010), a montage of several works connected through text and media, redefine the boundaries of contemporary dance composition.

About Martha Graham (5/11/1894 – 4/1/1991)

Martha Graham's creativity crossed artistic boundaries and embraced every artistic genre. She collaborated with and commissioned work from the leading visual artists, musicians, and designers of her day, including

sculptor Isamu Noguchi and fashion designers Halston, Donna Karan, and Calvin Klein, as well as composers Aaron Copland, Samuel Barber, William Schuman, Norman Dello Joio, and Gian Carlo Menotti.

Influencing generations of choreographers and dancers including Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp, Graham forever altered the scope of dance. Classical ballet dancers Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Baryshnikov sought her out to broaden their artistry, and artists of all genres were eager to study and work with Graham—she taught actors including Bette Davis, Kirk Douglas, Madonna, Liza Minelli, Gregory Peck, Tony Randall, Eli Wallach, Anne Jackson, and Joanne Woodward to utilize their bodies as expressive instruments.

Graham's groundbreaking style grew from her experimentation with the elemental movements of contraction and release. By focusing on the basic activities of the human form, she enlivened the body with raw, electric emotion. The sharp, angular, and direct movements of her technique were a dramatic departure from the predominant style of the time.

With an artistic practice deeply ingrained in the rhythm of American life and the struggles of the individual, Graham brought a distinctly American sensibility to every theme she explored. "A dance reveals the spirit of the country in which it takes root. No sooner does it fail to do this than it loses its integrity and significance," she wrote in the 1937 essay *A Platform for the American Dance*.

Consistently infused with social, political, psychological, and sexual themes, Graham's choreography is timeless, connecting with audiences past and present. Works such as *Revolt* (1927), *Immigrant: Steerage, Strike* (1928), and *Chronicle* (1936)—created the same year she turned down Hitler's invitation to perform at the International Arts Festival organized in conjunction with the Olympic Games in Berlin—personify Graham's commitment to addressing challenging contemporary issues and distinguish her as a conscientious and politically powerful artist.

Martha Graham remained a strong advocate of the individual throughout her career, creating works such as *Deaths and Entrances* (1943), *Appalachian Spring* (1944), *Dark Meadow* (1946), and *Errand into the Maze* (1947) to explore human and societal complexities. The innovative choreography and visual imagery of *American Document* (1938) exemplified Graham's genius. The dramatic narrative, which included the Company's first male dancer, explored the concept of what it means to be American. Through the representation of important American cultural groups such as Native Americans, African-Americans, and Puritans and the integration of text from historical American documents, Graham was able to capture the soul of the American people.

During her long and illustrious career, Graham created 181 masterpiece dance compositions, which continue to challenge and inspire generations of performers and audiences. In 1986, she was given the Local One Centennial Award for dance by her theater colleagues, awarded only once every 100 years, and during the Bicentennial she was granted the United States' highest civilian honor, The Medal of Freedom. In 1998, *TIME* Magazine named her the "Dancer of the Century." The first dancer to perform at the White House and to act as a cultural ambassador abroad, she captured the spirit of a nation and expanded the boundaries of contemporary dance. "I have spent all my life with dance and being a dancer," she said. "It's permitting life to use you in a very intense way. Sometimes it is not pleasant. Sometimes it is fearful. But nevertheless it is inevitable."

About Christopher Rountree (Artistic Director / Conductor, *wild Up*)

We see *Lady Macbeth* in a dozen crooning silhouettes washing blood out of rags in a bathroom; Stravinsky pouring out of an abandoned warehouse; a violinist cutting himself out of duct tape with a razor as his violin sits gathering feedback; and a lost John Adams suite at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Conductor and composer Christopher Rountree is standing at the intersection of classical music, new music, performance art and pop.

Rountree, 32, is the founder, conductor and creative director of the pathbreaking L.A. chamber orchestra *wild Up*. The group has been called "Searing. Penetrating. And Thrilling" by NPR's *Performance Today* and named "Best Classical Music of 2015" by the *New York Times*. *wild Up* started in 2010 with no funding and

no musicians, driven only by Rountree's vision of a world-class orchestra that creates visceral, provocative experiences that are unmoored from classical traditions.

Whether he's conducting, composing or curating a program, Rountree's approach – with its “infectious enthusiasm” (*Los Angeles Times*) and “elegant clarity” (*New York Times*) – is united by extremely high energy and a deeply engaged relationship between a score, musicians and audience.

“For most people, programming and conducting are about restraint, intellect. I want to get rid of restraint: I want to tear the thing's guts out. I want to go all the way there,” Rountree says. “I want to empower musicians. I want to energize an audience. It's not that I'm a ‘conduit for the score’ – everyone in the hall is a part of a circuit that connects the conductor, the musicians, the score and the listeners. A concert shouldn't leave people when people leave the concert hall.”

If there is a dam separating establishment classical music from more adventurous forms, Rountree finds himself spilling over both sides – conducting Opera Omaha here, and writing an experimental theater work for 12 singers singing Haydn backwards in the Philadelphia Museum of Art there.

This year, Rountree makes his Chicago Symphony, LA Opera and Atlanta Opera debuts, returns to the Music Academy of the West and twice to the San Francisco Symphony's SoundBox series, conducts the Interlochen World Youth Orchestra on the New York Philharmonic's 2016 Biennial, joins Jennifer Koh and Shai Wosner with *wild Up* at the Laguna Beach Music Festival, and conducts Diavolo's new show “L'Espace du Temps: Glass, Adams, and Salonen.” As a composer, his recent premieres and commissions include a new piece for The Crossing at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, a re-orchestration of Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Foreign Bodies*, a choral work for Bjork's choir *Graduale Nobili* in Reykjavik, Iceland, and two new pieces for Jennifer Koh: a short theater piece on the New York Philharmonic's Biennial, and a large-scale concerto co-commissioned by the Los Angeles Philharmonic for Jenny and *wild Up*.

Last year, Rountree founded an education intensive with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, continued an education partnership at the Colburn School, and taught “Creativity and Consciousness” at Bard College's Longy School. He joined the production company Chromatic, conducted Opera Omaha performing John Adams' “A Flowering Tree,” debuted on the San Francisco Symphony's SoundBox series, and started a three-year stint as guest conductor of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra.

With his eclectic style and resume, he's been tapped to curate and create events for contemporary art institutions including the Getty Museum, MCA Denver, the Philadelphia Museum of Art and UCLA's Hammer Museum, where a long-running *wild Up* residency brought the group to national prominence.

Through it all, Rountree is guided by his vision of a more engaging classical music culture that blows up the old boxes.

“I don't have enough tattoos to be the badboy provocateur of classical music,” Rountree jokes. “But is the goal to dismantle the artform and build something new – something bursting with life, contemporary relevance, and deep mindfulness? That is exactly what we're doing.”

About *wild Up*

wild Up has been called “Searing. Penetrating. And thrilling” by Fred Child of *Performance Today* and “Magnificent” by Mark Swed of the *Los Angeles Times*. Over the last five years, *wild Up* has collaborated with orchestras, rock bands and cultural institutions around the world.

The group began in 2010 as a self-funded, completely bootstrapped project of *wild Up*'s Artistic Director and Conductor Christopher Rountree: after graduate school, Rountree returned to Los Angeles wanting to create an ensemble made up of young musicians, a group that would reject classical music's most outdated traditions and embrace unusual venues and programs that throw the classical repertoire into the context of pop culture, new music and performance art. The group's first few concerts at art studios and rock clubs around L.A. created a fervent fan-base of true believers. Then UCLA's Hammer Museum tapped *wild Up* as

the museum's first ever Ensemble in Residence, and after dozens of concerts in the Hammer's halls, courtyards and galleries, the L.A. Times proclaimed the group "Best Classical Music of 2012." It was off to the races, as *wild Up* began working with musical and cultural institutions around the world.

The group has been Ensemble in Residence with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and played numerous programs with the Los Angeles Philharmonic including the Phil's Brooklyn Festival, Minimalist Jukebox Festival, and Next on Grand Festival. They started an ongoing education partnership with the Colburn School, taught Creativity and Consciousness at Bard's Longy School, led composition classes with the American Composers Forum and American Composers Orchestra, and founded and an intensive educational program with the LA Philharmonic in which ten young composers and a faculty of eight legendary composers meet to collaborate on new work.

While the group is part of the fabric of classical music in L.A., *wild Up* also embraces indie music collaborations. The group has an album forthcoming on Bedroom Community Records with Bjork's choir *Graduale Nobili*, vocalist Jodie Landau, and producer Valgeir Sigurðsson recorded in Reykjavik, Iceland; they played with composer Ellis Ludwig-Leone and rock band San Fermin under a tyrannosaurus rex at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles; they performed Mica Levi of *Micachu* and the Shapes' score of the Scarlett Johansson film "Under the Skin" at the Regent Theater in downtown L.A.; they premiered and recorded an opera by Lewis Pesacov of afrobeat band Fool's Gold about the end of the Mayan Calendar; and they will premiere forthcoming works by Domino Records artist Julia Holter and Eric Avery of rock band Jane's Addiction.

In the current season, *wild Up* was Ensemble in Residence with Jennifer Koh and Shai Wosner at the Laguna Beach Music Festival; they embarked on their second large-scale production with director James Darrah and production company Chromatic called FAILURE.; and the group premiered a few dozen new works, including composer David Lang's "Anatomy Theater" at the LA Opera. In October, *wild Up* made their New York debut on the American Composers Orchestra's SONiC festival with a new program called "West."

wild Up has been featured at numerous West Coast cultural spaces including the Music Academy of the West, Santa Barbara Arts and Lectures, the Broad Stage, Zipper Hall at the Colburn School, REDCAT, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Beyond Baroque, the Armory Center for the Arts, Santa Ana Sites and Echo Park's Jensen Rec Center. Their recordings of Shostakovich, Rzewski, Messiaen and Los Angeles composers have been featured on KUSC, WNYC, Q2, KPFK, Alex Ross's blog The Rest Is Noise and American Public Media's Performance Today, among many others.

Calendar Listing for Martha Graham and American Music

Venue: Valley Performing Arts Center
18111 Nordhoff Street
Northridge, CA 91330

Date: Saturday, May 13 at 8pm

Tickets: Starting at \$28

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