

Walker Art Center presents
The Misfortune of the Immortals
Sunday, May 22, 1994; 7 pm
Walker Art Center Auditorium

The Misfortune of the Immortals

An interactive theater work in three parts,
created by Joan La Barbara, Mark Coniglio,
Morton Subotnick, and Woody Vasulka

Characters:

Scientist – Joan La Barbara
Human/Dancer – Dawn Stoppiello
Prankster/Demon – I Nyoman Wenten

- Music composed by Joan La Barbara,
Mark Coniglio, and Morton Subotnick
- Video images by Steina and Woody Vasulka
- Morphing sequences by Bruce Hamilton
- Lighting Design by Kyle Lemoi
- Production Manager and Costumes by
Megan Morris

The Misfortune of the Immortals has been developed during workshops and residencies at Arizona State University/Institute for Studies in the Arts; The Atlantic Center for the Arts; California Institute of the Arts/Center for Experiments in Art, Information and Technology (CEAIT); The Center for Contemporary Arts in Sante Fe; Telluride Institute and Yellow Springs Institute.

The commissioning of the music for *The Misfortune of the Immortals* by California Institute of the Arts/Center for Experiments in Art, Information and Technology (CEAIT) and the Walker Art Center, was made possible by a grant from the Meet the Composer/Reader's Digest Composer Commissioning Program funded by the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Program Notes / Biographies

The Misfortune of the Immortals, a work-in-progress, will in its final form take place in an interactive computer-controlled stage environment utilizing an array of new technologies. These technologies extend the reach of the protagonists to the edge of their world: the stage space...and beyond. Sensors attached to the bodies of each performer establish a line of communication to the technological environment through **MIDI Dancer**, developed by Mark Coniglio, and a pitch follower which translates vocal material into information accessible to the computer for voice control of the environment, all programmed through **Interactor®**, a software program developed by Coniglio and Morton Subotnick.

By placing technology at the forefront as a dramatic device, allowing the performers access to specific realtime control of sound, video, lighting, the entire stage environment, we provide a vehicle for the exploration of our relationship with technology. Each of the three isolated characters attempts expression through the use of these new tools. In one episode, a scientist, trapped in a minimally functioning body, struggles to communicate theories about the nature of the universe and its beginnings and tries to create alternate realities by the only means available: vocal sounds and simple finger movements. In another, a dancer enters into competition with her technological double, an image of herself unencumbered by gravity or the limits of stamina. Finally, a prankster/demon performs with great bravura a fantastic symphony of light and sound, triggered by the movement of his hands and body.

These episodes will be embedded in a fabric of overlapping scenes in which the set appears to have a life of its own. As screens and lights move, sounds play, images and lights project, the three characters are revealed in various parts of the set as if they were part of its world.

The title of the work is taken from a Max Ernst collage book and suggests the often fantastic, sometimes poignant and always ephemeral quality of our species' attempt at using technology to place us beyond nature.

Morton Subotnick is one of the United States' premiere composers and innovators of electronic music. His work has encompassed many of the most important technological breakthroughs in the history of the genre. In addition to music in the electronic medium, Subotnick has written for symphony orchestra, chamber ensembles, theater and multimedia productions, including *Jacob's Room* commissioned for the Kronos Quartet and singer Joan La Barbara, *The Key to Songs* for chamber orchestra and computer, and his groundbreaking *Silver Apples of the Moon* from 1967. Currently, Subotnick co-directs both the Composition program and the Center for Experiments in Art, Information and Technology (CEAIT) at the California Institute of the Arts. He also tours extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe as a lecturer and composer-performer.

Joan La Barbara's career as a composer, singer, and sound artist has been devoted to exploring the human voice as a multi-faceted instrument, going far beyond its traditional boundaries, creating works for voices, instruments and interactive technology. *The San Francisco Examiner* recently called her, "One of the great vocal virtuosas of our time." La Barbara is an important pioneer in the field of contemporary classical music and soundart, and has developed a unique vocabulary of experimental and extended vocal techniques, including multi-phonics (the simultaneous sounding of two or more pitches), circular singing, ululation and glottal clicks that have become her signature sounds. La Barbara has premiered landmark compositions written for her by noted American composers including Robert Ashley, Larry Austin, John Cage, Morton Feldman, Philip Glass, Mel Powell, Steve Reich, Rhys Chatham, and Subotnick. La Barbara has also worked in film and television providing, among other things, the angel voice for actress Emmanuelle Béart in *Date with an Angel*, and voice and electronics for Steve Finkin's animated alphabet on the educational television show *Sesame Street*.

Mark Coniglio began his career with a five-year tenure as a producer for American Gramophone Records, during which time he received a performance of his work by the London Symphony Orchestra. A student of Subotnick's, Coniglio received his degree in music composition from the California Institute of the Arts; subsequently developing an interest in electronic and real-time interactive composition. He also has developed both software and hardware for interactive composition and performance. Recently, Coniglio has been active in the creation of collaborative media performance works with choreographers Tanya Hinkel (on *The Becoming Orchid*), and with Dawn

Stoppiello (*An Adjacent Disclosure and Tactile Diaries*). Currently Coniglio teaches Interactive Music at CalArts.

Woody Vasulka was born in Czechoslovakia, later emigrating to New York in 1965, where he worked as a freelance film editor and began experimenting with electronic sounds and stroboscopic lights. In 1974, Vasulka joined the faculty of the Center for Media Study at SUNY-Buffalo where he began investigating computer and real-time digital video tools. With his wife Steina, he founded The Kitchen, a New York City Media Theater. He and his wife live now in Santa Fe, where he continues his investigations into "digital space" through *The Theater of Hybrid Automata*. **Steina Vasulka** was born in Iceland in 1948. She attended the Music Conservatory in Prague from 1959 to 1963, joining the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra in 1964. After coming to the U.S. with her husband, she has been active in the development of the electronic arts. Her work has been shown and broadcast extensively in the U.S. and Europe, including the show *machine Vision* at the Albright-Knox Gallery in Buffalo, New York.

Choreographer-dancer **Dawn Stoppiello** resides in Los Angeles, where she is currently a member of the Bella Lewitsky Dance Company. Before completing her studies in dance at the California Institute of the Arts in 1989, she had already received the 1987 Princess Grace Foundation USA Scholarship in Dance, and was awarded a CalArts Inter-Disciplinary grant toward the creation of *The Need*, a large-scale performance work utilizing dance, theater, and interactive computer technology. She recently created the choreography for a collaboration with composer Mark Coniglio called *Tactile Diaries*. Through the use of a slow-scan video link, this performance allowed dancers at the Electronic Cafe in Los Angeles and the NYU Television Studios in Manhattan to interact during simultaneous performances at both sites. Previous performances include those with the Chicago Repertory Dance Ensemble, the Los Angeles-based Jazz-Tap Ensemble, and in John Cage's *Sixteen Dances* performed at the 1987 New Music America Festival.

I Nyoman Wenten is one of Bali's most versatile dancers and musicians. He is well known for his abilities in Javanese as well as his native Balinese dance and music. He has an advanced degree from National Academy of Dance in Jogjakarta, Java, and was also graduated from the Music and Dance Conservatory in Bali. He has taught at the National Academy of Dance in both Bali and Java, and at many music and dance programs in the United States (e.g. The Center for World Music, San Jose State University, and University of Wisconsin, among others).