

The Soraya Joins Martha Graham Dance Company and Wild Up for the June 19 World Premiere of a Digital Dance Creation

Immediate Tragedy

Inspired by Martha Graham’s lost solo from 1937, this reimagined version will feature 14 dancers and include new music composed by Wild Up’s Christopher Rountree

(New York, NY), May 28, 2020—The ongoing collaboration by three major arts organizations—Martha Graham Dance Company, the Los Angeles-based Wild Up music collective, and The Soraya—will continue June 19 with the premiere of a digital dance inspired by archival remnants of Martha Graham’s *Immediate Tragedy*, a solo she created in 1937 in response to the Spanish Civil War. Graham created the solo in collaboration with composer Henry Cowell, but it was never filmed and has been considered lost for decades. Drawing on the common experience of today’s immediate tragedy – the global pandemic -- the 22 artists creating the project are collaborating from locations across the U.S. and Europe using a variety of technologies to coordinate movement, music, and digital design.

The new digital *Immediate Tragedy*, commissioned by The Soraya, will premiere online Friday, June 19 at 4pm (Pacific)/7pm (EST) during Fridays at 4 on [The Soraya Facebook page](#), and Saturday, June 20 at 11:30am/2:30pm at the Martha Matinee on the [Graham Company’s YouTube Channel](#).

In its new iteration, *Immediate Tragedy* will feature 14 dancers and 6 musicians each recorded from the safety of their homes. Martha Graham Dance Company’s Artistic Director Janet Eilber, in consultation with Rountree and The Soraya’s Executive Director, Thor Steingraber, suggested the long-distance creative process inspired by a cache of recently rediscovered materials—over 30 photos, musical notations, letters and reviews all relating to the 1937 solo. Each dancer received four photos from which to develop specific movement phrases. Rountree and the musicians have taken inspiration from shards of Cowell’s music notations found in the Graham archives. All the artists received the background materials and are collectively basing their artistic contributions on Graham’s reflection in a letter to Henry Cowell “... whether the desperation lies in Spain or in a memory in our own hearts it is the same ... I had been in a valley of despair, too. I felt in that dance I was dedicating myself anew to space, that in spite of violation I was upright and that I was going to stay upright at all costs ...”

Neil Baldwin, author of the forthcoming *Martha Graham: When Dance Became Modern* (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc,) uncovered much of the archival material – including letters between Graham and Cowell, photos, reviews and writings – that inspire the artistic choices for this new work. Neil Baldwin’s previous book length subjects include William Carlos Williams, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford.

This new *Immediate Tragedy* is currently in rehearsal and being created remotely under the dictates of social distancing. The Soraya’s own video editor Ricki Quinn is working with Eilber and Rountree to bring all the elements together for the onscreen theatrical presentation. It will be available for viewing on the Martha Graham YouTube Channel and www.TheSoraya.org. Both companies have been engaging extensively online with their audiences during COVID Sheltering orders. This original digital dance, however, requires an even greater level of innovation since none of the artists will ever be in the same room.

“At The Soraya, one of our priorities has been to support artists during this time. This opportunity for the dancers and musicians to be back at work and undertake such an important creative endeavor is a silver-lining in an otherwise difficult moment when live performances are not possible,” says The Soraya’s Executive Director Thor Steingraber. He adds, “The innovative spirit and brilliance of Janet Eilber and Chris Rountree make a project like this possible. I am proud that The Soraya first brought them together in 2017, a collaboration that has subsequently continued worldwide.”

“While the piece is really located in a ‘post Henry Cowell’ space, another big inspiration is: this moment itself, and the immediate tragedy of us all being apart. What are our modes of being together in this moment? What does it look like, what does it sound like and how do we deal with being apart like this?” said Rountree. “We’ve followed this digital process, and what I’ve come to is some kind of iterative, call and response, where we hear shadows of multiple musicians’ voices, echoing and preempting each other. Like some simple but all too glitchy Zoom meeting.”

“For about two years, I have thought to make a choreographic response to this lost solo work, *Immediate Tragedy*,” said Eilber. Several unknown photos of the work resurfaced along with some writings, so I thought we had a chance to create something new and substantial, and I knew Thor and Chris would be ideal partners for this out-of-the-box plan. The ephemera of Graham’s *Immediate Tragedy* gives us potent and relevant ideas that resonate deeply with our current tragedy. Even in its absence, the passion with which Graham worked is palpable, and the inspirational courage of the people she depicted is sorely needed now.”

The 30-minute world premiere showings on June 19 and 20 will include interviews with the collaborators, a screening of a recent performance of *Deep Song*, a solo which the choreographer created as a companion to *Immediate Tragedy* in 1937, and the premiere of the new digital *Immediate Tragedy*, which is 10 minutes long.

Immediate Tragedy

Premiere June 19, 2020

Choreography by Janet Eilber and dancers of Martha Graham Dance Company

Music composed and conducted by Christopher Rountree

Digital Design and Editing by Ricki Quinn

Martha Graham Dance Company: So Young An, Alessio Crognale, Laurel Dalley Smith, Natasha Diamond-Walker, Lloyd Knight, Charlotte Landreau, Jacob Larsen, Lloyd Mayor, Marzia Memoli, Anne O'Donnell, Lorenzo Pagano, Anne Souder, Leslie Andrea Williams, Xin Ying

Musicians of Wild Up: Jiji, Richard Valitutto, Jodie Landau, Brian Walsh, Derek Stein

Commissioned by The Soraya.

The artistic team thanks Neil Baldwin for rediscovering much of the archival material used to inspire this production.

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Martha Graham Dance Company

Martha Graham is recognized as a primal artistic force of the 20th century, alongside Picasso, James Joyce, Stravinsky, and Frank Lloyd Wright. TIME magazine named Martha Graham "Dancer of the Century," and People magazine named her among the female "Icons of the Century." As a choreographer, she was as prolific as she was complex. Graham created 181 ballets and a dance technique that has been compared to ballet in its scope and magnitude. Her approach to dance and theater revolutionized the art form and her innovative physical vocabulary has irrevocably influenced dance worldwide.

Martha Graham's extraordinary artistic legacy has often been compared to Stanislavsky's Art Theatre in Moscow and the Grand Kabuki Theatre of Japan, for its diversity and breadth. Her legacy is perpetuated in performance by the Martha Graham Dance Company and Graham 2, and by the students of the Martha Graham School.

In 1926, Martha Graham founded her dance company and school, living and working out of a tiny Carnegie Hall studio in midtown Manhattan. In developing her technique, Martha Graham experimented endlessly with basic human movement, beginning with the most elemental movements of contraction and release. Using these principles as the foundation for her technique, she built a vocabulary of movement that would "increase the emotional activity of

the dancer's body." Martha Graham's dancing and choreography exposed the depths of human emotion through movements that were sharp, angular, jagged, and direct. The dance world was forever altered by Martha Graham's vision, which has been and continues to be a source of inspiration for generations of dance and theatre artists.

Martha Graham's ballets were inspired by a wide variety of sources, including modern painting, the American frontier, religious ceremonies of Native Americans, and Greek mythology. Many of her most important roles portray great women of history and mythology: Clytemnestra, Jocasta, Medea, Phaedra, Joan of Arc, and Emily Dickinson.

As an artist, Martha Graham conceived each new work in its entirety – dance, costumes, and music. During her 70 years of creating dances, Martha Graham collaborated with such artists as sculptor Isamu Noguchi; actor and director John Houseman; fashion designers Halston, Donna Karan and Calvin Klein; and renowned composers including Aaron Copland, Louis Horst (her mentor), Samuel Barber, William Schuman, Carlos Surinach, Norman Dello Joio, and Gian Carlo Menotti.

Her company was the training ground for many future modern choreographers, including Merce Cunningham, Paul Taylor, and Twyla Tharp. She created roles for classical ballet stars such as Margot Fonteyn, Rudolf Nureyev, and Mikhail Baryshnikov, welcoming them as guests into her company. In charge of movement and dance at The Neighborhood Playhouse, she taught actors including Bette Davis, Kirk Douglas, Madonna, Liza Minnelli, Gregory Peck, Tony Randall, Anne Jackson, and Joanne Woodward how to use the body as an expressive instrument.

Martha Graham's uniquely American vision and creative genius earned her numerous honors and awards, such as The Laurel Leaf of the American Composers Alliance in 1959 for her service to music. Her colleagues in theater, the members of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees Local One, voted her the recipient of the 1986 Local One Centennial Award for Dance, not to be awarded for another 100 years. In 1976, President Gerald R. Ford bestowed upon Martha Graham the United States' highest civilian honor, The Presidential Medal of Freedom, and declared her a "national treasure," making her the first dancer and choreographer to receive this honor. Another Presidential honor was awarded Martha Graham in 1985 when President Ronald Reagan designated her among the first recipients of the United States National Medal of Arts.

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.

Janet Eilber has been the Martha Graham Dance Company's artistic director since 2005. Her direction has focused on creating new forms of audience access to Martha Graham's masterworks. These initiatives include contextual programming, educational and community partnerships, use of new media, commissions from today's top choreographers and creative events such as the *Lamentation Variations*. Earlier in her career, Ms. Eilber worked closely with Martha Graham. She danced many of Graham's greatest roles, had roles created for her by Graham, and was directed by Graham in most of the major roles of the repertory. She soloed at the White House, was partnered by Rudolf Nureyev, starred in three segments of *Dance in America*, and has since taught, lectured, and directed Graham ballets internationally. Apart from her work with Graham, Ms. Eilber has performed in films, on television, and on Broadway directed by such greats as Agnes deMille and Bob Fosse and has received four Lester Horton Awards for her reconstruction and performance of seminal American modern dance. She has served as Director of Arts Education for the Dana Foundation, guiding the Foundation's support for Teaching Artist training and contributing regularly to its arts education publications. Ms. Eilber is a Trustee Emeritus of the Interlochen Center for the Arts. She is married to screenwriter/director John Warren, with whom she has two daughters, Madeline and Eva.

Wild Up

Called "a raucous, grungy, irresistibly exuberant ... fun-loving, exceptionally virtuosic family" by Zachary Woolfe of *The New York Times*, Wild Up has been lauded as one of classical music's most exciting groups by virtually every significant institution and critic within earshot.

The GRAMMY nominated ensemble was started by Artistic Director Christopher Rountree, his vision of a group of young musicians that rejected outdated traditions and threw classical repertoire into the context of pop culture, new music, and performance art. In 2020, the group celebrates 10 years of bringing people together around the belief that no music is off limits, that classical music concerts can defy convention and address the need for heart-wrenching, mind-bending experiences.

Over the past decade the group: accompanied Björk at Goldenvoice's FYF Fest; premiered David Lang and Mark Dion's "anatomy theater" at LA Opera; played the scores to "Under the Skin" by Mica Levi and "Punch Drunk Love" by Jon Brion live with the films at L.A.'s Regent Theater and

Ace Hotel; premiered hundreds of new works including: a new opera by Julia Holter at Brooklyn's National Sawdust, new pieces from avant-pop icon Scott Walker and celestial loop-maker Juliana Barwick at Walt Disney Concert Hall, and the West Coast premiere of Ragnar Kjartansson's "Bliss" a 12-hour epic at REDCAT during the LA Phil Fluxus festival. They played a noise concert as fanfare for the groundbreaking of Frank Gehry's new building on Grand Avenue and First Street in downtown L.A.; toured the country with their original projects "Future Folk," and "We the People;" championed the music of Julius Eastman; and founded the solstice series "darkness sounding." They held residencies at the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Colburn School, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, National Sawdust, and the Hammer Museum, and taught at dozens of educational institutions across the U.S.

Christopher Rountree

Whether presenting his beloved chamber group Wild Up in a museum bathroom, directing a series of interdisciplinary ambient concerts called SILENCE in an oak grove, or leading renowned ensembles through new music freshest works at the world's greatest concert halls, Rountree has distinguished himself as one of classical music's most forward-thinking innovators in creativity and community building.

"I think of scenarios that will awaken people's hearts or change people's minds about something, then set them up, and see what happens," Rountree, 36, says of his approach. "If I can imagine how a program will live in a space and that thought makes me smile, then I'm ready to start."

Rountree, is the founder, conductor and creative director of the pathbreaking L.A. chamber orchestra Wild Up. The group's eccentric mix of new music, pop and performance art quickly jumped from raucous DIY bar shows to being lauded as the vanguard for classical music by critics for The Los Angeles Times, The Wall Street Journal, public radio's Performance Today, and The New York Times, where Zachary Woolfe called the group "...a raucous, grungy, irresistibly exuberant...fun-loving, exceptionally virtuosic family." 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.

In 2019 he curated and conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic's FLUXUS Festival, the experimental music component of the Phil's 100th season in collaboration with the Getty Research Institute. The 16-concert FLUXUS Festival united icons of contemporary art with classical music for the first time, placing Yoko Ono next to Ryoji Ikeda and Luciano Berio; La Monte Young next to Steven Takasugi next to John Cage. Ragnar Kjartansson's "Bliss," an ecstatic 12-hour rendering of Mozart, stood next to Alison Knowles' "Make a Salad," performed by 1,700 people. David Lang's "crowd out" took over downtown L.A., as orchestra musicians launched the watermelons of Ken Friedman's "Sonata for Melons and Gravity" off the top of Walt Disney Concert Hall.

“I envision the audience first: their experience watching and listening to whatever it is that the band is doing up there on stage, and I think of the audience’s conversations when they leave the hall, What will they be interested in? What will they remember?” Rountree says. “Then I see the space the way I want it to be: the light, the air, the taste of the room. Then the band: I see all the challenges, fights and elation we’re going to have in rehearsal, and I imagine the way that we’ll all feel when the time is right, and we make that choice to walk on stage to start the show.”

As he’s become regarded as one of the most exciting and iconoclastic conductors and programmers in the field, Rountree’s inimitable style has led to collaborations with: Björk, John Adams, Yoko Ono, David Lang, Scott Walker, La Monte Young, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Mica Levi, Alison Knowles, Yuval Sharon, Sigourney Weaver, Tyshawn Sorey, Ragnar Kjartansson, Ashley Fure, Julia Holter, Claire Chase, Missy Mazzoli, Ryoji Ikeda, Du Yun, Thaddeus Strassberger, Ellen Reid, Ted Hearne, James Darrah, and many of the planet’s greatest orchestras and ensembles including: the National, San Francisco, Houston, Cincinnati, Colorado, San Diego and Chicago Symphonies, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, International Contemporary Ensemble, Roomful of Teeth, Opera national de Paris, the Washington National, Los Angeles, Omaha, San Diego, and Atlanta Operas, and the Martha Graham Dance Company. He has presented compositions and concerts at Walt Disney Concert Hall, Palais Garnier, Mile High Stadium, the Coliseum, the Echoplex, Kennedy Center, Philadelphia Museum of Art, ACE Hotel, National Sawdust, MCA Denver, The Hammer, The Getty, a basketball court in Santa Cruz, and at Lincoln Center on the New York Philharmonic’s Biennale.

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

About Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)

The 2019-20 Season marks the ninth year for the award-winning Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts which has quickly become one of the cultural jewels of the greater Los Angeles region. Under the leadership of Executive Director Thor Steingraber, The Soraya continues to expand its programming and outstanding multidisciplinary performances. The Soraya presents a wide variety of performances that not only include new and original work from the Los Angeles region but also work from around the world appealing to all of LA’s rich and diverse communities.

Located on the campus of California State University, Northridge, The Soraya’s season offers a vibrant performance program of classical and popular music, dance, theater, family, and international events that have served to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural

heart of the San Fernando Valley, and further establish itself as one of the top arts companies in Southern California. The award-winning, 1,700-seat theatre was designed by HGA Architects and Engineers and was recently cited by the Los Angeles Times as “a growing hub for live music, dance, drama and other cultural events.”

Thor Steingraber

Thor Steingraber's artistic career spans more than 20 years, stage directing at major venues from Lincoln Center to theaters in Europe and Asia. Los Angeles has been his foremost artistic home. His work could be seen at Los Angeles Opera from 1994 to 2008. Steingraber has directed operatic repertoire spanning 400 years and five languages and has also worked on contemporary operas with American composers including John Adams, John Harbison, Michael Ching, and Anthony Davis. Steingraber also taught and directed at Yale School of Music, Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music, and the Curtis Institute.

In 2008 Steingraber accepted Harvard Kennedy School's first Arts Fellowship, and embarked upon a Master's degree focused on non-profit management and public leadership.

Since his appointment in 2014 to The Soraya (formerly Valley Performing Arts Center), Steingraber has brought acclaim to the 1,700-seat venue. Located in the heart of the San Fernando Valley, The Soraya is home to many Los Angeles artists and arts organizations, and Steingraber's lifetime experience as a producer has brought to The Soraya a range of original, innovative, and diverse programming. Previously, Steingraber was Vice President of two of the nation's largest performing arts centers – The Kimmel Center in Philadelphia, and The Music Center in downtown Los Angeles. In his capacity at The Music Center, Steingraber was responsible for opening Grand Park and establishing the vision that made the park vital to LA, as the home to its many celebrations and holidays.

For more information, please visit www.thesoraya.org.

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