

**BILL T. JONES, A VISIONARY FORCE IN MODERN DANCE,  
TO BE HONORED WITH ONE OF THE LARGEST PRIZES IN THE ARTS  
– THE 2003 DOROTHY AND LILLIAN GISH PRIZE –  
Ceremony will Feature Special Performance by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane  
Dance Company, with tributes from Harvey Lichtenstein and Cassandra Wilson**

Dancer, choreographer, and director **Bill T. Jones**, one of the most innovative and powerful forces in the modern dance world, will be recognized with the **2003 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize**. Jones will be honored with the Gish Prize – a silver medallion and approximately \$250,000 – at an awards ceremony to be held on October 28, 2003, at the Hudson Theatre, Millennium Broadway, New York City. **Harvey Lichtenstein**, chairman, BAM Local Development Corporation, president emeritus of the Brooklyn Academy of Music, and founder of the Next Wave Festival, one of the largest and most influential expositions of the contemporary performing arts in the world, will be on hand to pay tribute and deliver remarks. Also on hand will be **Cassandra Wilson**, Grammy award-winning vocalist, musician and producer, who has collaborated with Jones. The evening will conclude with a special performance of Jones' 2003 work *Mercy 10 x 8 on a circle*, presented by the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company.

Jones is known for using his unique dance vocabulary—a mixture of movement, music, video, and text – to confront contemporary issues and tell compelling stories. The award-winning multicultural company he co-founded, the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, will celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this season.

The annual Gish Prize is one of the largest awards in the arts. Now in its tenth year, the Prize recognizes outstanding talents from a spectrum of disciplines in the arts. Gish Prize recipients are trailblazers who have redefined their art and reshaped the cultural landscape. **Bill T. Jones** is the latest to join the select assembly of Gish Prize winners that includes theater director **Lloyd Richards** (2002); lighting designer **Jennifer Tipton** (2001); dancer/choreographer **Merce Cunningham** (2000); author/playwright **Arthur Miller** (1999); author **Isabel Allende** (1998); singer/songwriter **Bob Dylan** (1997); artist/director **Robert Wilson** (1996); film director **Ingmar Bergman** (1995); and architect **Frank Gehry** (1994).

The Gish Prize has no application process and is not determined through a competition. The Gish Prize committee, a group that changes every year, chooses each recipient. Composed of leaders in the arts community, the committee for this year includes chairperson Patricia Cruz, executive director, Aaron Davis Hall, New York, NY; composer Anthony Davis, professor of music, University of California at San Diego, San Diego, CA; John Hanhardt, senior curator of Film and Media Arts, Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY; Bill Ivey, director, The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN; and Peter C. Marzio, director, The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, TX.

“I am still reeling from this great honor and the privilege of being added to such an impressive list of past honorees,” said Jones. “My art is one of the most ephemeral, and as a result one of the most brutal. The brutalized spirit must be cultivated with more care and steady nutrition. The Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize will provide this important nutrition, allowing me to slow down and reflect on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my company, while at the same time considering the company’s future.”

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**Bill T. Jones** began his dance training at the State University of New York at Binghamton, where he studied classical ballet and modern dance. In 1971, he began a partnership with Arnie Zane that ended with Zane's death in 1988. Throughout the 1970s, Jones and Zane choreographed and performed innovative solos and duos, and in 1982, they founded the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Jones and Zane were recognized as "new wave" or "post modern" choreographers whose large-scale, abstract works such as *Secret Pastures*, *Freedom of Information* and *Animal Trilogy* were engaged in the discourse of the New York art world of the 1980's.

As a choreographer, Jones is recognized as a visionary innovator. He often combines live music and text with his movements, producing varied and complex presentations. This has been represented by ensemble works such as *Ballad* (1996), danced to the recorded voice of Dylan Thomas reading his poetry; *Ur Sonata* (1996), set to Kurt Schwitters' *Ur-Sonata*, "a sonata in primitive sound" from 1928; and the groundbreaking trilogy of duets—*Monkey Run Road* (1979), *Blauvelt Mountain* (1980), and *Valley Cottage* (1981)—which he co-choreographed and performed with Arnie Zane to the electronic scores of Helen Thorington. Jones has also incorporated modern technology into his works, using Gretchen Bender's video environment in *Still/Here* (1994), and creating a virtual dance, in collaboration with Paul Kaiser and Shelley Eshkar, for *Ghostcatching* (1998). A great champion of the drama and meaning of movement for its own sake, Jones has used silence to great effect, and has also set his pieces to found sounds, pop music, as well as the compositions of Beethoven, Eric Dolphy, John Cage, Thelonious Monk, Gyorgi Kurtag, Julius Hemphill, Felix Mendelson, and Fred Hersch, among others.

In his continuing search for new perspectives, Jones has created landmark works that redefine what is considered proper content and context for dance performances. A notable example is *The Last Supper at Uncle Tom's Cabin/The Promised Land* (1990), a sprawling epic that took Harriet Beecher Stowe's pious melodrama as a point of departure in a jazz driven multimedia event questioning what has happened to the philosophy of liberation that has informed social movements in our country since its creation. Jones added a spiritual leader and a minimum of 39 locals to his cast in each location of the work's three-year tour of the U.S. and Europe. For *Still/Here* (1994), Jones culled material from workshops he devised that drew on the experiences of men and women touched by a life-threatening illness. *The Table Project* (2002), a simple eight-minute dance performance ritual constructed to a Schubert adagio, has been performed to great effect by six middle aged male non-dancers, followed by six adolescent girls, heightening the spectator's awareness of how what they see on stage is inflected and affected by who is performing.

Over the years, Jones has gradually expanded his repertoire into opera and musical theater. In 1990, he choreographed Sir Michael Tippett's *New Year* under the direction of Sir Peter Hall for the Houston Grand Opera and the Glyndebourne Festival Opera. Jones' theater involvement includes co-directing *Perfect Courage* with Rhodessa Jones for Festival 2000 in 1990. In 1994, he directed Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* for The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis.

Jones has also maintained his collaborative spirit. In 1995, working with Toni Morrison and renowned jazz drummer Max Roach, he directed and performed in *Degga*, which was commissioned by Lincoln Center's Serious Fun Festival. Jones' collaboration with Jessye Norman, *How! Do! We! Do!*, premiered at New York's City Center in 1999 as

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part of Lincoln Center's Great Performers New Visions series. In 2002, the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company toured nationally and internationally with an evening of works made in collaboration with the Lincoln Center Chamber Society and its Orion String Quartet. Most recently, in *Another Evening* (2003), Jones and his company performed with the Emmy-winning jazz vocalist Cassandra Wilson.

Jones has created more than 50 works for his own company, and received many commissions to create dances for modern and ballet companies, including the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, the Axis Dance Company, the Boston Ballet, the Lyon Opera Ballet, the Berlin Opera Ballet, the Dayton Contemporary Dance Company, and the Utah Repertory Dance Company. In the fall of 1999, he premiered his acclaimed *The Breathing Show*, an evening-long solo, which he toured nationally and internationally for three years. Jones is currently preparing a new evening-length solo.

In addition to the MacArthur Fellowship and three choreographic fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, Jones has received numerous other prestigious awards. Among them are the Creative Artists Public Service Award in Choreography (1979), and three New York Dance and Performance ("Bessie") Awards, including one received with Arnie Zane for their 1986 Joyce Theater season. In 2000, the Dance Heritage Coalition named **Bill T. Jones** "An Irreplaceable Dance Treasure."

Established in 1994 by the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize Trust and administered by JPMorgan Chase Bank and Nathan Hale as trustees, the prize is given annually to "a man or woman who has made an outstanding contribution to the beauty of the world and to mankind's enjoyment and understanding of life." In her will, Lillian Gish stated: "It is my desire, by establishing this prize, to give recipients of the prize the recognition they deserve, to bring attention to their contributions to society and encourage others to follow in their path." Lillian Gish died in 1993 and Dorothy Gish, also an actress, died in 1968.

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