

THE DOROTHY AND LILLIAN GISH PRIZE TRUST

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345 Park Avenue
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**“FREE JAZZ” INNOVATOR ORNETTE COLEMAN TO BE HONORED
WITH ONE OF THE LARGEST PRIZES IN THE ARTS
– THE 2004 DOROTHY AND LILLIAN GISH PRIZE –**

**Past Gish Prize Recipients Have Shaped the Cultural Landscape in
Drama, Music, Dance, Art, Architecture, Lighting Design, Film, and Publishing**

Innovative jazz composer and saxophonist **Ornette Coleman** has been selected as the recipient of the prestigious **2004 Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize**, one of the largest awards in the arts. He will be presented with a silver medallion and approximately \$250,000 at an awards ceremony to be held on October 14, 2004, at the Hudson Theatre, Millennium Broadway, New York City. Wynton Marsalis, artistic director, Jazz at Lincoln Center, will be on hand to pay tribute and deliver remarks. A special performance of Coleman’s composition *Lonely Woman* will be played by friends of Coleman, including JoAnne Brackeen (piano), Denardo Coleman (drums), Tony Falanga (bass violin), Dewey Redman (tenor saxophone), Wallace Roney (trumpet) and Badal Roy (tabla).

Ornette Coleman ushered in a new era for jazz with his revolutionary “harmolodic” concept, which broke music away from prevailing conventions of harmony, rhythm, and melody. He described this approach as “removing the caste system from sound.” His controversial free jazz style transformed the art form and changed the way people listen to modern music. From 1958 through the 1960s, Coleman released more than 15 critically acclaimed albums, most of which are now recognized as jazz classics. Among his followers were trumpeters Don Cherry and Bobby Bradford, drummers Ed Blackwell and Billy Higgins, and bassist Charlie Haden.

Now in its 11th year, the Gish Prize recognizes outstanding talents from a spectrum of disciplines in the arts. Recipients are trailblazers who have redefined their art and reshaped the cultural landscape. Ornette Coleman is the latest to join the select assembly of Gish Prize winners that includes dancer/choreographer **Bill T. Jones (2003)**; 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)**.

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The Gish Prize has no application process and is not determined through a competition. Each recipient is chosen by the Gish Prize committee, a group that changes every year. Composed of leaders in the arts community, the committee for this year includes chairman Bill Ivey, director, The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN; Anne d'Harnoncourt, George D. Widener Director and CEO, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA; David Henry Hwang, playwright, screenwriter, and librettist, New York, NY; Louis Massiah, filmmaker and executive director, Scribe Video Center, Philadelphia, PA; and Robert Pinsky, poet and professor, Boston University English Department, Boston, MA.

"I am thrilled to accept this Gish Prize and to be in such illustrious company," said Coleman. "Music to me has always been a powerful form of individual expression and this award reinforces the spirit of artistic adventure and discovery. I am so happy for the recognition and for the light it shines on the world of jazz, and on all musicians working to be heard."

Born in 1930 in Texas, Ornette Coleman burst onto the New York jazz scene in the 1950s with his now legendary engagement at the Five Spot club, which attracted crowds eager to hear his revolutionary sound. Grounded in the freedom of expression, Coleman's approach encouraged individual improvisation, leading to a unique interaction between musicians playing together. His free form style was at first rejected by many audiences and musicians who didn't understand the unstructured patterns and deemed his music as being out of tune. But with the release of his debut album *Something Else* in 1958, and the aptly titled *The Shape of Jazz to Come* in 1959, it became clear that Coleman had broken ground and ushered in a new era in jazz history. More than 15 critically acclaimed albums followed through the 1960s, establishing Coleman as a visionary jazz pioneer. His 1960 recording *Free Jazz*, a 37-minute sustained collective improvisation, is perhaps the single most important influence on avant-garde jazz of the period.

In the early 1970s, Coleman traveled throughout Morocco and Nigeria playing with local musicians and interpreting the melodic and rhythmic complexities of their music through his harmolodic approach. He began writing string quartets, woodwind quintets, and symphonies, including his ambitious 1972 work, *Skies of America*, a 21-movement suite for symphony orchestra. In 1975, seeking a fuller sound, Coleman assembled Prime Time, an electric band capable of producing a forceful and brash amped-up sound with a doubling of guitars, drums, and bass. The band combined elements of ethnic and danceable sounds now identified with a full genre of music and musicians. Trend-setting

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albums such as *Song X* with guitarist Pat Metheny, and *Virgin Beauty* featuring Grateful Dead leader Jerry Garcia followed. Always interested in crossing boundaries and breaking down barriers, Coleman befriended and worked with a range of artists including African-American painter Bob Thompson, Robert Rauschenberg, Japanese conceptual artist Yoko Ono, Indian singer Asha Puthli, astrophysicist Dr. Fiorella Tirenzi, poet David Henderson, singers from Sardinia and Japan, and Indian tabla players.

The 1990s included the premiere of *Architecture in Motion*, Coleman's first harmolodic ballet, as well as work on the soundtracks for the films *Naked Lunch* and *Philadelphia*. With the creation of the Harmolodic record label under Polygram, Coleman became heavily involved in new recordings including *Tone Dialing*, *Sound Museum*, and *Colors*. In 1997, New York City's Lincoln Center featured a four-day celebration of Coleman's music, including performances with the New York Philharmonic. Coleman was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1997. Among his other honors are a 1994 MacArthur Fellowship award.

Now in his sixth decade of performing, Coleman continues to tour. His 2004 schedule includes dates at Carnegie Hall in New York, Disney Hall in Los Angeles, and the famed Newport Jazz Festival in Rhode Island, and international stops in France, Italy, Norway and Slovenia.

Established in 1994 by the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize Trust and administered by JPMorgan Chase Bank as trustee, 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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A Portrait of Ornette Coleman – saxophonist, composer, and free jazz innovator – is available digitally.

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