

The New York Times

Merce Cunningham's Centennial Will Bring a Global Celebration

By ALASTAIR MACAULAY APRIL 16, 2018



Merce Cunningham, center, with members of his company performing "RainForest" in 1968. Photo: Jack Mitchell/Getty Images

The [Merce Cunningham Trust](#) announced Monday, on what would have been Cunningham's 99th birthday, a global centennial celebration of his legacy, beginning

this fall. More than 60 presenting organizations and dance companies from around the world are expected to participate, and the Royal Ballet in London will be one of several to tackle Cunningham for the first time.

The celebration will consist of performances, film screenings, discussions, education initiatives, new works by other artists in conversation with Cunningham's work, and new productions. At least two works will be performed for the first time in over 30 years. The films include several discovered in archives across the world since [Cunningham's death in 2009 at age 90](#).

Cunningham established the autonomy of dance by making choreography that was independent from music. He created works that, by being about dance itself, were variously hailed as radical, modernist, musical, theatrical and classical (and also as anti-musical, anti-theatrical and anti-classical).

Much of his work's essence lay in solos, created for himself and for others: indeed, in [soloism](#). A highlight of the centennial will be a "Night of 100 Solos" to be performed on the evening of Cunningham's 100th birthday, April 16, 2019. One hundred dancers will perform anthologies (called Events) of solos from the 1950s to 2009 in New York (Brooklyn Academy of Music), Paris (the Opéra-Comique), London (the Barbican Center) and Los Angeles (Center for the Art of Performance at the University of California, Los Angeles).

A month before he died, [Cunningham announced his legacy plan](#), the last of his mold-breaking policies. Notably, he decreed that, after his death, his dance company would close, following a two-year world tour (2010-11). But he also outlined the ways his trust would begin to disseminate his dance technique and preserve his choreography.

The centennial celebration builds on this plan: The trust is extending aspects of Cunningham's work into the future. The centennial was announced by Ken Tabachnick, executive director of the trust, and Trevor Carlson, executive director of the Cunningham company during its final seasons.

"Merce liked saying he didn't want to celebrate his birthday," Mr. Carlson, who will produce the centennial, said in a news release, "and yet he always enjoyed when we threw parties for him."