



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CORNISH COLLEGE OF THE ARTS COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

Merce Cunningham to be Awarded Honorary Degree

ACT's Kurt Beattie to give Commencement Address

Sunday, May 14, 2006, 2 pm

Benaroya Hall, S. Mark Taper Foundation Auditorium, 200 University Street, Seattle

For information, please call 206.726.5011.

SEATTLE, WA – Cornish College of the Arts will celebrate the graduation of the class of 2006 with Commencement ceremonies on **Sunday, May 14th at 2:00 pm. For the first time Commencement will be held at Benaroya Hall** in the S. Mark Taper Foundation Auditorium, located at 200 University Street in downtown Seattle. Alumnus **Merce Cunningham**, widely recognized as one of the most visionary and influential choreographers and artistic innovators of the twentieth century, will be awarded an Honorary Degree from Cornish College of the Arts. **Maestro Gerard Schwarz**, of the Seattle Symphony, will welcome the Cornish Community to Benaroya Hall, and **Kurt Beattie**, Artistic Director of A Contemporary Theater (ACT), will be the Commencement Speaker.

Choreographer Merce Cunningham, named a *Living Legend* by the Library of Congress, will be awarded an honorary degree. Merce Cunningham studied at Cornish in the 1930s (then The Cornish School) where he received his first formal training in dance and theater. It was at Cornish where Cunningham met composer John Cage, with whom he worked on numerous projects throughout his career. The honorary degree will be accepted on behalf of Merce Cunningham by his niece, Jodie Cunningham.

Kurt Beattie, Artistic Director for A Contemporary Theater (ACT) will give the Commencement Address. Kurt Beattie joined ACT in 2001 as Associate Artistic Director and was appointed Artistic Director in April of 2003. In addition to his directorial work at ACT, Beattie has directed productions at Seattle Repertory Theatre, The Empty Space, Intiman Theatre, the University of Washington, as well as at Milwaukee Repertory Theatre and the Alley Theatre in Houston.

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Born in Centralia, Washington, **Merce Cunningham** attended what was then known as The Cornish School in the 1930s, studying first Theater and then Dance. Studying in the Dance Department, Cunningham met composer John Cage, who was then a piano accompanist for the department. This fortuitous meeting led to many collaborative projects between the two artists during Cunningham's career. A soloist in the company of Martha Graham from 1939-1945, Cunningham presented his first New York solo concert with John Cage in April 1944. The Merce Cunningham Dance Company was formed at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1953. Since that time Cunningham has choreographed nearly 200 works for his company and his work has been presented by dance companies world-wide. Cunningham's many honors and awards include: the Praemium Imperiale, Tokyo (2005), the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize (2000), the Nellie Cornish Arts Achievement Award from Cornish College of the Arts (1996), the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale (1995), the National Medal of Arts (1990), and the Kennedy Center Honors (1985). In France, he was made Commander of the Order of Arts & Letters (1982), and first Chevalier (1989) and Officier (2004) of the Légion d'Honneur. In 2000 Merce Cunningham was named a *Living Legend* by Washington D.C.'s Library of Congress.

Kurt Beattie (Director/Artistic Director) joined ACT in 2001 as Associate Artistic Director and was appointed Artistic Director in April of 2003. In ACT's 2006 season Beattie will direct *The Pillowman*, *Mitzi's Abortion*, and *The Underpants*. His past productions at ACT include *Vincent in Brixton*, *Bach at Leipzig*, *Black Coffee*, *Alki*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *Fuddy Meers*, *Fully Committed*, *Via Dolorosa*, and *A Christmas Carol*. Beattie directed *Things Being What They Are and Art* at Seattle Repertory Theatre, and has directed work on many local and national stages. As an actor Beattie has appeared in leading and major roles at ACT, Seattle Rep, Intiman and The Empty Space, as well as at many regional theatres throughout the country. Beattie was the co-recipient (with Susan Trapnell) of the 2004 Theatre Puget Sound Gregory A. Falls Sustained Achievement Award.

ABOUT CORNISH COLLEGE OF THE ARTS

Cornish College of the Arts is the premier, accredited arts college in the Northwest, inspiring the highest standards of artistic and academic excellence. Founded in 1914 by Nellie Cornish, Cornish College is the only private, accredited college in the region offering baccalaureate degrees in visual and performing arts. Cornish College offers a Bachelor of Music and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in art, dance, design, theater and performance production. Cornish College is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design.

Over the years, Cornish has hosted a parade of important artists in the roles of students, teachers or as visiting artists-in-residence, including John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Mark Tobey, Martha Graham, Morris Graves, Imogen Cunningham, Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Jacob Lawrence, Mark Morris, Meredith Monk, Bobbie McFerrin, Obo Addy, Rinde Eckert, Bebe Miller, Ruth St. Denis, Ted Shawn, Bill Frisell, Robin Holcomb, Jeff Koons, Michael Spafford, Lynda Barry, Chet Huntley, Syvilla Fort, Ping Chong, Kenny Werner, Ralph Towner, Mary Frank, Thornton Wilder, Lou Harrison, Jane Ira Bloom, Kraig Patterson, Musicians Accord, Bun Ching Lam, Brendan Fraser, Myra Melford, Sharon Isbin, Joanne Brackeen, Oliver Lake, California Ear Unit, Colorado Quartet, and Gary Peacock, among others.

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