

COMPOSER FIRST!

Photo of Meredith Monk by K. Scott Schafer

NewMusicBox Editor Frank J. Oteri visits Meredith Monk at her home
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1. MUSIC WITH MULTIPLE BRANCHES

FRANK J. OTERI: I thought it would be interesting to do a whole issue about composers who have multiple identities, composers who not only get artistically or creatively fulfilled through writing music but through doing many different things. You immediately popped into my mind, because your creative work is not just composition, it's choreography, it's theater, sometimes it's film, it has so many different components. And there's the component of you as a composer [a priori] and the component of you as a performer within the composition. There are lots of layers. Do you consider yourself a composer first?

MEREDITH MONK: Yes.

FRANK J. OTERI: Why?

MEREDITH MONK: Because the heart of my work is the singing. I think of my work as a big tree with two main branches. One main branch is the singing and it started from my solo work, exploring the human voice and all its possibilities. That's been a very

strong discipline for over 30 years, working with my own instrument and discovering all the different possibilities. And then that goes also into making CDs, and, compositions with the Ensemble, and other groups singing this music. One branch is made up of all the different aspects of the music. And then the other branch is the composite forms, which could be operas or musical theater pieces, or installations, or films. And that's where different elements are woven together into one big composition. But I always feel that those forms are put together, in a sense, musically. Even with images, it's really thinking of rhythm as the basic underlying ground of everything. And not necessarily just metric rhythm, but rhythm, I would say, is the underlying ground of these weavings together of different perceptual modes.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, has that been the case from the very beginning of your work, or was it other things first and then music...

MEREDITH MONK: Well, you know, I came from a music background. I'm a fourth generation singer in my family. My mother was the original Muriel Cigar voice on radio and she was singing soap commercials. She was singing Blue Bonnet Margarine, all these jingles... So I grew up in radio. My mother was on CBS, ABC, NBC in the '40's, and singing commercials for soap operas every day. I had a lot of singing in my background. My grandfather was a singer, bass-baritone; and my great-grandfather was a cantor. Singing was a tradition in my family. So that was, in a sense, my first language. I was comfortable singing. It was my personal language. And then because I have an eye challenge, where I can't fuse two images together, I was uncoordinated physically, and so my mother heard about Dalcroze Eurythmics, and took me to these wonderful Polish sisters Mita and Lola Rohm at Steinway Hall. Dalcroze Eurythmics is a way of learning music through movement; a lot of conductors study it to get coordinated physically. But for me it was really learning physical movement through the music, because as a young child, I already had a strong rhythmic proclivity.

FRANK J. OTERI: What sort of music were they using?

MEREDITH MONK: Dalcroze Eurythmics has a lot in common with the Carl Orff method; as I remember, there was a lot of work with rhythm sticks. I don't remember the music itself but I remember improvising to music, and throwing balls in precise time, and exercises dealing with music in relation to parts of the body. For me, it was a revelation. It integrated sound, space and movement. I loved it so much, and so my whole body thing opened up. Having that background, experiencing the voice or music and the body as one was something that has influenced me without me even knowing it all these years. Because, also the way they teach solfege, for example... It's done physically, so the low do is down here and high do is up here...

FRANK J. OTERI: Right.

MEREDITH MONK: You move your arms incrementally from down to up as you are singing the scale and at the same time you can read the notes on the blackboard. So you are getting sound, space and sensation simultaneously.

FRANK J. OTERI: So it's a lot more than even the Kodaly hand signals...

MEREDITH MONK: It's more an overall body sense. You know, as I think back on it (...I only did it from the time I was 3 to 7, so I don't remember it too well...), what I sense is that intuitive physical connection to sound and space, which I think is something I've always been interested in: the voice and space, and the architecture of the voice.

FRANK J. OTERI: So when did you decide, 'Okay, I'm a composer'? When did composing become the focus, the creating of work, the disseminating of that work that you've created, both in terms of you yourself doing it and then other people doing it, with you or without you?

MEREDITH MONK: That's a hard question, because it's been such a gradual process. And I'm still struggling with it, even now, because I'm trying to figure out how much music I really want other people to sing of mine and how much I don't.

2. THE VOICE

MEREDITH MONK: I think that the revelation I had as a singer came around 1965. I came to New York in 1964. At Sarah Lawrence, I was in the voice department and I was in the dance department. And I was also doing some theater, too. I had designed a program for myself called Combined Performing Arts where two-thirds of my program was in performing arts. I had one academic my last year and they let me do it, which was great. I had also done a lot of folk singing. I earned my way through college partially by singing at children's birthday parties with my guitar, and I had been in one or two rock and roll groups. So I was doing more folk and rock kind of forms, and doing lieder singing, and opera workshop at Sarah Lawrence, and writing some music. But when I first came to New York, my pieces were more gesture-based with a kind of cinematic syntax and structure. I was thinking a lot about images. How you could perform images that would cut in the way that film does? How would these very disparate elements go together? The sound aspects of those works were tapes that I made myself. In those days, there weren't multi-track tape recorders, but I was working with a two-track tape recorder and then layering. But at a certain point, after being in New York for one year and doing a lot of performing in different galleries and churches and places like that, I really missed singing a lot, straight out singing, so I sat at the piano and started vocalizing. There was a one day sometime in 1965 when I realized, in a flash (...it really was a flash experience...), that the voice could have the kind of fluidity and flexibility of the body, say, like the articulation of a hand. That the voice could be an instrument and that I could make a vocabulary built on my own voice the way that I had in movement. In movement, I had had a lot of limitations physically. That was to my advantage on a certain level because I had to find my own idiosyncratic way of moving. In some ways, technical limitations are good, because you have to find your own way. So then when I applied that same principal to my voice, I already had a more virtuosic instrument to begin with because of my family legacy. It was as if the whole world opened up, and then I realized that within the voice there could be different textures, colors, ways of

producing sound, different genders and ages, characters, ways of breathing, landscapes. The other aspect was that it was also my way of going back to my family tradition and yet doing it my own way. Because it was always hard in that family to find your own spot as a singer.

FRANK J. OTERI: And I think that what you've discovered is so different from our accepted notion of vocal types. You talked about age and gender as opposed to soprano, baritone...

MEREDITH MONK: Right. Exactly.

FRANK J. OTERI: And it's so interesting hearing other people singing music and hearing you sing your work, which sort of defies the notion of tessitura and range. People are able to sing much wider areas of pitch bandwidth, if you would, than the classical tradition says they can.

MEREDITH MONK: In Houston, when I was teaching 6 singers *Dolmen Music*, the soprano couldn't sing F below middle C, for example, because she said, "I'm a soprano," and I said, "Gee, well, Monica Solem, for whom I made that part, sings up to high E's and sings that F. And then I realized, wow, the soprano won't go below middle C... We never think in those terms, and also I do a lot of things with the men singing falsetto and the women singing way down and, you know, there's always this real fluid thing about sound; sound and gender.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, so when you first formed the Ensemble, you weren't working with classically-trained singers. Where did these singers come from?

MEREDITH MONK: Well, those singers that I'm thinking of... Andrea Goodman, Robert Een, Paul Langland... they were people that were in my music-theater work of the mid-'70s. Actually, the shift to the Ensemble came when I was working on a piece called *Quarry*, and it was a big opera with about 42 people in it. There was a chorus of 28 young people that I auditioned who were really strong singers and movers. I had a lot of fun working on big choral sound and movement pieces with them. So it was very inspiring and then I chose three of the really strong singers from that group – Susan Kampe, Andrea Goodman and Monica Solem – and made a piece called *Tablet*. Up to that point, in most of the more theatrical, operatic pieces, I was doing most of the singing myself. I was also performing solo music concerts at that time. In the music-theater pieces, I was singing with keyboard, organ or piano, and then if there were people singing other parts they were much simpler, because I was working with people that came more from movement or acting backgrounds who could sing, but didn't really have developed musical chops. But when I had the chorus, there were some wonderful, wonderful musicians, so I made this piece *Tablet*, and each of the vocal parts was as complex as the others, so it wasn't that I was the soloist and I had my backup group. That was a breakthrough for me, and then with *Dolmen Music* in 1979, I added the 3 men, so then I was exploring what men's voices could do, you know, what was going on there, even though Julius Eastman was also singing falsetto in that piece. We were all flipping back and forth from high to low. Working with that group was very exciting for me because it

was a way that I could make my textures more complex. So I could work with more complex forms in terms of color and texture, I could really play with vocal landscape.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, with pieces like that, you work very closely with the singers involved, you workshop them, for even the solo pieces. Let's go back even further because you made a comment about how it would be difficult for another singer to take on a lot of the solo work that you were doing. Are there notations for those pieces? Are they the same, were they fixed, completely fixed pieces, as it were, in our conception of what that means?

MEREDITH MONK: [laughs] I would say a little of both! Well, let's see, if you listen to *Songs from the Hill* in 1976 and now, because I'm still singing it and still find those forms extremely challenging, you would know that they were the same songs and there's one section, another section, the third section, and another section. So those forms have pretty much stayed the same. But you can hear how from one performance to the next, there's a difference. Because if I'm inspired and something interesting comes up at a certain place in the material, I might stay there a little while and then go back. Again, it's the tree and the branch metaphor. I'm on the trunk of the tree and I'm going up, and then there might be this little branch where I hang out for a while, but then I'll always go back to the trunk again. So the form will be the same, but within it there is space to be inspired in the moment. The parameters are quite defined, so the challenge is to convey the intricacy and precision as well as the freedom of it to another singer. And even syllabilization, how one thing works and how something else doesn't work... It's really hard to explain it sometimes; the impulses are very hard to explain.

3. COMPOSITIONAL PROCESS

MEREDITH MONK: I feel like I've been more successful transferring the group pieces, particularly the choral pieces...

FRANK J. OTERI: Are those pieces worked out before you even work with the singers? How much of it evolves through the process of the workshopping?

MEREDITH MONK: There are different gradations. Usually I come in with my material, I work alone for quite a while, and then I come in to the rehearsal and I try the material. So in that way I'm really lucky, I've got these people, and I can hear it right away. Then I go back and work alone again, and then I'll work again with a group and then I'll finally put it together. That's the standard format. From time to time, I have come in with the forms totally complete, but I prefer to teach them orally than to have them on paper. But I have come in from time to time with something on paper. That happens more when we don't have a lot of rehearsal time. The way I usually work is labor-intensive. It really is.

FRANK J. OTERI: That's interesting.

MEREDITH MONK: These performers are so patient. They're like midwives, it's like giving birth to this thing and I'm working right on those voices, you know, right there, "Okay, Theo, try singing that note. Katie, you sing that." And then I remember that, when Nurit Tilles, that wonderful pianist who came in to work with us, around the beginning of the 1980s, I guess around 1983, she was amazed at how Robert Een and Andrea Goodman could learn material in one rehearsal and come back the next day with it imprinted in their minds. Then if I wanted to change something, they could re-learn it in the new way.

FRANK J. OTERI: How do you choose the people you work with?

MEREDITH MONK: It's a very intuitive kind of process. For example, I was teaching at Oberlin in 1974, and making a new piece there. And Andrea was a student. She wasn't even in the Conservatory but she was a very good musician. The first day I walked into Oberlin, I met my next door neighbor – this guy Michael who was a keyboard player – in the dorm, and somehow got to singing Sacred Harp with him. Andrea heard us and she knocked on the door and came in and started reading through these Sacred Harps pieces. I heard that she had a wonderful voice and was very musical so I asked her to be in my piece. So then, after she graduated from Oberlin, she came to New York, and I said, "do you want to be in *Quarry*?" So that was that.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow.

MEREDITH MONK: The same with Robert Een. He was in Minnesota. We worked with a chorus of local performers for our production of *Quarry* there. I had sent a few members of the original cast to do some preliminary work with the chorus. When I went to a rehearsal and saw Bob, I said, "Who is this amazing person?" They said that he wanted to sing and when I heard him, I gave him as much to sing as I could in that production, he sang so well. A few months later, he came to New York and walked into a rehearsal and it seemed like the most natural thing in the world, and then later he moved to New York to become a member of the Ensemble. So in those days, it wasn't really so much an audition process as who naturally gravitated to this work. I started working with many of these performers from the time they were in their early 20s. They grew up with this way of thinking of things, and this way of working with the voice, so I didn't have to go through the same process that I did with some of the people that I worked with in *ATLAS*, where I had to break down some of the Western European thinking about the voice. Coming back to notation, I remember, in 1994 we did *American Archaeology*, which was a huge outdoor piece, and we only had 2 weeks of rehearsal. So there were music pieces in the show that the group learned from paper. But basically our process is more oral or aural tradition. With the hoquet from *Facing North*, that was even in the process of working on the piece. There is no way that you could learn and perform a piece as fast as that by reading from the page. There's no way. It has to be in the muscle memory of your vocal cords.

4. SEEING VS. LISTENING

FRANK J. OTERI: This century has seen so many battlegrounds for what the future of music should be, from the very beginning to even now that we're in a new century, but there was a very concerted rebellion that happened against academic music in the 1960s when the whole minimalist movement came up, and then an equal rebellion in the more entrenched academic world when people turned back to tonality. And people were saying, we want to create music where you can hear the structures rather than just stuff that you can see. Now, you sort of take it one step further: these are not only structures you can hear, but that you can actually feel, physically. And I remember being at a performance that you did at the Church of St. Mark's in the Bowery, I guess it was last year, it was this very nice solstice celebration...

MEREDITH MONK: The Celebration Service, yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: And I thought this was so interesting, and I was reminded of an essay that Steve Reich had written 30 years ago about how he wanted to have this conductorless music where someone was making a pattern, and they would change the pattern, and that would be the signal that would allow everybody to go on to the next place. So you wouldn't get a visual cue, you'd get an aural cue that you could hear. Then I saw your ensemble, and they were touching each other, they were making movements and the cues were tactile rather than visual...

MEREDITH MONK: [laughs] I know which piece you're talking about!

FRANK J. OTERI: I thought this is so cool because you can just picture the conservatory-trained classical musician in an orchestra saying, 'don't touch *me*!' You know? [laughs]

MEREDITH MONK: Right. That's *very* interesting. I never really thought about that. I guess I think of my music as very visceral; it's very sculptural in a certain way. And it starts right from the center of the body, and then it goes from there. So that's already this visceral way of thinking of the body and the voice: a kinetic way of singing. So again, it's something I've just taken for granted. But when I started working with classically-trained singers for *ATLAS*, for example, at the Houston Grand Opera, I realized it was hard to find that, because the Western classical tradition is about standing and planting yourself. There's an idea that if you plant yourself, that you can get your notes. But, in fact, there is a relationship between the vitality of the voice and the freedom of the body, not having to necessarily jump around in space but working with the unfettered use of the whole body. I like to call it the dancing voice and the singing body. I think that relationship makes for a much more lively kind of singing all around. *ATLAS* made me realize notions that I had just taken for granted or that I had been working with all these years but then when people are coming from another planet into this planet, you begin to look at it in a different way, yourself. I think what Steve was thinking and writing about is something that happens a lot in Indonesian music or Balinese or Javanese gamelan, which is, there is a sound signal and then a pattern changes. It needs that aural acuteness; my music does also. I've never liked to use paper, particularly not to teach anybody the music, because you lose that fine sense of listening. Paper memorization is one step too

many. It's like the memorization of the eye. Even people who have photographic memories are one step away from the music itself.

FRANK J. OTERI: They're not hearing it. They're seeing what's on the paper, and then they're playing or singing.

MEREDITH MONK: I don't think that all of my music, particularly the solo pieces, transfers that easily to another singer, unless it's from the aural tradition of me really teaching somebody what the parameters might be, to keep the freedom, but the rigor at the same time.

FRANK J. OTERI: And that's something that notation can't communicate...

MEREDITH MONK: I don't think that you can completely capture the essence or the principles of my music on paper. A lot of what I do seems less complicated than it is by looking at the score. So I'm struggling with it right now, because at the same time I'm feeling that I want to be open-hearted and let other people sing my music if they want to. I think that some of my music, like the hocketing in *Facing North*, could not be easily learned from notation. Actually, I did write out the melody of the hocket that Bob [Een] and I were singing, and we tried working on it that way. We found that the body is actually faster than the eye and faster than the mind. So, in fact, in a form where you're throwing things back and forth that fast, you're slowing yourself down by having that visual image in your mind. You're one step away from the actual action.

FRANK J. OTERI: We're such a visually-oriented society and sometimes we have to overcome that. I always get upset when people say things like, "Oh, I went to see a concert last night."

MEREDITH MONK: [laughs] Yeah, right.

FRANK J. OTERI: Aren't we hearing concerts?

MEREDITH MONK: Uh huh.

FRANK J. OTERI: When people say they're going to send me a tape or a disc or something, rather than saying, "I'm looking forward to it," I've been trying to get myself in the habit of saying, "Listening forward to it!" Our language is so visual; our metaphors are mostly visual. I have a very close friend who's blind, and even he'll say, "When am I going to see you?"

MEREDITH MONK: Right.

FRANK J. OTERI: This is really bizarre, because he never sees me! But it's built into our language. It's ingrained in us; we have these visual words that affect everything we do. And even music, the only non-visual art form we have ever fully developed, has been made visual through notation, through conductors, through cueing, through things along those lines.

5. MINIMALISM

FRANK J. OTERI: Nowadays I sometimes see your music lumped together with the music of the minimalist movement, with Philip Glass and Steve Reich, and Terry Riley and La Monte Young and all of their followers. And I always find it interesting because you were doing this stuff at the same time that they were doing this stuff, and they got this label affixed to them, and it's only with hindsight now that I see your name being grouped with them upon occasion. How do you feel about that association? Do you feel connected to that movement?

MEREDITH MONK: Well, I guess I always have a hard time with any kind of categorization at all, and I feel like anything that becomes a kind of movement, I'm very skeptical about, because basically, each of those people are unique composers in their own right, and really have found different things. So it happened, I think, that there was a certain period of time when people were getting sick of the Western European, what I call "from the chin up" kind of music. [laughs] And there was an impulse to go back to the body, and I think, to go past forms that had climax and denouement, linear, narrative kind of forms to a more... again, I don't like to put people together at all, but generally, the idea was to find more circular, textural or more sculptural sorts of forms, you could say. But I think, for me it was very different. First of all, I didn't know about their music at that time, and I think I was quite lonely. How I got to my music was much more from the song tradition, coming from a folk singing background. When I was in high school and college, my classical music heroes were Stravinsky, Bartók, Satie and Gershwin. I sang a lot of 20th century music in school but something of the honesty and directness of folk music touched me. When I began exploring my voice, I became interested in composing non-verbal, abstract song forms. So when I was using repetition (and I still do, to this day), I was thinking more about the way that folk music has a verse and chorus and the underlying instruments, which play repeating patterns are accompaniment. You know, I don't think of myself that much as an instrumental kind of composer, I really feel I'm a vocal composer...

6. INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

MEREDITH MONK: The instrumental thing, for me, is much more a kind of carpet, or a stabilizing force that the voice can jump from, can spin from...

FRANK J. OTERI: ...kind of like the continuo in Baroque music...

MEREDITH MONK: You know, it's like being on a carpet, and then the voice can have total freedom with that; the voice can always jump off from it.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, you have written some non-vocal works. You have written a few instrumental pieces.

MEREDITH MONK: A few. [laughs] I'm working on one now! [laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: How did those happen? What led you to... was that performer driven? Was that through work with other pianists like Nurit Tilles and Anthony De Mare?

MEREDITH MONK: Well, I never actually wrote anything for Tony. He basically played some of the pieces that were solo piano pieces or piano and voice pieces and solo arrangements of group pieces. Coming from the piano as a young child, it would be organic for me to write some piano pieces. For example, I wrote a solo piano piece called "Paris" which ended up being a kind of overture for a chamber music theater piece by the same name that I made with Ping Chong. I liked the idea of having a funny pianist as a character within a theatrical context. First he comes in, does an exaggerated bow, opens up his music by unfolding it like an accordion, and then he sits down at the piano and plays the piece. It seemed that the solo piano was the right sound for *Paris*; I didn't really need a vocal line for that piece. But I generally think that my instrumental knowledge is much less developed than my knowledge of the voice. So now I've been very interested in trying to open that up a little bit and have been working on orchestration.

FRANK J. OTERI: So you would be interested in writing, say, for a symphony orchestra?

MEREDITH MONK: Well, I actually have been asked by Michael Tilson Thomas to write a piece for the New World Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow. Instrumental or with chorus?

MEREDITH MONK: He said to try to stay with orchestra and maybe add a few solo singers. It will definitely have singing in there, too, but to think about working with a full orchestra is daunting, so I feel like it's something that I've been cautious about. I've deliberately kept my instrumental writing very simple. I know for some people, it seems simple-minded, but for me it's more a way to provide a lot of space in the sound so that the vocal parts can be as complex as possible. That's been my strategy.

FRANK J. OTERI: In terms of working with instrumentalists, that whole tactile notion of music, how does that translate? Because here you have people who are equally entrenched as a result of their training into what you can do and what you can't do.

MEREDITH MONK: Yes.

FRANK J. OTERI: And a lot of the vocal stuff evolved because you, as a singer, knew it could be done.

MEREDITH MONK: Exactly.

FRANK J. OTERI: And you could do certain things on the piano because you play the piano. It comes out of your own performance.

MEREDITH MONK: Right.

FRANK J. OTERI: But what happens when you deal with, you know, "Well, what can an oboe do?" Or "What can a French horn do?" And you talk to somebody who says, "Well, this can't be done."

MEREDITH MONK: Well, I've had wonderful experiences with instrumentalists, like the group of people who played *ATLAS*, which was a little chamber orchestra. They were so open to even giving suggestions from the pit, which was pretty amazing. And I think that they really appreciated that I was really interested in hearing what they had to say. My French horn player had a whole new mute sound that I had never heard before. I was really open to suggestions even though the music was pretty much complete by the time we started rehearsing. There was a lot of give and take. And, if you're usually sitting in the pit, that never is allowed. So, so far, every instrumentalist that I've ever met that wanted me to write something for them, has been totally generous and interested in showing me what the instrument can do. And I think that a lot of musicians are wanting to try to open up the instruments to other possibilities.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the problems with working with symphony orchestras is the rehearsal schedule. It's absurd. You get 2 rehearsals, 3 if you're lucky.

MEREDITH MONK: That's right.

FRANK J. OTERI: And that's it. And your music really is about, you referred to your performers earlier in this conversation as "midwives."

MEREDITH MONK: [laughs] Patient midwives.

FRANK J. OTERI: People in symphony orchestras are not ever able to be midwives. They're playing the same repertoire over and over again largely because it's repertoire they know, they don't have to rehearse it.

MEREDITH MONK: Well, you see, the thing that's so wonderful about Michael is that he understands my process very well. His idea, which we haven't gotten to yet because it's going to take years of my studying instrumentation, is for me to go down to the New World Symphony, which is an ensemble of young performers, and try some material, to do the same thing that I do with my ensemble. See how it works, let them play with it a little bit, do this, do that. And then I'll go back and work on it some more, and then go back again and then finish it. And then for something like the San Francisco Symphony, it would be a finished score, but basically, we'd use the New World Symphony as a way of playing with some of the material, and he feels that these young performers would just love to do that. That's the thing that is so beautiful about him as a conductor. Even hearing him do something like the *Rite of Spring*... He has a series in San Francisco called American Mavericks, and so I've been doing that for about the last 3 or 4 years. And they were doing a Stravinsky program the day before my concert, so I went. I mean,

it sounded like those guys were cooking. I mean, they were cooking! And you know what a symphony orchestra situation is, but you felt that they were improvising even though they weren't. It was so lively, and I feel that Michael really understands that the idea is to let people play, to get out of the way of the players, even as a conductor of a symphony orchestra.

7. JAZZ, ROCK AND POPULAR MUSIC

FRANK J. OTERI: You said you did folk music and rock music. What's your view of that music now? Do you listen to that music still, do you identify with performers in that world?

MEREDITH MONK: My early influences as far as folk music were concerned were people like Peggy Seeger and Cynthia Gooding. There was a real excitement in folk music, and there was some nice singing going on. And then rock... I was in a rock band called The Inner Ear for a while but I knew I needed to devote my energy to my own music. After I had been performing for a few years my early pieces where I was working with very primal, very edgy vocal qualities, there were maybe six months or so in 1968 when I got very depressed. I felt that maybe I had closed off my possibilities by getting too intellectual with my music. Then I heard Janis Joplin, and she blew me away. It was that idea of beauty being in the eye of the beholder or the ear of the beholder, that beauty is anything you want it to be, basically. She was going back to a much rawer way of singing, anything could be possible with voice. Hearing her was a wake up call to remind myself that the freedom was really where my source was. And so, then I went back to really singing and composing full out, raw, very visceral kind of music.

FRANK J. OTERI: Did you get to know Janis Joplin?

MEREDITH MONK: I met her once at a party but I never got to know her, which I feel very sad about, but I did have the privilege of hearing her live, which was just unbelievable, a wall of energy coming at you. It was just extraordinary.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, one big difference between what you do and the whole popular music world today, is that music is so largely about electronics and amplification, and your music is almost ancient in its purity. It's really about acoustic sound, acoustic phenomenon.

MEREDITH MONK: I think one of the reasons that I didn't want to push into the rock and roll form... even though my first record was with Don Preston (we did a piece called "Candy Bullets and Moon")... is that part of the pleasure is finding new forms. So that's why I didn't go into the rock field, per se. Jazz is the same thing – it has its own language. And I guess, for me, I was trying to find my own language.

FRANK J. OTERI: Although there certainly are people within the rock world who've challenged that notion...

MEREDITH MONK: Oh, yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: Brian Eno, or Robert Fripp...

MEREDITH MONK: Sure. Definitely.

FRANK J. OTERI: Even people today, a group like Sonic Youth is questioning what it means.

MEREDITH MONK: Definitely. But, I just felt that I needed to go more into finding my own way of saying things, I guess, as far as form is concerned, for whatever reason, I have no idea! That was the way I was thinking.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, with jazz, it's very interesting. I remember the first time I bought one of your records. I knew you were not a jazz artist, but I bought the record in the jazz section of the record store.

MEREDITH MONK: That's probably because of ECM.

FRANK J. OTERI: It was on ECM, and people at the time couldn't conceive of ECM as more than a jazz label, so at Tower Records, when it just had opened up on 4th Street and Broadway in New York City, I got my first Steve Reich record, you know, in the jazz section...

MEREDITH MONK: Right.

FRANK J. OTERI: ...and a Meredith Monk record in the jazz section.

MEREDITH MONK: That seems fine to me. Because jazz musicians right from the beginning of the time that I was working vocally were very, very supportive of what I was doing. Extremely supportive.

FRANK J. OTERI: I know you worked with Collin Walcott.

MEREDITH MONK: He was one of my dearest friends. And then, you know, all those guys in Oregon, they were really supportive, and then Sam Rivers, I mean, there were people that were really saying, "Go for it!" From that world, the jazz world particularly, you know, so I felt good that it was in the jazz category, at that time it was fine with me, but I still feel like they don't know where to put me in a record store. So then they just don't put me anywhere! [laughs] So that's been one of my problems. But getting back to the acoustic thing, I feel that the voice can do anything that a synthesizer can do. Until I stop being utterly fascinated with the human voice, I feel that I'll pretty much stay with the voice.

8. INDETERMINACY AND CONCEPTUALISM

FRANK J. OTERI: Do you feel that your work is at all connected to the work of John Cage and indeterminate music, and the post-Cage conceptualists like Robert Ashley or Alvin Lucier or other people who were doing things at that time you started your artistic explorations?

MEREDITH MONK: I feel like I must have been a hermit in New York or something, [laughs], because I really didn't know that much about it at that time. The first time I ever heard Bob's work was in 1970 at a festival in Santa Barbara, and that's also the first time I ever met Pauline Oliveros. Ashley was in the ONCE group, and I had read a lot about the ONCE group but I had never heard their work. The first time I heard Alvin's music was in 1974 in Sonic Arts. The Sonic Arts Union was Alvin, Gordon Mumma, David Behrman and Bob Ashley. And I was just blown away by all 4 of them, and I remember saying to them, "If I can call myself an artist and you're artists, I'm really proud to be part of the same race," you know? [laughs] I just felt that their work was absolutely amazing. But in my beginnings, I definitely was not aware of their work. I was aware of people like Philip Corner and Malcolm Goldstein. They were friends of mine. Dick Higgins was a friend of mine. And I loved what they did, but I felt that for me it was really more about going to some sort of source, which was singing... Just going right back to the instrument itself. That was really how I was working, for better or for worse.

FRANK J. OTERI: Although it's very different, Robert Ashley's work has mostly evolved along similar lines, thinking about the voice, and thinking about new theater forms, but his work is much more about text and language.

MEREDITH MONK: His exploration of language is really, really powerful.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, where do you fall vis-à-vis somebody like Cage, who really opened up the doors for a lot of this.

MEREDITH MONK: Well, I became friends with John at the end of his life. I sang his piece *Aria* for him upstate, and we hung out and cooked mushrooms that he had picked that day. [laughs] So we got to be really good friends. Also, in the '70's, in the mid-'70's, I sang for some of Merce's events. I sang with my organ and the Cunningham Company danced, and that was the first time I actually really met John, and he was very supportive of my music at that time. During the time I was at Sarah Lawrence one summer, there was a class that Merce was giving, which was called "Suite by Chance." We threw coins and made movement material and then found different kinds of permutations by throwing coins and putting different phrases together, different parts of the body together. I enjoyed it very much, but I think that intuitively, I knew that it wasn't the path for me. I think that one of the first energizing principles for John was to try to get away from habitual patterns. And I think that in the beginning of my work, I hadn't gotten to habitual patterns that you have to break down! [laughs] So it was really more an organic kind of way of working.

FRANK J. OTERI: And in some way, your work is about creating new types of habitual patterns.

MEREDITH MONK: Well, after doing all these pieces all these years, I have to find ways to get past my habitual vocal patterns and try to find new ways of working with the voice, and I think as you go along and you've been doing a lot of work over the years you've got this backpack of your own history weighing you down.

FRANK J. OTERI: One of the things that's so difficult is people expect to go hear a new piece, and for it to sound like what they know, but if it sounds like what they know, they're upset and they'll say, "Oh, it's just the same thing again!" But if it doesn't sound that way, they'll think, "Well, what's this about? How does this connect to the work?"

MEREDITH MONK: Exactly.

FRANK J. OTERI: The other night I was watching a videotape of *The Politics of Quiet*, and I was blown away by some of the harmonies that were going on in the third act. They're completely unlike anything I've heard from you before, but it was fabulous. I heard it as an extension of what had gone on before, but it was going somewhere new, I thought.

MEREDITH MONK: I keep trying. I like to put myself in risk situations. I don't like to say the word "like" because the process is sometimes incredibly painful, but it's more this idea of trying to start from zero as much as possible. And it's being able to tolerate hanging in the unknown for a while. Because otherwise you're just repeating what you know already. It's more of this thing of the unknown. Flailing about for a while, and that's why again my ensemble's so patient, because they see me flailing about, trying to find what I know I'm looking for but I don't know what it is. And that's not an easy process, but I think it's the only way that you ever find the mystery. You know, it's really the only way that you get to a renewal of creative energy. It's the R& D part of the field rather than the production line aspect.

9. TRANSMISSION

FRANK J. OTERI: We talked a little bit about other performers performing your music, and notation, and what do you do? It's the immortality question. What happens 200 years from now when a group of people gets together to perform *ATLAS*?

MEREDITH MONK: [laughs] *ATLAS*, I think, would be one of the easier pieces.

FRANK J. OTERI: Okay, *Dolmen Music*.

MEREDITH MONK: *Dolmen Music* would be quite challenging.

FRANK J. OTERI: I was looking at the score.

MEREDITH MONK: The score doesn't match the performance. My friend Steve Lockwood wrote out the score, bless his heart, but when I looked at that thing where it's a 3/2 cello line and there's a 5/8 against it... I said, "Steve, we could never sing it like

that in a million years!" Because what he did was he made the bars of the singers match up to the 3/2. So every 5/8 bar is different, whereas that's not how we're thinking about it at all, we're thinking, there's no way, again, it's the same thing as I said with the hocket, there's no way that you could learn it so that each bar is different. Someone's in charge of 1& 2& 3& 4& 5& | 1& 2& 3& 4& 5&. Then, within that, there are all these variations and ways of throwing it around. And the 3/2 is the longer cycle, so in fact, the way to notate the piece would be to notate all the 5/8 bars as close as you can get, and then you just put your 3/2 under that.

FRANK J. OTERI: So that was not a piece that had been notated, your transmission of it was completely aural.

MEREDITH MONK: Yeah.

FRANK J. OTERI: O.K., so 200 years go by...

MEREDITH MONK: And, these poor people, I mean, I would *never, never* ask a group of singers to try to learn it from the score the way it is.

FRANK J. OTERI: 200 years into the future, a group wants to do *Dolmen Music*, since it's one of the most important pieces of music of the latter half of the 20th Century...

MEREDITH MONK: Oh, my God, thank you. [laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: And, you know, they want to do this piece. What do they do? What's their source material? Do they go back and listen to the recording?

MEREDITH MONK: There are funny things in the recording, too... There's one less phrase because someone was singing flat and so we edited it... [laughs] It was really funny, you know, when we were working with these Houston Grand Opera singers. Trying to sing *Dolmen Music* was pretty trippy. [laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: [laughs]

MEREDITH MONK: You know, first of all, I won't be around to even care about it one way or the other... I'm being facetious because, really, it's an issue that I'm thinking a lot about. Because it's not so much an immortality thing; it's more a generosity issue. It's really more about letting other people have the experience, because the experience of singing *Dolmen Music* is really wonderful.

FRANK J. OTERI: I bet.

MEREDITH MONK: You know, or singing *Invisible Light*, Act 3 of *ATLAS*.

FRANK J. OTERI: Uh huh.

MEREDITH MONK: You're just floating after you sing that. So how do you transfer that to other people? I feel incredibly honored that my music is going to be the featured

music for the Lincoln Center Festival this summer. It will be a retrospective of 3 concerts in 3 different places. And we're going to go back to *Dolmen Music* again.

FRANK J. OTERI: Oh, terrific.

MEREDITH MONK: Andrea [Goodman]'s singing it, and Paul [Langland], but Bob [Een] can't do it, so I've got to have a cello player and teach Bob's part to somebody and get a new bass because Julius [Eastman] died in the interval. We're doing the *Turtle Dreams Waltz* also, but with new singers... So I think maybe I'll be able to answer your question better after July...

FRANK J. OTERI: You'll be singing in this as well?

MEREDITH MONK: I'll be singing and so will Ching [Gonzalez]. I wanted to teach it to people who are in my ensemble now, so it'll be Theo Bleckmann and Katie [Geissinger]. So that we could actually perform it once we get it in our voices.

FRANK J. OTERI: One answer for this "200 years into the future question" is, something along the lines of the traditions of raga singing in India where there are garanas and teachers pass down traditions, and there are certain kinds of garanas and you study with the teachers from that tradition, and perhaps people who've been in your ensemble will later transmit this music to another generation, and those people will pass it on to another generation...

MEREDITH MONK: That's so far what we've been doing. But I think that there's something to be alert to, which is that sometimes there are things that I feel that I can't explain very well. Sometimes it is very hard to articulate how they work exactly. So sometimes things get lost a little bit in the translation. It's comparable to the way that computer music programs square things off to make them work out within a system. And, I think, with my music, a lot of what happens, the excitement, is between the barlines... between the cracks, rather than within the barlines. So if you square it off too much, some of the excitement gets lost. So that's the only danger of it. But basically, we have been doing that. The San Francisco Chorus is going to sing some of the things from *Invisible Light*, the Third Act of *ATLAS* in the American Mavericks Program this year, so Katie will go out there and do the preliminary work with them. Randy Wong will be out there, and then I'll come out and Theo, Kathy, Randy and I will be sort of the four anchors of the chorus. But basically she'll go and teach it to them. She'll go out and work with them.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, have there been performances of your work that you have had nothing to do with at all that have been satisfactory?

MEREDITH MONK: The closest to that was a group called the Pacific Mozart Ensemble, Dick Grant's group out in the Bay Area. He asked about doing some music of mine, and I listened to the chorus and I thought it was a really nice sound, you know, that it was not too vibrato-y, it just had a really nice sound. And he just seemed like he was very sensitive as a musician. They did a preparation of that music – I did work with them 5 days before they sang the pieces, but I must say that even when I got there, they were in

pretty good shape. I mean, you know, it wasn't me not doing anything with them, but they had gotten the ground base of everything and so for me it was much more just working on nuance and process.

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, did you work with the people in Musica Sacra who did *Return to Earth*?

MEREDITH MONK: I did, but that was a pretty short rehearsal period. That was that thing of going into a situation where you have 4 rehearsals.

FRANK J. OTERI: And were they working from scores?

MEREDITH MONK: They were working with Wayne before I got there, and they were working more from a map... they did not work from a score because again with that piece, if you were reading it bar by bar, it would take 10 years to learn. You could never sing it. It's too hard to learn it that way. It's better to have a map and to know that the "bay-ohs" come in, and they fade in, they fade out, and this happens and then that happens, and then when that person does that, that happens, and you know, it's more like blocks of material and these events happen within this block. But if I listen to that recording, there are some things I feel could have been more delicate. Musica Sacra are a remarkable chorus and I respect them, because I always say to them, "you're the Rolls Royce of choruses," [laughs]. I mean, they're remarkable. A lot of them have perfect pitch... I mean, they're amazing! But there were certain principles of that music that if I'd had more time to work with them, I think they would have understood better. In *Return to Earth*, things fade in and out. Something begins and the next thing slowly fades in and later goes out, and you never know where it's coming from or where it went. And the subtlety of those crescendos and decrescendos, I didn't feel that they really quite had that. That feeling of "Where did that come from? I didn't hear that and suddenly I hear that." You know, that kind of thing.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right.

MEREDITH MONK: The subtlety, I didn't think they quite got that.

10. THE POLITICS OF QUIET

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, as a composer, and as an audience member, I thought it was very interesting, that in *The Politics of Quiet*, you were not performing.

MEREDITH MONK: That was my first time! That was my gift to the Ensemble.
[laughs]

FRANK J. OTERI: And it's a wonderful piece. How did it feel being in the audience, seeing other people doing this, and not being part of it?

MEREDITH MONK: Strange. [laughs] I know some people think that they have more control by being in the audience. I know people who want to direct and they don't want to perform in their own pieces because they feel like they have more control. I feel like I have less control! [laughs] I'm too nervous sitting in the audience. It's all an illusion anyway, but I feel that I have more influence if I'm on the stage. [laughs] But that process was very interesting, because it is hard for me. It was very difficult. I wanted to find material that was worthy of these remarkable performers, I wanted to have each person have a shining quality of uniqueness (...which is what I always like to do...), where you really saw who these people were, and heard who these people were, and I think for some of the performers, who come from the singing actor background, I didn't give them anything that they could hold on to. Working that way was a little bit my reaction to *ATLAS*. After doing something as narrative as I've ever done in my life, I felt I wanted to go back more to stripping away all those elements, and going just to the essence of these human beings. So the piece seemed to want to be simpler and simpler on every other level than music. Every time I tried to add theatrical elements, it didn't want it. So a lot of my process of making a piece is saying to this piece, "Please make yourself known," and trying to find the laws of the world that I'm working within. And then, if I listen, the laws of that world come across very clearly to me, and I know, no, it doesn't want this, or it does want this, or it needs that, or it doesn't need that. So, you know, I think for them as performers, until they started getting feedback from some of their friends, they were nervous because they didn't have characters they could hold on to, they didn't have any masks on any level, it was just essential Tom Bogdan, essential Ching Gonzalez, essential Katie Geissinger. And so it was very naked for them. It was very vulnerable. When I'm working on these forms, I don't know what the form's going to end up being, and I think what ended up happening with *The Politics of Quiet* is it became a kind of non-verbal oratorio form.

FRANK J. OTERI: Well, this whole question of using verbal language, to use words or to not use words... There are pieces of yours over the years that have incorporated texts, but it's been very spare.

MEREDITH MONK: Minimal texts...

FRANK J. OTERI: And there's been a clear avoidance of text in order to get beyond its sonic limitations, to free the voice from its constraints, because once you're dealing with texts, you're dealing with another art form, you're dealing with another type of comprehension, you're dealing with "chin up," I suppose.

MEREDITH MONK: Right. I think of my music as being more "stateless." It's not American, or this or that. It's more about knowing that the voice is a language in itself that is very eloquent. And it can really delineate energies and feelings that we don't have words for. So in a certain way, I really believe that the voice as an instrument is universal. And it speaks very directly to the heart, and so that's why we have been able to perform all over the world and people respond to it very directly. And I think that that is the beauty of the voice; that's the power of the voice. When you add language to it, you're doing two languages simultaneously. Plus, in a sense, you're imprisoned by the rhythms and cadences of that particular verbal language. That can be interesting if it

leads you to some new rhythms in your music. Working on *Three Heavens and Hells* was very interesting because I had to find a way to free myself from those cadences and work rhythmically with my own impulses. Going back full circle to the beginning of the interview, rhythm is really important to me. So I don't like to feel that I have to adjust my rhythmic impulses to something else, which is the cadences of language.

11. RECORDINGS

FRANK J. OTERI: I knew about your music through records, long before I had ever seen you perform live, which is true for many other people as well. But so much of what you do is more than music. It's music, but it's also movement, it's dance, it's theater, in some cases, it's film, you know, I'm thinking of works like *Book of Days*, or *Ellis Island*, you know, where the non-musical components are a very important part of the experience, yet, most people go home and listen to these things on record players or CD players and are missing all those connections... And, even more drastic, you pick up a disc like *Do You Be*, which has got pieces from all over the place that are suddenly together on this disc and are completely re-contextualized. But that's the way people get introduced to this music. Is that the ideal way for the work to be disseminated? Should these things be released on DVD, on video, should people come hear this music live? What is the best way to get introduced to your work?

MEREDITH MONK: Well, I think my music is the most inspired live. And in a certain way, recording is very challenging for me, to get that figure-eight of energy that we have in live performance, that inspiration. You know, sometimes it's very hard for me in the studio, because I feel like, this is it, it has this fixed kind of form, and so, sometimes I feel like I'm not daring enough in the studio. You know, I want to get it right, so to speak. But I feel that in the recordings I want the music to stand by itself. And some of the music does not have a theatrical context at all.

FRANK J. OTERI: Right.

MEREDITH MONK: And then, sometimes Manfred [Eicher] and I, when we worked on the albums... It was very challenging because sometimes I just wanted to do one whole piece, like instead of doing *Do You Be*, I thought I would have liked to have just recorded *The Games*...but since Manfred comes from the recording/producer point of view, he really hears it very differently. So it's a kind of a dialogue. I remember *Do You Be* originally had even more inter-cutting of material from different sources, and I said to him, "You know, I really think this first side should be more of these solo pieces that come from Acts of *Under and Above* to keep the integrity of that world." And then the second side was selections from *The Games*, so that it sustained more of each world. In the pieces that I work on, I try to find a new musical world within my world for each piece. So it does get confusing, you know, when you mix these things.

FRANK J. OTERI: It's the same thing on a disc like *Volcano Songs* where there are works from lots of different periods.

MEREDITH MONK: Exactly. Well, one of the problems which I've had sadness about is that I feel like I can't keep up with the recording, with how fast I'm writing this music. And the way that that company works is really much more... they really do albums every few years. And so then I'm thinking, "I've got to record this, I've got to record that, because it will be another 4 years until I can record again!" And that's kind of weird. On some levels my thinking like that isn't a good way of looking at it, because then I might be putting too many things into one album.

FRANK J. OTERI: But what a fantastic job they do.

MEREDITH MONK: Oh, Manfred is remarkable. And I have so much respect. I've stayed with the label all these years. There's nobody like him in the recording business. First of all, you know, he is brilliant as a musician and he has an extraordinary ear, but also I think it has a lot to do with his philosophy, which is very much about a deep sense of integrity. For example, within a business which usually discards everything that is not bringing in lots of money immediately, he keeps all his records in print and he stands behind his whole catalog. There have been many opportunities that he's had to work with distribution systems where they only want to work with the 5 people who bring in the thousands of dollars. And he refuses. His whole output is one whole vision. He is a really, really remarkable person.

FRANK J. OTERI: There are so few living composers whom we can say are well-documented, and it's ironic, because you are one of those well documented composers, but you're not nearly as well-documented as you should be given the amount of work that you produce.

MEREDITH MONK: It's hard to keep up with. [laughs] So I don't know. Manfred's way of thinking is interesting because he says you don't have to record everything. And, you know, on some levels, he's right. I mean, if I listen to *The Politics of Quiet*, I feel like there are some things that don't really need to be recorded, they are more a visual than aural experience. But also, I have to say, that there are many, many years where basically I'm just doing music concerts. We go all over the world with the concerts, which I feel totally represented by. I think if you come and see a solo concert of my music, you have everything there. I don't feel that, "oh, no, you should go and see *Magic Frequencies* or something because you're not getting the visual images." I never think that. I feel if I do a solo vocal concert, you've got the heart of a human being's work. That's it. The whole thing is there. But it's in a very pure, distilled form, and then in these other things, the worlds open up a little bit more, but basically you've got the energy in this very pure form. And all of us really enjoy doing the music concerts. We love to do them. But what I wanted to say is that sometimes I will change the form of a piece of music, from, say, *The Politics of Quiet*. I'll actually recompose it for a concert format, where I rethink it so that it has much more compression and the forms are more essentialized.

FRANK J. OTERI: And I imagine the same is true for a recording situation.

MEREDITH MONK: Exactly.

FRANK J. OTERI: You can't get those visual signals. Any possibility of anything ever coming out on video or DVD?

MEREDITH MONK: Oh, I love the idea, of course, of that happening. So...

FRANK J. OTERI: It would be great to see *ATLAS*.

MEREDITH MONK: We have videotapes of *ATLAS*, but I think they would have to be reedited. *ATLAS* should have had 3 cameras, but we had 2. There should have been 2 close-ups and 1 longshot camera, but because of finances and also because of BAM being a union house, they only allowed 2. And I think that that was too bad for *ATLAS*, because there are so many things in *ATLAS* where there are simultaneous events. I think that my live pieces are sometimes really hard to record. You know, you have to rethink the pieces. I think that the video of *Turtle Dreams* is very strong, because we really, literally, rethought it for video. So it's not a recording, it's more... You have to redo it in cinematic terms.

FRANK J. OTERI: Do you ever conceive of dance things or film things or visual things, dramatic things, stage things without music? Are there things where music is not a part of it?

MEREDITH MONK: No.

FRANK J. OTERI: So music is always the center.

MEREDITH MONK: Music is always the center. I think in this last piece, *Magic Frequencies*, I was interested, after doing *The Politics of Quiet* (...you know, one piece influences the next piece...), where all the other elements were really stripped down, I was interested in going back to some of the more playful theatricality and playful movement material of my early work. And so strangely enough, in that balance, there was a lot less straight out singing than usual. There was music all the way through it, but there wasn't "we're standing here, we're going to sing, sing, sing, sing." I mean, we did sing, but it's not as much as usual. Every piece has a different balance. That's part of the process of finding out what the form is. And so it balanced, you know, I was letting in these other elements, these images, and movement materials. But I think that I just can't conceive of doing a piece that doesn't have music. That's my daily discipline, that's what I do. I always am writing music. Then, from time to time, I get the energy up to be able to make these other kinds of forms. But it takes a few years to want to make another of those forms, whereas I'm always writing music. That's my continuity.

12. LINCOLN CENTER FESTIVAL

FRANK J. OTERI: Now, at the Lincoln Center Festival that's coming up, you mentioned that *Dolmen Music* will be done... Any idea of what some of the other programs will be?

MEREDITH MONK: Well, it's going to be 3 concerts in 3 different places, so it will be a little bit like an expedition, you know, it will be like my old pieces, where you go to 3 different places, but it will be within a week's time. So, the first concert is going to be at the Society for Ethical Culture, in that large hall, which is a beautiful hall. Acoustically, it's gorgeous. So I'm going to do a solo concert there. And right now I'm trying to figure out whether I'm going to do *Songs from the Hill* complete, or whether I'm going to do a few of the *Light Songs* and a few of the *Volcano Songs*, like an a cappella set. There will be an a cappella set the first half. Second half, I'll be doing piano and voice, some of my own sitting at the piano and playing, and then Nurit Tilles will play the *New York Requiem*, which I'm not able to play and sing at the same time, and St. Petersburg Waltz, and we'll probably do a little set where I can also move around a little bit. And then the second concert is at Alice Tully Hall. And right now, I think it's going to be me singing some *Light Songs*, maybe a little *Facing North*, and someone dancing, but I can't actually say who it will be yet, because we're still working on it. Like what I did with Merce, of literally singing and whoever's dancing, you know, we just come together that night and, you know, that's how it goes...

FRANK J. OTERI: Is it your choreography?

MEREDITH MONK: No. I loved doing those things with Merce, where they were his Events, and he basically said 90 minutes of music and that's it. And I just showed up and did my 90 minutes of music and they showed up and did the dancing. That was so special, and I really want that represented in this retrospective, because that was really amazing. So that's kind of what it will be like. A 20 minute set, whoever's dancing will be dancing, I'll be singing, that's it. And then, we'll do some of the sections from *ATLAS*, Act 1 and 2, with a chamber orchestra.

FRANK J. OTERI: Not staged.

MEREDITH MONK: Not staged – you know, semi-staged, the way we do in concert where we do a little of the gestural material, but not with costumes: semi-staged. And then intermission. Then we'll do a little set of some very short a cappella pieces from *American Archaeology* and maybe *Quarry* because Nigel [Redden] really wanted me to work on some of the old pieces, too, so... and then we'll do Act 3 from *ATLAS*, *Invisible Light*, straight through. And then the last concert, I'm going to sing some of *Our Lady of Late*, the 1972 solo for voice and wine glass, followed by *Turtle Dreams Waltz*, and then *Dolmen Music*. So *Dolmen Music* will be the last piece of the retrospective.

FRANK J. OTERI: Wow. But none of the stage works are being done.

MEREDITH MONK: Uh unh, but they're going to do a whole evening of films at the Makor Center. They're going to do, in 35mm, *Book of Days* and *Ellis Island*, and then, the short films will be part of the 3rd and last concert, at LaGuardia High School...

FRANK J. OTERI: My alma mater.

MEREDITH MONK: Using the films in that concert, is like having ginger with sushi: we'll show these short silent films so we can change costumes between *Our Lady of Late*

and *Dolmen Music*. The films will be the 5-minute *Quarry* film of the rocks, and the 7-minute silent version of *Ellis Island*. So they will also be part of that concert.

FRANK J. OTERI: Terrific. Now the silent films don't have music.

MEREDITH MONK: That idea, as I said, is the ginger between pieces of sushi. The idea is to wash out your aural tongue, [laughs] your aural palette, and then you can go back to the next thing.

FRANK J. OTERI: Like water in between single malt scotches.

MEREDITH MONK: Exactly. Exactly.

FRANK J. OTERI: Terrific.

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