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LJ photo/Jeff Vondra

TRIBUTE: Anna Halprin looks at stills of 'The Prophetess,' photographed by Imogen Cunningham, which is part of the exhibition on Halprin on display at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco

BODY OF WORK

S.F. art center shows tribute to Mill Valley's Anna Halprin, dance innovator

By Christa Palmer Bigue

LJ correspondent

PIONEER of postmodern dance. Innovator of performance art. Healer, dance educator and community leader who shaped the dance revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s.

Over the course of her life, Anna Halprin has been called many things.

It's no wonder: After viewing the audio/visual installation "Anna Halprin: At the Origin of Performance," running through April 5 at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco, it doesn't take long to see that Halprin, 87, possesses

a remarkable capacity for bringing meaningful and multiple dimensions to the field of dance.

"I really think of myself as a student of life who sees everything through movement and dance," explains Halprin from her home on the slopes of Mount Tamalpais.

"This inspires me and generates my creativity. I am simply a dancer who does my best to impart this to others through teaching, maintaining the rituals, performing what feels real and drawing from the greatest force of all — nature herself."

Halprin's career reveals a dedication to finding truth in movement by reintroducing dance as a medium for social inquiry, healing and activ-

ism. The exhibit is an example of Halprin's lifelong commitment to take dance to a place no other has taken the art form.

The exhibit is also important because it reminds that performance art was born in California in the 1950s with Halprin at the forefront, founding the groundbreaking San Francisco Dancer's Workshop in 1955 and the Tamala Institute in 1978 with her daughter, Daria Halprin.

Finally, the exhibit is part of the Yerba Buena Center's Making Peace series, featuring artists who — culturally, politically or personally — approach the idea of peace in their work, forging the way with

hope, imagination and courage.

"This exhibit has a theme of making peace with oneself, with others, within communities and finally with the earth," Halprin says. "It begins with my dances as a teenager and culminates with my aging process."

Curator Jacqueline Caux creates an intimate and at times political and humorous autobiographical account of Halprin's life. Listening stations offer interviews with artists John Cage, Morton Subotnik, Simone Forti, Terry Riley and La Monte Young about their work and relations with Halprin. Together, the body of work brings to light the concepts integral to Halprin's



LI photo/Jeff Vondel

ALL TOGETHER NOW: Anna Halprin is known for her living, breathing artistic expressions that sometimes involve many participants. Above, volunteers raise their arms in unison to the sounds of rhythmic drumbeats on July 7, 2007, at Santo Meadow near Muir Woods during the 27th annual Planetary Dance, which coincided with Al Gore's Live Earth concert. At right, 'The Five-Legged Stool,' 1962.



Provided by Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon

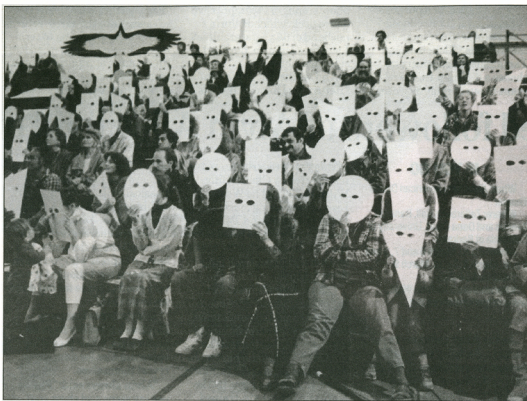
career, such as everyday tasks, healing and nature.

Caux says she wanted to place some Halprin works in the lobby to show Halprin's interest in working with different ethnicities and the kind of "art of the street" showcased regularly by the Yerba Buena Center. "I also found it important to tell very quickly... the humor that is in works," Caux says.

The result is a sinuously moving exhibit that tells a story of a woman who was not afraid to take risks. She's a dancer, choreographer, wife, mother of two daughters and cancer survivor who upended the conventions that formed modern dance by enabling others to generate their own creativity through movement and bring about change and healing into people's lives with a reverence for the natural environment.

At the start of the exhibit, a collection of black-and-white photographs and film shows a very young Halprin in her early works, ("The Lonely One" from 1944, "Daughter of the Voice" from 1953) discovering a new beginning for dance. "I had been instilled with a patternistic way of moving," Halprin says. "I later studied human anatomy and dissection so I could understand the forces of nature, to find for myself the truth of movement."

In the next room, a large movie screen plays Halprin's



Paul Fusco photo provided by Musée d'Art Contemporain de Lyon

BOLD STATEMENT: For "Circle the Earth, Dancing with Life on the Line" in 1989, Anna Halprin brought together 100 people living with AIDS, AIDS-related complex and HIV-positive status along with their caregivers, supporters and friends.

signature piece, "Parades and Changes" from 2004. It's a bit of a shock in comparison to the first set of benign images because nude and half-dressed figures dominate the screen. Next, they are entwined in sheets of crinkling brown paper, ripping and moving the paper in constant motion.

MUSIC IS MIXED WITH SOUNDS OF crumpled paper, an early example of the many scores Halprin created.

It's hard not to wonder what this has to do with dance. But this is the work that first introduced Halprin's notion of tasks which used improvisation and ordinary, everyday gestures for

a more personal approach to dance rather than one based on defined stylistic movements.

"Parades and Changes" was also the first use of nudity on a concert stage with "the natural body as an extension of nature rather than as sexual titillation," Halprin says. "When that piece was first performed

IF YOU GO

What: Anna Halprin: At the Origin of Performance

When: Through April 5

Where: Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission St., San Francisco

Tickets: \$5 to \$7

Information: 978-2787, www.ybca.org, www.anna-halprin.org

Also: "Returning Home," featuring Anna Halprin, screens in the YBCA Screening Room at 7:30 p.m. March 19. Admission is \$6 to \$8

in Stockholm in 1965, it was called 'a ceremony of trust.' In New York in 1967, I was arrested for indecent exposure."

Caux says she wanted to shock with the exhibition of that piece. "Each great artist has a signature piece and it is 'Parades and Changes,'" she says. "(It's) so related to introducing ordinary gestures in the field of the dance, the revolutionary position to the nudity, and the relation with the music through the paper noise."

In the next room and hallway, Caux features Halprin's works in chronological order, mostly related to the notion of tasks. There is "Four and Five Legged Stool" from 1961-62; "Lunch" from 1968, a series of black-and-white photographs

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HALPRIN: Dance with purpose

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depicting dancers eating lunch simultaneously with the audience; and "City Dance," which tells so much about Halprin's relation to dance outside of the studio with a focus on everyday gestures, the city streets and nondancers.

"I wanted to find activities for dancers to do to shift their mental process, to take a task and modify it by shaping it artistically," Halprin says. "... I was looking for a process that connected the dancer to their real life and inner truth, a more humanistic and holistic approach to art because that is the origin of dance."

"Apartment 6" from 1965 finds Halprin exploring a new direction: the psychological and highly emotional aspects of human relationships. Six black-and-white photos show a realistic scene of a living room, yet the audience looks at the performers through a window. The dancers perform everyday tasks, such as making pancakes, reading the paper and listening to the radio, all symbols of how people relate to each other. In the background, sculptor Charles Ross develops a fantasy animal out of papier mache. When he finishes his

creation, the improv comes to a close with a funny and surprising undertone.

More serious works include "Dancing My Cancer," representing Halprin's battle with cancer and her shift from postmodern dance in theaters to performance rituals about healing; "Intensive Care" and "Rocking Chairs," illustrating her relation with cancer and AIDS patients and the elderly; and all the works she did out in nature.

Not to be missed is "Plenary Dance," which ties together themes important to Halprin's work such as performance ritual, everyday tasks and bringing about change and healing into people's lives. Here, photos depict a moving mandala, a simple circle dance based on walking, running and standing still in four directions to the beat of drums. It's the first worldwide dance, bringing 36 countries around the world to pray for peace — between each other and with the earth.

"It is a dance for a purpose," Halprin says. "I introduced it 28 years ago in response to the trainline killer on Mount Tamalpais. Each spring we choose a different theme relevant to our community needs



By photo/Jeff Ventner

GOING STRONG: Anna Halprin, 87, says she never feels finished with her work. She pauses in front of a poster for 'The Bath,' which was photographed by Irving Penn in 1967.

and dedicate this dance to that issue." This year, she says, the dedication is to make peace with the earth.

Other exhibit highlights include poster-size drawings and photographs of the impressive dance deck, which Halprin's husband of 66 years, architect Lawrence Halprin, built outside their home.

And, at the exit of the exhibit, "Returning Home" (2003), is

a 45-minute movie by Andy Abrams whose Wilson that features Halprin experiencing the body as a person's home. "This film is a mythic and very personal journey home," Halprin says. "Perhaps the peace theme is releasing into the earth, returning home, and coming to terms with my own passing when the time comes, appropriate for an ending."

But Halprin declares there is

no end in sight yet. The exhibit clarifies for her that her work is a series of layers — or like doors opening up to more doors.

"As one thing opens up on a technical, artistic level, other things open up politically, socially and personally," she says. "I never feel finished. Because within the body, I feel there is so much information. It's like trying to excavate the meaning of nature itself."

Impassioned followers of Alvin Ailey tend to his legacy

By Andrew Gilbert

San Jose Mercury News

ALMOST TWO DECADES after Alvin Ailey's death, the dance company he lifted to international prominence is still imbued with his spirit.

The brilliant choreographer had an unerring sense when it came to selecting dancers, as well for identifying just the right people to tend his legacy. And no one has done more to pass on the founder's vision to the company's current crop of athletic young artists than Masazumi Chaya, who is celebrating his 35th year in the Ailey fold.

"Chaya knows everything about the company and everything about me," Ailey says in an interview that's included in a company-produced video honoring its star dancer-turned-associate director (go to www.youtube.com and type "chaya" and "ailey" in the search form to find the video).

IF YOU GO

What: Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater

Where: Zellerbach Hall, Bancroft Avenue and Dana Court, University of California at Berkeley

When: 8 p.m. March 6 and 7, 2 and 8 p.m. March 8, 3 p.m. March 9

Tickets: \$34-\$80

Information: 510-642-9988, www.calperformances.org

As the Ailey company returns to Berkeley for a Cal Performances residency through March 9, Chaya's vast and varied contributions will be on vivid display. More than a repository of institutional memory, he's an emotional conduit who communicates the exact steps and original motivation behind them to dancers too young to have met Ailey. Responsible for running the company's rehearsals, Chaya also spearheads the delicate task of restaging dances that might otherwise be lost to time.

Among the pieces included

in this year's repertoire are two resurrected by Chaya: Billy Wilson's 1992 "The Winter in Lisbon," featuring music by Dizzy Gillespie, and Talley Beatty's 1959 "The Road of the Phoebe Snow," set to music by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn.

Chaya danced three roles in "Phoebe Snow" during his tenure as an Ailey dancer and learned the piece from Beatty himself. So when he and the company's artistic director, Judith Jamison, started thinking about featuring a piece by the Katherine Dunham-trained choreographer who died in 1995, it was a natural choice.

Chaya didn't have to search his memory for the piece. By phone during a rehearsal break he says, "Talley's presence at the studio was incredible, so I remember every single thing he said. Several choreographers are like that. ... When you're with them in the studio, you'll never forget what they're doing."

"But 'Phoebe Snow' is a

very difficult ballet to teach, because you have to know classical ballet technique, jazz technique and Martha Graham technique. ... Talley is such an intelligent choreographer, he mixes all those elements. You have to express who you are in the character. I thought it was a very good exercise for our dancers to do that."

Ailey's dance company requires versatility from its performers, while providing opportunities for dancers to reveal themselves.

"Alvin always said: 'Please use my steps and show yourself,'" Chaya recalls. And referring to the diversity of those on stage, he adds, "It's not just one cookie-cutter dancer."

Chaya himself was an unlikely choice. Born and raised in Fukuoka, Japan, where he studied classical ballet, he moved to New York City in 1970 with the dream of performing on Broadway. He was gaining attention with the Richard England Repertory

Company when a chance encounter brought him to Ailey.

Accompanying his friend Michihiko Oka as a translator for his Ailey audition, Chaya ended up getting an audition himself, and Ailey hired them both. He danced with the company from 1972 to 1986, transitioning to assistant rehearsal director while still a stellar dancer.

"I was lucky enough to be around Alvin when he was so on top of choreographing in the 1970s," Chaya says. "He struggled in the '50s and '60s, trying to establish a company. Everybody loved it, but still it was difficult. And in the '70s, finally New York audiences couldn't wait to see the Ailey Company more and more. He was just pouring out ideas."

"We're a repertory company, and he was asking new choreographers and designers to contribute. It was just amazing — that energy of creating."