



because character always implies psychological acting, and I think I'm doing much more. I'm pulling everything down to essence—I'm not trying to think about what kind of toothpaste the person used. I'm going to the essence of those three stages of life. It's a distillation.

**Is it strange not to perform it with the group section, which you added in 1973?**

Yes, it is. It's sad. On a lot of levels. We've lost three people. Sad, too, because now it's very hard to do even that piece with those production values. You have to be kind of scrappy these days. And you have to be really imaginative, like, Okay—I

can do another form with this and [that became] *Shards*. I love the piece. In the old days, Lamson's five-and-ten was my big inspiration for everything. What can I do with a Slinky? What can I do with crepe paper? As artists, I think that one of the good qualities we have is that we're imaginative. We're resourceful. We like challenges.

**I've heard that you are working with Björk. Is it true?**

Yes. We are working on a project of duets. We actually don't really even know what form it will take. We're just seeing how the two voices sound together and seeing, also, that our working methods are somewhat different. And it's been great.

**Did you reach out to her or did she reach out to you?**

In the late '90s, I was teaching at Connecticut College and one of my students said, "Björk is singing a song of yours—'Gotham Lullaby.'" She was singing with the Brodsky Quartet. It was very different than the way I would sing it, but it had the feeling of the song. So I wrote her a card and I said, "I really appreciate your version of it, and I really think it keeps the integrity of the song, but you found your own way." So we stayed in touch. In 2005, American Music Center was starting a series of broadcast programs and the first interview was with Sarah Cahill and us for NPR. Björk had come to the interview with a notebook full of questions. It was very touching, and we almost were in tears by the end. There was some link there. Not in the music itself, not in the way it manifests, but more in the spirit of it: It's elemental and organic. It's almost like an artistic daughter.

*Meredith Monk performs at 3LD Art & Technology Center Tue 7-June 11.*



# Meredith Monk

The multifaceted artist revisits three stages of life in *Girlchild*. By **Gia Kourlas**

Meredith Monk, the last artist to be produced by Dance Theater Workshop before it becomes New York Live Arts, has created—in her inimitable way—a performance experience. (She was also, remember, the last performer to grace Merce Cunningham's memorial.) In *Education of the Girlchild Revisited*, Monk looks back at a seminal 1972 work, in which she performed a solo that documented the life cycle in reverse; she starts out old and ends young. Joined by Ellen Fisher, Katie Geissinger and Allison Sniffin, Monk also presents *Shards*, a new piece weaving together music and movement created between 1969 and 1973. She spoke at her Tribeca loft.

**Why did you want to bring *Education of the Girlchild* back?** Actually it started in 2008. Charlie Reinhart was doing an anniversary at the American Dance Festival, and they asked me to do something for that, and because I have a soft spot in my heart for Charlie from the old days, I said yes. I woke up in the middle of the night, and I just thought, You know, maybe I should do the *Girlchild* solo. I feel like it's taken about two years to get to the point where I have total freedom. It's very much channeling these characters. I've been working more, in these last years, in a kind of purity

of being and then, if there are characters, they come out of that, but *Girlchild* is really like an acting piece. I'm dealing with three personas or three aspects of this one person's life, and so it's just more intense in its transformative aspects. It has been so profound to work on it.

**Because you're revisiting your mind at that time?**

Revisiting particular concerns. Revisiting a certain level of intensity that's sustained. It's 35 minutes. I feel this freedom that I remember as a young performer with material.

**What concerns are you revisiting?**

I was reading a lot of biography at that time, and I was thinking, How do you do biography or portraiture in an abstract theater form? I had read Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives*, and that was really inspiring. I was going to have three different solos. I can't remember what the other two were going to be, but then after I'd done this solo, I felt that that idea had fulfilled itself.

**How is *Girlchild* a meditation about youth and age?**

I don't know why I was thinking about age at 29, but I saw a beautiful picture in a magazine. It's so great. [*She disappears and returns with black-and-white magazine photos of a weathered man.*]

One inspiration was a potter. I was thinking about when you're old, there's no gender. Male and female are almost the same. The other thing I was struck by with this man was his joy. I thought it was very inspiring to think of life that way. How at that age could I actually get that postural thing of an older person into my body? Now, it's quite hard for me. Each time I've performed the piece in the last three years, I find a different challenge with a different character. With the young woman, I have to remember that softness and that openness and to think of my body as really fluid and to think of my voice as really light.

**What about the middle character?**

I think of her almost as a farm woman—very straightforward and honest and right to business. The gestures are clear and articulated. I love that character actually. I love all three of them. But they are one person. I think of them more as persona than character

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