



The Kitchen Center
for Video, Music, Dance,
Performance, Film & Literature

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A work that promises to define 21st-century opera...

Robert Ashley: *Celestial Excursions* (U.S. Premiere)

April 9–12 [Wed-Sat], 16-19 [Wed-Sat] 8pm

\$20 advance sales/\$25 at door

Text, music and direction by **Robert Ashley**

Singers: **Sam Ashley, Thomas Buckner, Jacqueline Humbert, Joan La Barbara and Robert Ashley**

Performance artist: **Joan Jonas**

Prerecorded electronic orchestra: **Robert Ashley and Tom Hamilton**

Mixing and live electronics: **Tom Hamilton**

Piano: “**Blue**” **Gene Tyranny**

Lighting design: **David Moodey**

Technical coordination/sound system engineer: **Cas Boumans**

Stage manager: **Melanie Lipka**

“...hypnotic, James Joyce-like maximalist works...[words] snatched from high and low culture and set into tightly choreographed blends of speech, song, meaning and textural wizardry.”—*Los Angeles Times*

After the sold out performances of *Dust* in 1999, godfather of experimental opera **Robert Ashley** returns to The Kitchen with *Celestial Excursions*. Ashley’s latest endeavor explores remarkably uncharted territory—the kind of language that is common among “old” people who talk all the time or not at all, to anyone passing by or to themselves. The opera will premiere in March at the Hebbel Theater in Berlin, before coming to The Kitchen to receive its U. S. premiere. Singers include **Sam Ashley, Thomas Buckner, Jacqueline Humbert, Joan La Barbara and Robert Ashley**, with a special appearance by **Joan Jonas** as the “Silent Character.”

Celestial Excursions delves into the wild intermingling of reminiscence, regret, love, nightmare, old sayings, and songs on the radio—all seemingly to no purpose, except for the operatic end of relentless speed and precision in ensemble singing and the possible stage magic inherent in illusion, hallucination, and a physically changed state of the senses. The opera’s originality lies in a use of a new vocal technique Ashley has built over the last 20 years, which enables several stories to be heard at the same time. In an intricate vocal system, a principal voice is “chased” by other voices whose parts rotate in sequence in a given order. The result of this technique creates a complex jungle of voices, delivered with an extraordinary rhythmic intensity rarely heard in ensemble singing.

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As for all of Ashley's latest works, the orchestra music of *Celestial Excursions* was composed in the computer-synthesizer studio. However, all the voices and the orchestra (on multi-track tape or on disc) are processed again during the concert in order to match the sound of the opera to the performance space.

"With the exception of a few condescending and silly movies, "old" people are one of the few "minority" groups basically unrecognized in the arts. Not that they care, but among the "marginalized," old people are the most marginalized, because, obviously, unlike racial or ethnic groups or the poor, they have no future. Or rather, in the most important sense, their future will never change for the better."—Robert Ashley

"When has any other opera libretto ever hewn so close to the unselfconscious way people talk? Language evolves, and each new century has to recapture anew some way to bring music and language into intimate contact. Ashley has always represented a new point of crystallization in that process..."

—Kyle Gann, *The Village Voice* (March 2000)

TV Dinner No. 16: Robert Ashley

April 17 [Thu] 6pm \$25 (includes dinner)

Moderated by **John Rockwell**, New York Times critic

Panelists: **Kenneth Goldsmith**, poet, journalist, DJ, critic; **Joan Jonas**, video artist; **Carlota Schoolman**, independent producer, Kitchen Media Curator (1982-86)

TV Dinner's sixteenth installment celebrates Robert Ashley's revolutionary legacy in Music Theater. Meet the artist in conversation with celebrated New York personalities over a vegetarian dinner. Enjoy newly re-mastered excerpts from the Kitchen Archives, including selections from the 1978 Kitchen Benefit, *Music with Roots in the Aether* (1976), *Perfect Lives* (1978) and *Dust* (1998).

Music programs at The Kitchen are made possible with generous support from the Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, The Aaron Copland Fund, and The Virgil Thomson Foundation.

Robert Ashley was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan in 1930 and was educated at the University of Michigan and the Manhattan School of Music. In the 1960s, Ashley organized Ann Arbor's legendary ONCE Festival and directed the ONCE Group. During the 1970s, he directed the Center for Contemporary Music at Mills College, toured with the Sonic Arts Union, and produced and directed *Music with Roots in the Aether*, a 14-hour television opera/documentary about the work and ideas of seven American composers. Ashley wrote and produced *Perfect Lives*, an opera for television widely considered to be the pre-cursor of "music-television." Staged versions of *Perfect Lives* and *Atalanta (Acts of God)* and the monumental opera tetralogy, *Now Eleanor's Idea*, have toured throughout Europe, Asia and the United States. More recently, he has completed *Balseros* for Florida Grand Opera, *When Famous Last Words Fail You*, for the American Composers Orchestra, *Your Money My Life Good-bye* for Bayerischer Rundfunk, and *Dust* for premiere at the Kanagawa Arts Foundation in Yokohama. In 2002 he received the John Cage Award for Music from the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts.

The Kitchen is located at 512 West 19th Street (between 10th & 11th Avenues). To order tickets, call the Box Office at 212-255-5793, ext 11. For press comps, call 212-255-5793, ext 14.