

## Invitation to the 'Table of Silence,' a 9/11 Commemoration

Perry Santanchote for NYC-ARTS | September 7, 2012 4:00 AM | Thirteen.org



"Table of Silence Project 9/11," a 31-minute work for 100 dancers, was created in honor of the 10th anniversary of 9/11, and specifically for Lincoln Center's Josie Robertson Plaza. The 2011 performance will be repeated on Sept. 11, 2012.

The tragic events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath are recalled in speeches, articles, reports and public events at each anniversary. This coming Tuesday, one of the few silent, but still public, commemorations of 9/11 takes place for a second year in a row at Lincoln Center. With the iconic fountain as their center and framed by the travertine pattern of the plaza, more than 100 dancers clad in white will perform a ritual — both a literally moving tribute to the victims and a meditative devotion to peace.

Choreographer Jacquelyn Buglisi titled this work "Table of Silence Project 9/11," after Italian artist Rossella Vasta's installation of 100 terracotta plates, arranged around a symbolic banquet table, uniting humanity. Buglisi Dance Theatre members are joined in the performance by students from the city's prestigious dance centers, including the Juilliard School, the Ailey School, Dance Theater of Harlem, Ballet Hispanico and the Martha Graham School.

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Buglisi, who lives in New York, faced the prospect of losing two people close to her. One of her dancers was on her way to the World Trade Center when it was hit. A close friend, photojournalist Bill Biggart, was covering the disaster and contact with him had been lost. "We began searching, like everyone else, for those who were missing," Buglisi said. Her dancer was safe, but Biggart had perished, his lens capturing the building that collapsed on him.

"It appeared the unutterable had come to our home. Following the collapse of the second tower, some of us rushed downtown to help family and friends evacuate their homes. We checked at the hospitals to see if we could help. We were waiting for bodies, and there were no bodies. It was an image of ineffable grief," Buglisi recalled.

"There was already a silent procession of people covered in white ash streaming up the West Side Highway. It seemed all traffic had stopped and while so much was happening—the city went silent," Buglisi described.

Buglisi works in images, and many striking ones are formed by the circle of dancers in "Table of Silence," which she created specifically for Lincoln Center's Josie Robertson Plaza (though it has since been performed at other commemorations, such as for the victims of Pan Am Flight 103, at Syracuse University).

As for movement, the creator of more than 70 works explains,

*"There comes a moment, through repetition—like the beating of the hands, the pounding of the fist against the heart—that compels you to create a rhythmic tone that expresses perhaps some great hymn, some offering or worship that allows people to be unified in unexplained compassion. They do not need words in this ritual."*

*One of the first dances that I performed while dancing with the Martha Graham Dance Company, was the ritual dance "Primitive Mysteries" (1931), which was inspired by pagan and religious ceremonies of the American Southwest Indians. I certainly feel that the staging and architecture of this dance ritual and others like it gave me a strong underpinning to realize the Table of Silence Project 9/11, with the Josie Robertson Plaza as the stage. I needed a labyrinth and water, and there it was."*

Buglisi believes the arts are a natural way to address global issues and to promote peace and tolerance. Her scores of dancers represent not only a cross-section of the U.S., but come from countries around the world, including India, Japan, Korea, Trinidad, Colombia, Belgium and France.

Spectators of this free performance are invited to join the dancers in a gesture of openness at its end (precisely at 8:46 am), extending their arms with palms upturned to the sky for a minute of communal movement and silence.

*"Table of Silence Project 9/11" will take place Sept. 11, 2012 from 8:15 am to 8:46 am at Josie Robertson Plaza at Columbus Ave. and West 64th St.*

<http://www.thirteen.org/metrofocus/2012/09/invitation-to-the-table-of-silence-a-911-commemoration/>



Photo credits from top:  
Photo by Kokyat; Photo by Paul B. Goode, Rehearsing "Table of Silence" at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in 2011.; Photo by Terri Gold.