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LIBERAL ARTS

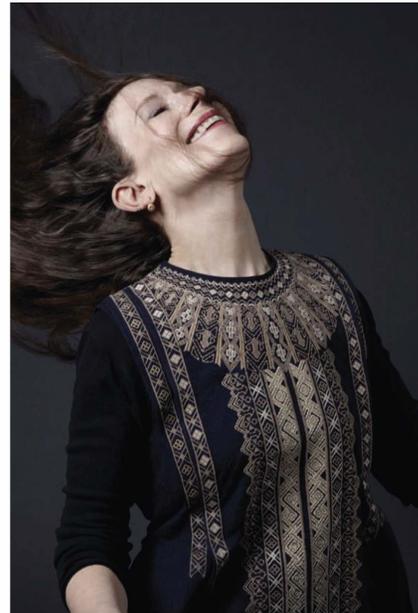
The polymath Meredith Monk brings her latest experiment in multimedia performance art to Stanford Live.

By Joanne Furio

The way Meredith Monk sees it, artists have responded in two ways to the current political quagmire. One response is outright political work that challenges and pushes back. “Another strategy is art of healing,” she says, “art as sacred and spiritual work that’s an antidote to what’s going on.” Monk’s work fits into the latter. A composer, singer, director/choreographer and creator of new opera, music-theater works, films and installations, Monk’s been recognized as one of the most influential artists of our time. This month, the polymath will perform one of her most recent works at Stanford Live.

For those uninitiated with Monk’s avant-garde style, her word-optional vocal pieces are sometimes nothing more than monosyllabic sounds modified by pitch, tone and rhythm. Her style is considered a groundbreaking exploration of the voice as instrument. She’s even been known to mimic the sounds of bees—for an entire piece. “Would you believe [it]? An opera with virtually no words!” gushes David Gockley, the former general director of the San Francisco Opera, who commissioned Monk to create a small-scale piece earlier in his career at the Houston Opera. The result became 1991’s *Atlas*, based loosely on the adventures of explorer Alexandra David-Néel, played by Monk herself, who also directed and choreographed. “The traditionally trained singers had a ball with it and said it improved their skills as actors and singers,” Gockley adds. “Her work is some of the most delightful and individual ever to play on an opera stage.”

On April 6, Monk’s newest work, *Cellular Songs*, a direct response to the politics brought forth by the 2016 presidential election, entails a diverse female cast that includes 10 young singers from iSing, Palo Alto’s girls chorus. Monk conceived of the production before the #MeToo movement. “Artists are the antennae of the society,” says Monk. “It was an impulse I was feeling really strongly.” The production is inspired by “the cell as the basic unit of life and prototype for cooperation and interdependence,” says Monk. Her decision to cast only women disappointed the men in her ensemble, she says, but ultimately they understood. “The young women are like a template for what the society can be,” says Monk. “A society of kindness instead of cruelty, and cooperation instead of greed. We need it so badly.” 7:30pm, tickets \$32-\$52, 327 Lasuen St., Stanford, live.stanford.edu



Meredith Monk’s career dates to the 1960s. The composer, performer, director, filmmaker, vocalist and choreographer is known for her multidisciplinary work that can be hard for some to understand.

