



MEREDITH MONK

..M...EM..O.R...YG.A....ME...

1	Spaceship [1983]	4:18
2	Gamemaster's Song [1983] Vocal Solo: Theo Bleckmann	5:12
3	Migration [1983] Words by Ping Chong, performed by Michael Cerveris	7:37
4	Memory Song [1983] Words by Meredith Monk	6:44
5	Downfall [1983]	3:56
6	Waltz in 5s [1996] Vocal Solo: Katie Geissinger	3:54
7	Tokyo Cha Cha [1983]	9:45
8	Totentanz [2006]	3:12
9	Double Fiesta [1986] Vocal Solo: Meredith Monk	5:42



MEMORY GAME

Music by Meredith Monk

Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble

Theo Bleckmann, Katie Geissinger, Meredith Monk, Allison Sniffin: voices

Allison Sniffin: bowed psaltery

Michael Cerveris: guest artist

Bang on a Can All-Stars

Ashley Bathgate: cello and voice

Robert Black: electric and acoustic bass

Vicky Chow: piano, keyboard and melodica

David Cossin: percussion

Mark Stewart: electric guitar, banjo and voice

Ken Thomson: clarinets and saxophones



All music composed by Meredith Monk

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“Spaceship” arranged by Michael Gordon; “Gamemaster’s Song” and “Migration” arranged by Meredith Monk; “Memory Song” arranged by Julia Wolfe; “Downfall” arranged by Ken Thomson; “Waltz in 5s” arranged by Meredith Monk and Allison Sniffin; “Tokyo Cha Cha” arranged by Allison Sniffin; “Totentanz” and “Double Fiesta” arranged by David Lang.

“Spaceship,” “Gamemaster’s Song,” “Migration,” “Memory Song” and “Downfall” originally composed for *The Games: a science fiction opera* [1983-84]; “Waltz in 5s” composed for *The Politics of Quiet* [1996]; “Tokyo Cha Cha” composed for *Turtle Dreams Cabaret* [1983]; “Totentanz” composed for *impermanence* [2006]; “Double Fiesta” composed for *Acts from Under and Above* [1986].

Produced by David Cossin and Rob Friedman

Recorded by Rob Friedman at Water Music, Hoboken, NJ, December 2016 and David Cossin’s Studio, November 2017 and March 2018

Assisted by Brian Chirlo

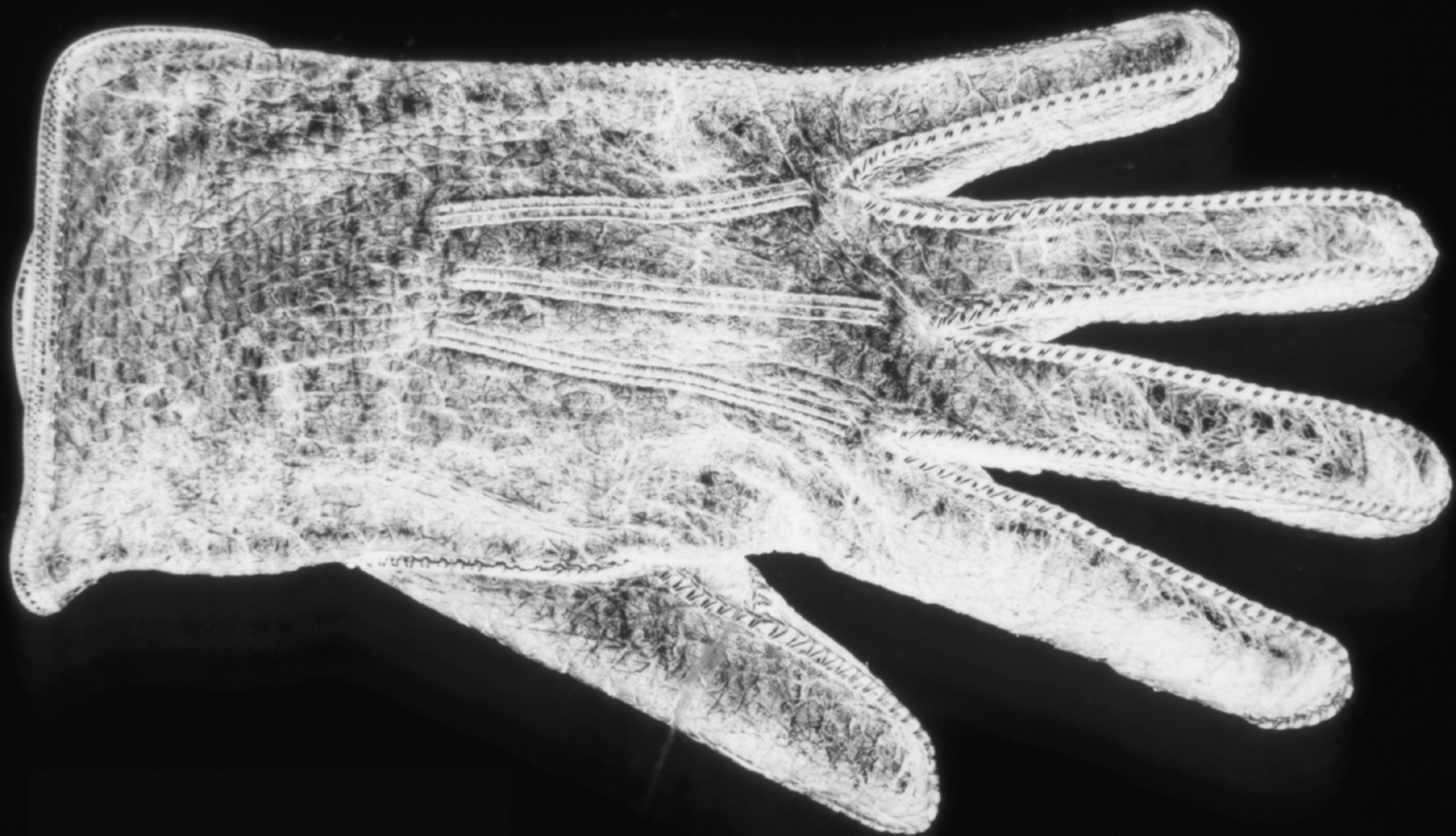
Edited by David Cossin

Mixed by Rob Friedman with David Cossin, Meredith Monk, and Allison Sniffin at littlelife studio, NYC

Mastered by Rob Friedman

Score Preparation by Allison Sniffin

Meredith Monk and Theo Bleckmann appear courtesy of ECM Records



Migration

They were not unlike us in appearance though their lifespan was 80 years.

The adults among them weighed from approximately 100 to 200 pounds.

Some of them had offspring already at the age of 13, but the average age of a mother was 25.

Their languages numbered in the thousands, many of which we have succeeded in transcribing.

Some of them bear similarities to our own language. We have now put them into common usage.

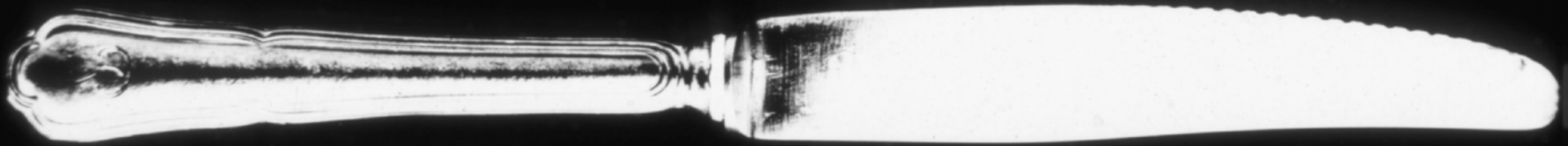
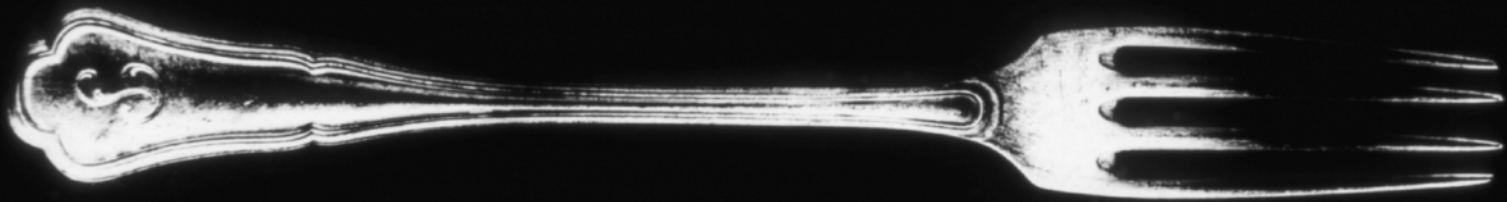
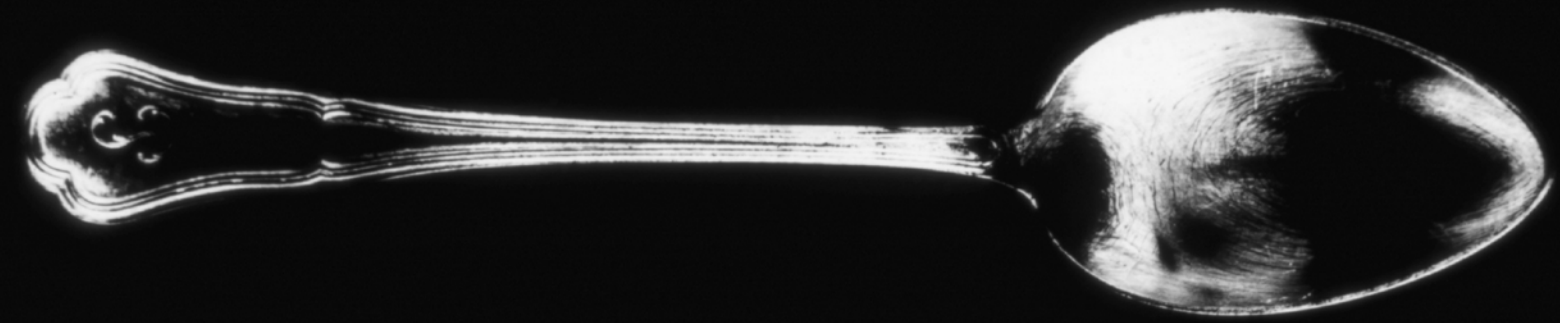
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The climate of the southern hemisphere was very warm so most people lived in lightweight shelters and wore little clothing.

Many were forced to move from place to place.

Towards the end, the smell of the air changed.

We know all these things because some of their ancient ones are still among us.



Memory Song

I remember mushrooms

I remember candlelight

I remember early morning coffee

I remember fish

Ich erinnere mich an altes Kopfsteinpflaster (I remember old cobblestones)

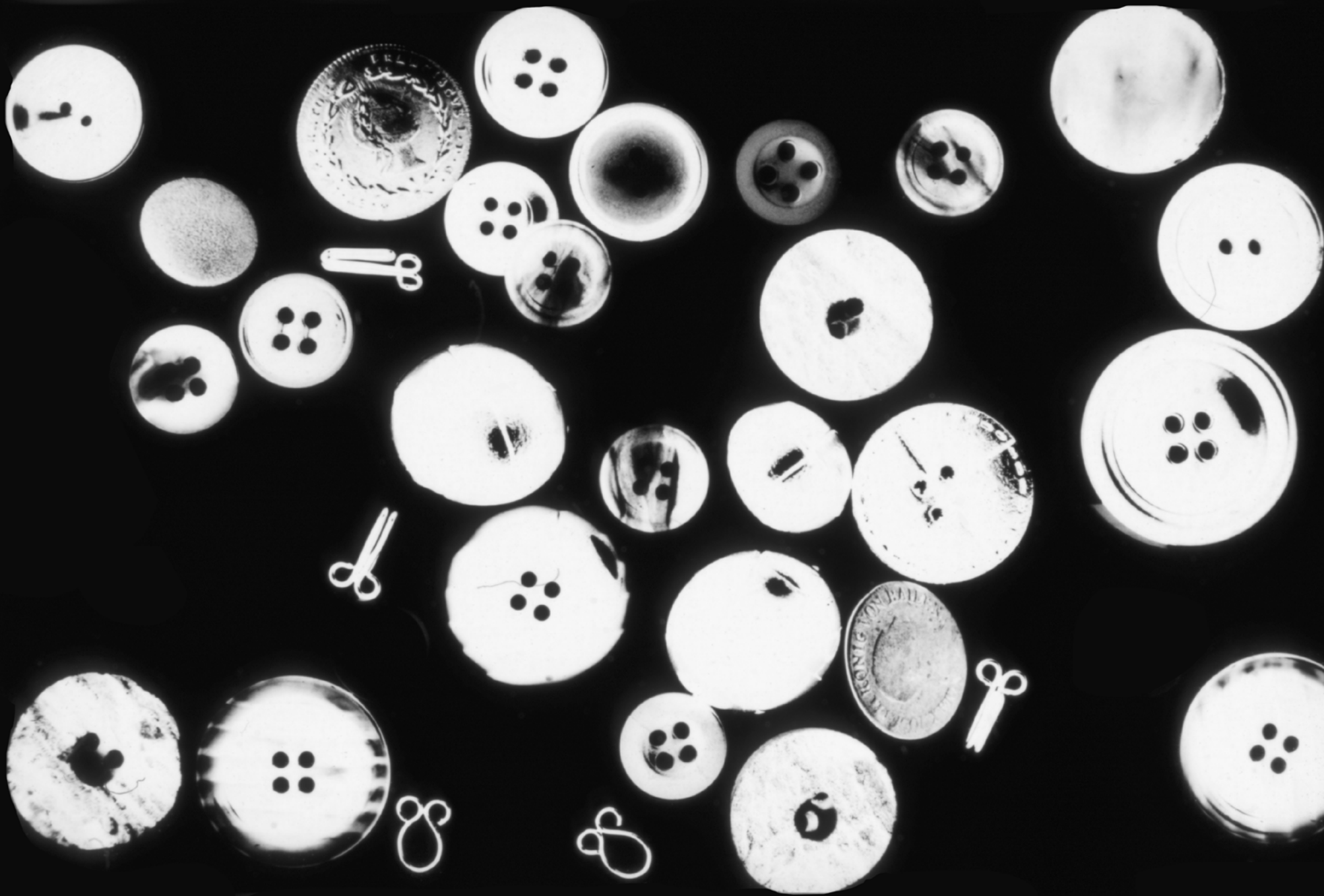
I remember a black Suzuki

Ich erinnere mich an das tisch gebet (I remember saying grace)

Je pense à mon lit (I think of my bed)

I remember aspirin

I am thinking about Shakespeare's garden



Composer's Notes:

I remember seeing the name “Bang on a Can” on a poster sometime in 1986 and it intrigued me. Soon after that, I found out that Bang on a Can was an organization run by three young composers, Michael Gordon, Julia Wolfe and David Lang, who were writing new, iconoclastic music and were also producing an annual marathon of music by a wide variety of composers. I was excited by the news. In 1987, they asked me to be part of the marathon and I sang and played a set of my music with the pianist, Nurit Tilles [including “Double Fiesta” which concludes this recording].

In 1998, Julia Wolfe asked for my permission to arrange “Memory Song” from *The Games: a science fiction opera* for me to sing with the Bang on a Can All-Stars in a concert at Alice Tully Hall. Two of the players also performed the vocal parts with me. The rehearsals were filled with joy, mutual respect and energy. That performance marked the beginning of a journey that has resulted in MEMORY GAME. Over the next few years, David Lang arranged “Double Fiesta” and “Totentanz”. I later went on tour with the group as Guest Artist and the All-Stars performed with me at Carnegie Hall as part of my 50th Anniversary celebration in 2015. Even though our sensibilities are quite different, I have always felt an affinity with these wonderful composers and musicians.

For many years, we talked about making an album of my compositions, arranged by various musicians, mostly consisting of pieces that had not been previously recorded. Considering which selections to include, I thought that music from *The Games* would not only be relevant in terms of what is now happening in our world but also a perfect vehicle to combine the edgy, urban energy of Bang on a Can with my more primordial, plangent style. After deciding upon a suite from *The Games* as the centerpiece of this recording, I chose a few compositions from various pieces for augmentation and contrast, allowing me to create an overall dramatic arc.

In the fall of 1983, I was in Berlin working on a project for the Schaubühne Ensemble of West Berlin and had asked the writer/director, Ping Chong, to collaborate with me. I composed the music and



worked with Ping on the scenario, choreography and direction. Ping wrote most of the text and created the slides and video. At the time, missiles were pointed at West Berlin from the East, the Berlin Wall was up, 1984 was rapidly approaching, and so were the Olympic Games. Responding to these factors, we began working on *The Games*. It evolved into a meditation on the aesthetics and trappings of Fascism in relation to the future of our Earth. Set on an imaginary planet, *The Games* takes place in a post-nuclear or global warming future after the Earth has been destroyed. The survivors [who come from all over the world] and their descendants are involved in the repetition of ritual games re-enacting Earth's culture in order to preserve shards of civilization. The games are led by a Gamemaster who appears at first to be a benign and entertaining presence but gradually reveals himself as a sinister commander with the potential to repeat the destruction that occurred on Earth.

An overture to the suite from *The Games*, "Spaceship" evokes the original journey of Earth's survivors to a new planet, as well as their sense of optimism about their future. "Gamemaster's Song" introduces the seductive, charismatic Gamemaster as a combination MC, referee, politician and rock star who runs the ritual games every year. "Migration" is an account of the last period of time on Earth and the constant upheaval of its inhabitants. "Memory Song" is an abstract quiz game containing the fragmented language used by citizens of the new planet. Only the elders still retain vague memories of the Earth. Members of the younger generation, who have never been there, have only learned about its culture by hearsay and by the annual games. Seeds of destruction imbue "Downfall" as the corruption of society by the now power hungry Gamemaster is revealed.

I chose to include "Waltz in 5s", a passage from *The Politics of Quiet*, for its plaintive, delicate, bittersweet quality as a kind of antidote to the last selection from *The Games*. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, I made a number of apocalyptic pieces that were a reflection of the fragmentation, violence and speed of the time. Soon after that, I realized that instead of stating the problem, it would be more useful and inspiring to return to the notion of offering an alternative. I wanted to create a musical world in which members of the audience could have a pure, direct and immersive

experience. As part of this series of works, in 1996 I composed *The Politics of Quiet*, a non-verbal oratorio contemplating community, sacred space and the end of the 2nd millennium.

After my first visit to Japan in 1982, I wrote “Tokyo Cha Cha”. From the time I was a young artist, I had been inspired by Japanese aesthetics and art. I expected to be surrounded by that history and tradition when I went there for the first time. Instead, what struck me was the futuristic, iconoclastic aspect of the culture with its extreme contrasts and imaginative modifications of the contemporary world. I had been thinking about social dance forms, their relation to music and how I could make an abstract, surrealistic and asymmetrical version of one of the favorite dances from my high school days. Starting with that impulse, memories from my trip colored and embedded themselves into the form. “Tokyo Cha Cha” was also the beginning of an exploration of fragmented language and displacement of syntax that I later developed in *The Games*.

From 2004 to 2006, I composed *impermanence*, a full evening work reflecting upon the ephemerality of life as a response to the sudden death of my partner, Mieke van Hoek. As I worked on “Totentanz”, images of the Mexican Day of the Dead began to enter my mind. The idea of accepting and celebrating the inevitability, unpredictability and presence of death as a natural part of life inspired the form of “Totentanz”.

I originally composed “Double Fiesta” in 1986 for solo voice and two pianos. In the piece, I explored a variety of vocal qualities and quick shifts of persona or character within the underlying relaxed but buoyant atmosphere created by the two pianos. “Double Fiesta” was originally part of *Acts from Under and Above*, a chamber piece presenting images of solitude and friendship.

Right from the beginning of conceiving MEMORY GAME, the prospect of uniting the magnificent singers and players from Meredith Monk & Vocal Ensemble and Bang on a Can All-Stars filled me with excitement. My hope is that our rich and joyous experience of making music together inspires and resonates with the listener.

–Meredith Monk



Special thanks to Allison Sniffin, Kirstin Kapustik, Peter Sciscioli, Ping Chong, Michael Cerveris, Yoshio Yabara, Manfred Eicher and ECM Records, Rob Grenoble and Water Music, Philippa Thompson, Tim Thomas, and Sruly Lazaros

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Images: WALLET: Front and Back cover: Ruth Walz, *The Games: a science fiction opera* [1983] by Meredith Monk & Ping Chong, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin, Germany

Inside panels: Ping Chong, production slides for *The Games*

BOOKLET: Front cover: Ruth Walz, *The Games: a science fiction opera* [1983] by Meredith Monk & Ping Chong, Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz, Berlin, Germany

Portraits of Meredith Monk: Peter Moore, Armin Linke

Katie Geissinger, Allison Sniffin, Meredith Monk, Theo Bleckmann: John Edward Mason

Bang on a Can All-Stars: Stephanie Berger

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