

WHITNEY

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MEDIA ALERT



Cecil Taylor, performance at the Whitney Museum of American Art, April 14, 2016, as part of *Open Plan: Cecil Taylor*, April 15–24, 2016.
Photographs © Paula Court.

OPEN PLAN: CECIL TAYLOR

April 15– April 24, 2016

Taylor set to appear in concert on Thursday, April 14 at 8 pm with Tony Oxley and Min Tanaka

Currently underway at the Whitney Museum of American Art is *Open Plan*, an experimental five-part exhibition using the Museum's dramatic fifth-floor as a single open gallery, unobstructed by interior walls. The largest column-free museum exhibition space in New York, the fifth-floor Neil Bluhm Family Galleries measure 18,200 square feet and feature windows with striking views east into the city and west to the Hudson River, making for an expansive and inspiring canvas.

Open Plan: Cecil Taylor celebrates the artist's extraordinary life and work through a comprehensive exhibition and a festival of events. A retrospective environment that will include documentation of Taylor's career through archival videos, audio, notational scores, photographs, poetry, and other ephemera, the ten-day retrospective also features a series of live performances. The festival commences on Thursday, April 14 at 8 pm with a concert by Taylor himself with Tony Oxley on electronics and dancer Min Tanaka in the fifth floor gallery where the exhibition will be on view. Over twenty additional events featuring Taylor's musical collaborators, as well as dancers, playwrights, poets, filmmakers, and writers who have been deeply involved in his work, will take place throughout the retrospective and festival (see complete schedule of events below). Participants include Hilton Als, Cheryl Banks-Smith, Clark Coolidge, Andrew Cyrille, Steve Dalachinsky, Thulani Davis, Chris Funkhouser, Henry Grimes, The New Unit, Tristan Honsinger, Nathaniel Mackey, Dianne McIntyre, Jemeel Moondoc/Ensemble Muntu, Tracie Morris, Fred Moten, William Parker, Enrico Rava, A.B. Spellman, Anne Waldman, Heather Watts, and others. Throughout the galleries, listening stations will provide the chance

to hear Taylor's albums. Screenings of important films documenting Taylor's life and performances will also be presented, including the world premiere of a new feature length performance film, *The Silent Eye*, that was shot in Taylor's home over three days in January 2016.

Open Plan: Cecil Taylor is organized in consultation with the artist by curator and curator of performance Jay Sanders and Lawrence Kumpf, artistic director, Blank Forms, with senior curatorial assistant Greta Hartenstein, and Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow Lauren Rosati.

About Cecil Taylor

Cecil Taylor (b. 1929) is a towering, sometimes divisive figure within twentieth-century music. In the early 1960s, with fellow maverick artists Ornette Coleman, Albert Ayler and others, he revolutionized jazz by extending bebop into a radical terrain dubbed the "New Thing" or "free jazz"—the latter a term with political as well as aesthetic connotations given the social changes underway at the time in America. For Taylor, freedom meant a deep synthesis of the modern composers such as Béla Bartók and Igor Stravinsky that he encountered during his studies at the New England Conservatory of Music with the nuanced and original piano innovations of Thelonious Monk, Horace Silver, Bud Powell, and Duke Ellington, elaborated into an uncharted territory.

Taylor has extended the potential of jazz as an art form to include an exceptionally wide range of intellectual, conceptual, and spiritual expressions. The sheer speed and percussive attack of his piano playing, its extreme density of both ideas and notes, and his complete unlocking of pitch, harmony, rhythm, and tempo to exploit their vast multiplicities has for more than fifty years left some listeners baffled or overwhelmed and others ecstatically transfixed. Whether he is playing solo piano or leading one of his bands—which he often calls "Units" to underscore the structural, almost architectural nature of their improvisations—Taylor has remained an uncompromising musical innovator of the highest order. For him, music exists in a continuum that extends to all art forms, and his work is deeply informed by the artists he loves, whether musicians, dancers, architects, or poets. His expansive view of music has led him to write poetry himself (though rarely to publish it), and to branch out into dance and theater through his own performances and by working with a remarkably broad range of collaborators including The Living Theater, Dianne McIntyre, Adrienne Kennedy, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Heather Watts, and Min Tanaka.

Major support for *Open Plan* is provided by the Philip and Janice Levin Foundation and the National Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

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Major funding for the Whitney's Performance Program is provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, with generous support also provided by the Mertz Gilmore Foundation and the Performance Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

Bösendorfer 280SP concert grand piano is provided in-kind by Yamaha Artist Services, New York.

About the Whitney

The Whitney Museum of American Art, founded in 1930 by the artist and philanthropist Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney (1875–1942), houses the foremost collection of American art from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Mrs. Whitney, an early and ardent supporter of modern American art, nurtured groundbreaking artists at a time when audiences were still largely preoccupied with the Old Masters. From her vision arose the Whitney Museum of American Art, which has been championing the most innovative art of the United States for more than eighty years. The core of the Whitney's mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and exhibit American art of our time and serve a wide variety of audiences in celebration of the complexity and diversity of art and culture in the United States. Through this mission and a steadfast commitment to artists themselves, the Whitney has long been a powerful force in support of modern and contemporary art and continues to help define what is innovative and influential in American art today.

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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

OPEN PLAN: CECIL TAYLOR

The exhibition is on view during regular museum hours in the fifth-floor Neil Bluhm Family Galleries. Screenings and Listening Sessions will take place in the adjacent Kaufman Gallery. For ticket information, additional details and schedule updates, please visit whitney.org/CecilTaylor.

Thursday, April 14, 2016

8 pm

Concert

Cecil Taylor, Tony Oxley, and Min Tanaka

The New Unit*

(Doors open at 7:00pm. Tickets are required for this event. Please visit whitney.org/events for more information.)

To celebrate the opening night of his retrospective and festival, Taylor will be joined by two longstanding collaborators for an historic trio concert that unites improvisatory jazz with extemporaneous movement.

*For the second half of the opening night concert, Cecil Taylor and Min Tanaka are joined by **The New Unit** for a surprise performance. The members of The New Unit are **Albey Balgochian**, bass; **Jane Grenier Balgochian**, spoken word; **Tristan Honsinger**, cello; **Jackson Krall**, percussion; **Elliott Levin**, tenor saxophone and flute; **Harri Sjöström**, soprano saxophone; and **Bobby Zankel**, alto saxophone.

Friday, April 15, 2016

10:30 am

Exhibition opens

Open Plan: Cecil Taylor

A retrospective exhibition, *Open Plan: Cecil Taylor* includes archival videos, audio, notational scores, photographs, poetry, and other ephemera. The exhibition is on view through April 24.

12 pm

Screening

Cecil Taylor: *Burning Poles* (1991)

Directed by Sheldon Rochlin and Maxine Harris. 60 min.

Taylor's kinetic, breathless style is documented in this three-part concert by the Cecil Taylor Unit (Taylor, André Martinez, Tony Oxley, William Parker) recorded at the National Video Industries studio. Generous permission provided by Morgan Harris and Mystic Fire Video.

2 pm

Screening

Cecil Taylor: *All the Notes* (2005)

Directed by Chris Felver. 72 min.

Recorded at Taylor's home and studio in Brooklyn, this documentary portrait captures the maestro's unconventional approach to performance and his eclectic interests in architecture, spoken word, art, and music. Generous permission provided by director Chris Felver.

7 pm

Concert

Tristan Honsinger with Harri Sjöström and Okkyung Lee

Thulani Davis, Cheryl Banks-Smith, and Henry Grimes

A duo set by cellist Tristan Honsinger with Harri Sjöström and a poetry, dance, and bass trio by Thulani Davis, Cheryl Banks-Smith and Henry Grimes initiate a ten-day performance program series for *Open Plan: Cecil Taylor*.

Active since the 1970s, Tristan Honsinger is a Berlin-based cellist versed in free jazz and improvisation. He will perform a solo set in this rare U.S. appearance.

Three of Taylor's collaborators unite for a special trio performance combining poetry, dance, and bass. Thulani Davis is a Grammy-winning writer (for liner notes) working at the intersections of fiction, poetry, memoir, criticism, and spoken word. Cheryl Banks-Smith is a veteran dancer, choreographer, and frequent collaborator of jazz improvisers. Henry Grimes is a virtuoso double-bassist who has played, toured, and recorded with the greatest jazz musicians of his era.

Saturday, April 16, 2016

12 pm

Listening Session

Hosted by Thulani Davis

2 pm

Conversation

Cecil Taylor and Dance

With Cheryl Banks-Smith, Dianne McIntyre, Min Tanaka, and Heather Watts

Taylor has worked with some of the most prominent dancers of his generation, and frequently compares his physical performance style to the movements of modern dance. This panel connects three of his collaborators in a discussion on dance, jazz, and improvisatory movement.

5 pm

Performance

Min Tanaka

7 pm

Concert

Andrew Cyrille

Enrico Rava, William Parker, and Andrew Cyrille

One of Taylor's most enduring collaborators, Andrew Cyrille is one of the greatest free jazz drummers of his generation. He made his reputation with the Cecil Taylor Unit, which he played with from 1964 to 1975, establishing himself as an innovator. He will pay tribute to Taylor in a solo percussion set before joining Rava and Parker in a trio performance.

Enrico Rava is an internationally-renowned Italian jazz trumpeter who performed with Taylor on his album *Cecil Taylor Segments II (Orchestra of Two Continents) – Winged Serpent (Sliding Quadrants)*, recorded in 1984 for the Italian label Soul Note. William Parker is a legendary double-bassist and composer who has been hugely influential to the New York experimental jazz scene. He gained wide recognition as part of the Cecil Taylor Unit in the 1980s and 1990s, and has appeared on numerous live albums with Taylor including *The Eighth* (Hat Hut Records, 1986) and *Celebrated Blazons* (FMP, 1990).

Sunday, April 17, 2016

12 pm + 4 pm

Screening

The Silent Eye (2016)

Directed by Amiel Courtin-Wilson. 70 min.

This marks the world premiere of a new feature length performance film, *The Silent Eye*, by Amiel Courtin-Wilson featuring Min Tanaka and Cecil Taylor. Shot in Cecil Taylor's home over three days in January 2016, the film is a highly intimate, impressionistic portrait of the unspoken rapport between two masters of their form who have been collaborating for over thirty years.

2 pm

Listening Session

Hosted by Archie Rand

Brooklyn-based painter and muralist [Archie Rand](#) is Presidential Professor of Art at Brooklyn College, City University of New York, whose work combines diverse influences such as jazz, European modernism, comics, and Hebrew texts. A friend of Taylor's since the age of fifteen, Rand credits him with transforming his career by imparting the virtues of improvisation and textual interplay.

Monday, April 18, 2016

2 pm

Screening

Cecil Taylor: All the Notes (2005)

Directed by Chris Felver. 72 min.

See description above.

4 pm

Screening

Cecil Taylor: Burning Poles (1991)

Directed by Sheldon Rochlin and Maxine Harris. 60 min.

See description above.

Wednesday, April 20, 2016

12 pm

Screening

And When I Die, I Won't Stay Dead (2015)

Directed by Billy Woodberry. 89 min.

A screening of director Billy Woodberry's recently-completed feature-length documentary of jazz-inspired Beat poet Bob Kaufman, who Taylor credits with transforming his conception of language and textual rhythm.

3 pm

Poetry and Music

A.B. Spellman

Anne Waldman with Devin Brahja Waldman

Min Tanaka and Tony Oxley

In this special afternoon performance, poets celebrate Taylor's lifelong engagement with poetry and the spoken word.

Former Deputy Director of the National Endowment for the Arts and a founding member of the Black Arts Movement, [A.B. Spellman](#) is a legendary jazz critic, writer, and poet. His first full-length book, *Four Lives in the Bebop Business* (1966), chronicled the lives of Ornette Coleman, Herbie Nichols, Jackie McLean and Cecil Taylor, and remains one of the most important texts on modern jazz.

Prominent member of the Beat generation of poets and author of more than forty books of poetry, [Anne Waldman](#) is co-founder (with Allen Ginsberg) of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado. She and Taylor have appeared on stage together at several cross-disciplinary events. She is joined at the Whitney by her nephew, [Devin Brahja Waldman](#), jazz saxophonist and the co-director of Fast Speaking Music, a poetry and music label in New York City.

Thursday, April 21, 2016

12 pm

Listening Session

Hosted by André Martinez

Leader of the ensemble Earth People, esteemed percussionist [André Martinez](#) performed in hundreds of shows as a member of the Cecil Taylor Unit from 1981 to 1992. He will share selections from his archive, which contains countless rare audio and video recordings of the Unit's concerts during this period.

1 pm

Performance

Min Tanaka

3 pm

Poetry and Music

Steve Dalachinsky

Clark Coolidge and Michael Bisio

Henry Grimes and Nathaniel Mackey

Giants of the free jazz and poetry worlds come together in duo and solo sets to pay tribute to Taylor.

A New York poet and avant-garde jazz devotee, Steve Dalachinsky performs and records regularly with free jazz musicians. His book, *The Mantis* (Iniquity Press, 2011), was written while the author listened to Taylor perform in New York venues from 1966 to 2009. Clark Coolidge is a jazz musician and experimental poet associated with the Language movement whose poem, "Comes Through in the Call Hold (Improvisations on Cecil Taylor)" (1989), was first published as an excerpt in the *Village Voice*. He will be accompanied by Michael Bisio, an acclaimed bassist and composer praised for the physicality of his playing. The third set will feature Nathaniel Mackey, a lauded writer and winner of Yale University's Bollingen Prize for American Poetry (2015). He has published interviews with Taylor in *Hambone* (which he edits) and has written on Taylor and "new thing" jazz in his experimental text *Splay Anthem* (2006), which won the National Book Award for Poetry. He will be joined by virtuoso double-bassist Henry Grimes.

9:00 pm

Performance

***A Rat's Mass* (1967)**

Written by Adrienne Kennedy. Directed by Hilton Als

With Helga Davis

(Doors open at 8:30pm. Tickets are required for this event. Please visit whitney.org/events for more information.)

Taylor's cross-disciplinary experiments in music and live performance reached a highpoint in March 1976 with an operatic re-staging of Adrienne Kennedy's one-act play, *A Rat's Mass*, at La MaMa Experimental Theater Club in New York. The Whitney Museum hosts a new staging of Kennedy's 1967 one-act play, directed by *New Yorker* staff writer and current guest artist at The Artist Institute, Hilton Als, and starring acclaimed performer and singer Helga Davis. The piece will include elements of Taylor's music from 1967 until 1976. A longtime fan of Taylor's work, Als has written about the musician and composer and Kennedy for the *New Yorker*, among other publications.

Friday, April 22, 2016

12 pm

Listening Session

Hosted by Gary Giddins

Gary Giddins, a leading jazz critic and former columnist for the *Village Voice*, is the Executive Director of The Leon Levy Center for Biography at the CUNY Graduate Center. His writings on Cecil Taylor have been published in numerous articles, reviews and books including *Riding on a Blue Note* (1981) and *Visions of Jazz* (1998).

1 pm

Performance

Min Tanaka

2 pm

Listening Session

Hosted by Fred Moten and Chris Funkhouser

Renowned poets Chris Funkhouser and Fred Moten jointly speak on Taylor's relationship to poetry and the written word. Funkhouser, Professor and Director of Communication & Media at the New Jersey Institute of Technology, famously interviewed Taylor for *Hambone* ("Being Matter Ignited") in 1994. Moten, an acclaimed theorist of black aesthetics, was a finalist for the National Book Award for Poetry

for *The Feel Trio* (Letter Machine Editions, 2014), named after and inspired by one of Taylor's late groups.

6 pm

Concert

Chris Funkhouser

Tracie Morris and Susie Ibarra

Fred Moten

Jemeel Moondoc/Ensemble Muntu (featuring William Parker, Mark Hennen, Charles Downs)

Poet and technologist Chris Funkhouser presents a new sound work that draws on Taylor's own recorded voice. Tracie Morris, an interdisciplinary poet, performer, and vocalist, has performed on several bills with Taylor both individually and with her eponymous band. She will be accompanied by innovative percussionist Susie Ibarra, who combines jazz, world, and indigenous Philippine music into her performances and compositions. Poet Fred Moten and double-bassist William Parker perform together for the first time. Avant-jazz alto saxophonist Jemeel Moondoc first performed as part of Taylor's Black Music Ensemble at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the early 1970s. He later founded the tight-knit Ensemble Muntu in New York (1973-1982), a 12-piece band composed mostly of Taylor's ex-students. The Ensemble reunites for this event with a lineup of original members.

Saturday, April 23, 2016

12 pm + 2 pm

Listening Session

Hosted by Ben Young

Ben Young is a jazz historian and the former director of Columbia University's renowned radio station WKCR who is currently at work on the definitive biography of Taylor's life and career. As founder of Triple Point Records, he has compiled, released, and reissued numerous of Taylor's recordings including a live double album of duets with Tony Oxley (*Ailanthus/Altissima*, 2008). He shares his in-depth knowledge on Taylor over two sessions.

8:30 PM

Concert

Cecil Taylor: Words & Music

Okkyung Lee

Tony Oxley

Harri Sjöström

Jackson Krall

On the closing weekend of his retrospective and festival, renowned musician Cecil Taylor performs for a special concert event, featuring Okkyung Lee, Tony Oxley, Harri Sjöström, and Jackson Krall.

Doors open at 7:30 pm. Tickets are required (\$50 adults; \$45 members, seniors, students).

Sunday, April 24, 2016

2 pm

Listening Session

Hosted by Nahum Chandler

Nahum Chandler is Professor in the School of Humanities at the University of California, Irvine. A philosopher and historian of critical thought, he is a scholar of the work of W.E.B. Du Bois, Jacques Derrida, and Cecil Taylor, whom he hosted as an artist in residence while director of the Program in Comparative American Cultures at Johns Hopkins University.

4 pm

Screening

***And When I Die, I Won't Stay Dead* (2015)**

Directed by Billy Woodberry. 89 min.

See description above.

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