

The New York Times described Robert Wilson as “a towering figure in the world of experimental theater and an explorer in the uses of time and space on stage. Transcending theatrical convention, he draws in other performance and graphic arts, which coalesce into an integrated tapestry of images and sounds.” Susan Sontag has said of Wilson’s work, “it has the signature of a major artistic creation. I can’t think of any body of work as large or as influential.”

Born in Waco, Texas, Wilson was educated at the University of Texas and Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute, where he took an interest in architecture and design. He studied painting with George McNeil in Paris and later worked with the architect Paolo Solari in Arizona. Moving to New York City in the mid-1960s, Wilson found himself drawn to the work of pioneering choreographers George Balanchine, Merce Cunningham, and Martha Graham, among others artists. By 1968 he had gathered a group of artists known as The Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, and together they worked and performed in a loft building at 147 Spring Street in lower Manhattan. In 1969 two of Wilson’s major productions appeared in New York City: *The King of Spain* at the Anderson Theater, and *The Life and Times of Sigmund Freud*, which premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

In 1971 Wilson received international acclaim for *Deafman Glance*, a silent “opera” created in collaboration with Raymond Andrews, a talented deaf-mute boy whom Wilson had adopted. After the Paris premiere of the work, French Surrealist Louis Aragon wrote of Wilson, “he is what we, from whom Surrealism was born, dreamed would come after us and go beyond us.” Wilson then went on to present numerous acclaimed productions throughout the world, including the seven-day play *KA MOUNTain and GUARDenia Terrace* in Shiraz, Iran in 1972; *The Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*, a twelve-hour silent opera performed in 1973 in New York, Europe, and South America; and *A Letter for Queen Victoria* in Europe and New York in 1974-1975. In 1976 Wilson joined with composer Philip Glass in writing the landmark work *Einstein on the Beach*, which was presented at the Festival d’Avignon and at New York’s Metropolitan Opera House, and has since been revived in two world tours in 1984 and 1992.

After *Einstein*, Wilson increasingly worked with European theaters and opera houses. His productions were frequently featured at the Festival d’Automne in Paris, the Schaubühne in Berlin, the Thalia Theater in Hamburg, and the Salzburg Festival, among many other venues. At the Schaubühne he created *Death Destruction & Detroit* (1979) and *Death Destruction & Detroit II* (1987); and at the Thalia he presented three groundbreaking musical works, *The Black Rider* (1991), *Alice* (1992), *Time Rocker* (1996), and *POEtry* (2000).

In the early 1980's Wilson developed what still stands as his most ambitious project: the multi-national epic *the CIVIL warS: a tree is best measured when it is down*. Created in collaboration

Robert Wilson -- 2

with an international group of artists, Wilson planned this opera as the centerpiece of the 1984 Olympic Arts Festival in Los Angeles. Although the full epic was never seen in its entirety, individual parts have been produced in the United States, Europe and Japan.

Over the last two decades Wilson has brought his specific sensibility to light, space and movement to the standard dramatic and operatic repertoire. He has designed and directed operas at houses such as La Scala in Milan, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and Opéra Bastille in Paris, the Zürich Opera, the Hamburg State Opera, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, and the Houston Grand Opera. These include Wagner's *Parsifal* (Hamburg, 1991), Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (Paris, 1991-99), Wagner's *Lohengrin* (Zürich, 1991; New York, 1998), Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (Paris, 1993-98; Bologna, 1996; Hammamatsu, 1999; Amsterdam, 2003; Los Angeles, 2004), and Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Salzburg, 1997; Paris 2004). He has presented innovative adaptations of works by writers such as Virginia Woolf (*Orlando*, 1989, 1996), Henrik Ibsen (*When We Dead Awaken*, 1991), and Gertrude Stein (*Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, 1992; *Four Saints in Three Acts*, 1996; and *Saints and Singing*, 1997).

Wilson has collaborated with a number of internationally acclaimed artists, writers, and musicians. He worked closely with the late German playwright Heiner Müller on the Cologne section of *the CIVIL warS* (1984), *Hamletmachine* (1986), and *Quartet* (1987; has since toured extensively). With singer/song-writer Tom Waits, along with writer William S. Burroughs, Wilson created the highly successful production *The Black Rider : The Casting of the Magic Bullets* (1991). With David Byrne, Wilson staged *The Knee Plays from the CIVIL warS* (1984), and later *The Forest*, in honor of the 750th anniversary of the city of Berlin (1988). He worked with poet Allen Ginsberg on *Cosmopolitan Greetings* (1988) and with performance artist Laurie Anderson on Wilson's adaptation of Euripides's *Alcestis* (1986). Writer Susan Sontag joined Wilson in creating *Alice in Bed* (1993), and together they developed a new work, *Lady from the Sea* (1998), performed by actress Dominique Sanda in an international tour. Wilson's long association with noted opera singer Jessye Norman began with *Great Day in the Morning*, presented in Paris in 1982, and continued with a stage and video work based on the Schubert song cycle *Winterreise* in 2001. Recently Wilson continued a longstanding collaboration with singer/song-writer Tom Waits on an adaptation of Büchner's *Woyzeck* for Copenhagen's Betty Nansen Theater, which toured internationally. Recent works include *The Temptation of St. Anthony* with Dr. Bernice Reagon (2003) and Georg Büchner's *Leonce and Lena* with German singer Herbert Grönemeyer (2003).

In 2004, Robert Wilson projects built on his longstanding love for Indonesia for an entirely new production based on an Indonesian sacred text, *I La Galigo*, which opened at the Esplanade Theatres on the Bay, Singapore, and toured extensively in Makassar, Melbourne, Djakarta, and New York; *Les Fables* by La Fontaine at the Comedie Francaise; and a restaging of *Alceste* at the Opera la Monnaie in Brussels. He also directed revivals of several of his most lauded productions, including *Erwartung/Deafman Glance* in Berlin and a new co-production of *The Black Rider* at

Robert Wilson -- 3

the Barbican Centre in London and the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco. In 2005, Wilson restaged *Madame Butterfly* at the Bolshoi in Moscow; *Parsifal* at the Los Angeles Opera with Placido Domingo in the title role and an adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* with long-time collaborators at the Berliner Ensemble. 2006 saw, among others, a production of Wagner's *Ring* at Le Chatelet in Paris with musical direction by Christopher Eschenbach and a *Lohengrin* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York. His most recent productions in 2007 include a staging of Bach's *Johannespassion* at Le Chatelet, Paris; *Rumi: in the blink of the eye*, based on poems by the Sufi mystic in Athens; and Brecht's *Dreigroschenoper* at the Berliner Ensemble.

While known for creating highly acclaimed theatrical pieces, Wilson's work is firmly rooted in the fine arts. His drawings, paintings and sculptures have been presented around the world in hundreds of solo and group showings. Major Wilson exhibitions have appeared at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (1991); the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris (1991); the Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston (1991); and the Instituto de Valencia de Arte Moderno (1992). Wilson has created original installations for the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam (1993); London's Clink Street Vaults (1995), and the Museum Villa Stuck, Munich (1997). More recently he has created installations at the Guggenheim Museum and the Kunstindustrimuseet in Copenhagen (2000), The Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany (2001) the Galeries Lafayette (2002).

His extraordinary tribute to Isamu Noguchi has been shown at Vitra Museum, Weil am Rhein (2001), the Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid (2002), the Kunsthal, Rotterdam (2003), the Noguchi Garden Museum, New York (2004), the Seattle Art Museum (2006) and the Japanese American National Museum, Los Angeles (2006). His installation of the Guggenheim's Giorgio Armani retrospective (2000) traveled to Bilbao (2001), Berlin (2003) London (2003), Rome (2004), Tokyo (2005) Shanghai (2006), and Milan (2007). In 2007, Paula Cooper Gallery and Phillips de Pury & Co in New York held exhibitions of his most recent artistic venture, Video Portraits.

Subject of this series of loops in high definition video include Brad Pitt, Gao Xingjian, Winona Ryder, Jeanne Moreau, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Renee Fleming, as well as various animals. The works have been shown at the Tribeca Film Festival (2006) and in galleries and museums in Los Angeles, Naples, Moscow, Singapore, Graz, Milan and will continue to tour internationally over the next years.

His drawings, prints, videos and sculpture are held in private collections and museums throughout the world. He is represented by the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York City.

A recipient of two Rockefeller and two Guggenheim fellowships, Wilson has been honored with numerous awards for excellence. In 1986 Wilson was the sole nominee for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama for *the CIVIL warS*. Other honors include the *Premio Abbiati* from the Italian Music Critics Association, for *Hanjo/Hagoromo* in 1994 (awarded 1995); two Italian *Premio Ubu*

Robert Wilson -- 4

awards (1994 and 1992) for *Alice* and *Dr. Faustus Lights the Lights*; the *Golden Lion Award* for Sculpture of the Venice Biennale (1993) for *Memory/Loss*; and the 1990 German Theater Critics Award for *The Black Rider*. He has been named a Lion of the Performing Arts by the New York Public Library; Texas Artist of the Year by the Art League of Houston; received an Institute Honor from The American Institute of Architects in New York City; honorary doctorates from the Pratt Institute, the California College of Arts and Crafts, and the University of Toronto; an American Theatre Wing Design Award for Noteworthy Unusual Effects; a Bessie Award; an Obie Award for Direction; a Drama Desk Award for Direction; the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize for lifetime achievement in 1996; the *Premio Europa* award from Taormina Arte (1997); the Harvard Excellence in Design Award (1998); the award for best foreign production, Union of French Theater Critics, for *Dream Play* (2002); and election to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 2000. In a ceremony at the White House, the Smithsonian Institution presented him with the National Design Award in 2001. The French Republic made him a *Commandeur des Arts et des Lettres* in 2002. In 2009 he was awarded the Hein-Heckroth-Prize for stage design of the city of Giessen and the Medal for Arts and Sciences of the city of Hamburg. In 2011 he was elected to be a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Since the early 1990s, Robert Wilson has held workshops for students and experienced creative professionals from around the world at the International Summer Arts Program at the Watermill Center in eastern Long Island – an interdisciplinary laboratory for the arts and humanities. Following a successful capital campaign, construction of a permanent facility was completed in the summer of 2006, enabling the Byrd Hoffman Watermill Foundation to offer residencies, lectures and performances, and educational programs throughout the year.

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