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Morphoses



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Music	String Quartet No. 1 (Métamorphoses Nocturnes) (1953-54) by György Ligeti
Choreography	Choreography by Christopher Wheeldon
Premiere	June 13, 2002, The Diamond Project V, New York City Ballet, New York State Theater
Original Cast	Wendy Whelan, Alexandra Ansanelli, Jock Soto, and Damian Woetzel
Average Length	22 min.

Morphoses is a complex, athletic ballet for four dancers. Set to Ligeti's String Quartet No. 1, the ballet begins with four orange-clad dancers rising from the floor as a single, moving organism that contracts and expands before breaking off into two couples. Each couple presents a complex pas de deux requiring both flexibility and lyricism. The dancers' movements, in response to Ligeti's atmospheric sounds, seem to unfold spontaneously. The choreography then returns the dancers to their opening formation as a united, breathing organism. In addition to energetically nuanced musical performance by the Flux Quartet, Morphoses is further enhanced by vertical strips of light of continuously changing colors that appear and disappear against the spare, black background, reflecting the changing movements of the dancers. György Ligeti (b. 1923), a modern composer, was born in Transylvania. Studying at the Budapest Academy of Music, he initially was influenced by Bartók, Stravinsky, and Kodály. He graduated in 1949 and later returned to teach harmony and counterpoint. In 1956, he wrote his first major work, Artikulation, an outgrowth of his employment at the West German Radio electronic studio. His interest in composition continued when he settled in Austria, where he engaged in research into Romanian folk music and explored Webern's serialism. A string quartet survives from this period. Though he was constrained by politics from publishing his more daring works, and lacked early exposure to international musical developments, his arrival in Vienna

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— Wendy Wasserstein

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brought him into contact with key figures of the European avant-garde. Until the premiere of his first orchestral work, *Apparitions* (1958), Ligeti had been regarded as an obscure but brilliant theorist. In 1964, he was elected to the Royal Swedish Academy of Music and has won much international acclaim since then. He says his works are neither tonal nor atonal. His major influences have been Nancarrow, Reich, Sub-Saharan African music, Terry Riley, John Chowning, and fractal geometry. He conceives his works visually, "in many different colors."

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