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PRESS RELEASE

New York City AIDS Memorial announces a rare public performance of Arthur Russell's 1973 musical work *City Park*.

The live concert will be presented as a part of the Memorial's Fall Arts & Culture Season and the West Side Cultural Network's first West Side Fest on September 30, 2023, at 4 PM.

New York, NY – Wednesday, August 9

– The New York City AIDS Memorial announces a free public outdoor concert of *City Park*, a controversial early work by maverick American composer, cellist, producer, and singer **Arthur Russell** (1951–1992), which integrates chamber music, electronics, concrete poetry, turntablism, and modern rock. The new, site-specific version at the Memorial, directed by **Nick Hallett**, features percussionist **David Van Tieghem**, who participated in the work's premiere, and **Peter Zummo**, another primary Russell collaborator, in collaboration with a later generation of musicians invested in Russell's legacy, including **Nat Baldwin**, **Lea Bertucci**, **Shawn O'Sullivan**, and **Alex Waterman** (ensemble subject to change).



The music of Arthur Russell has found new listeners and entered the critical discourse decades after his 1992 death from AIDS-related illness at age 40. However, his radical concert work, *City Park* (1973), has gone unheard for half a century. Conceived while Russell was studying with modernist composer Charles Wuorinen and apprenticing with Fluxus artist Jackson Mac Low, *City Park* was galvanized by Christian Wolff, a pivotal figure within John Cage's circle, who was a mentor to Russell, and whose scores stimulate spontaneous choices on the part of performers. Russell transcended these influences to create the manifesto that would jump-start his career. The work's only live performance featured Wolff on electric bass and Mac Low's poetry. Wuorinen—a staunch modernist—called it “the most unattractive thing I've ever heard.”

The new edition of the *City Park* score, arranged by Hallett from archival materials, reconsiders the work as ahead of its time. The concert is presented in partnership with the Arthur Russell Estate and the Music Department at Wesleyan University.

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“The New York City AIDS Memorial is thrilled to host this unique concert to introduce Russell’s life, work, and influence to new audiences,” says New York City AIDS Memorial Executive Director Dave Harper. “Where more appropriate to present a work titled *City Park*, created by an artist who would die of AIDS-related illness, than in our city park dedicated to the remembrance of those lost to the epidemic?”

Performance curator and concert director Nick Hallett says, “My gratitude goes to these institutions that support the work to preserve the art of my queer ancestors and would-be mentors. *City Park* exists at a fascinating crossroads of avant-garde histories, but the sum of its parts is something that has not yet been heard. Arthur Russell fans will be surprised by this one.”

The performance will take place at the New York City AIDS Memorial at St. Vincent’s Triangle, located at Greenwich Avenue and West 12th Street in New York City’s West Village. For additional information on the New York City AIDS Memorial’s arts and cultural programs, and for directions to the Memorial, please visit nycaidsmemorial.org.

“Arthur Russell: *City Park*” will be performed as part of the inaugural West Side Fest, presented by the recently formed West Side Cultural Network—a group of 18 museums, parks, performing arts centers, and other cultural institutions located within one half-mile portion of historic New York. On September 30, West Side Fest will host a day of free admission, with special indoor and outdoor programming, crafts for kids, artmaking for all ages, an evening dance party, and more, welcoming all New Yorkers to the city’s newest cultural destination along Manhattan’s vibrant western waterfront. More information on West Side Fest will be announced later in the summer of 2023.

About the Artists

Iconoclast composer-cellist-vocalist **Arthur Russell** merged experimental and popular forms into “Buddhist bubblegum,” an entirely personal idiom. Around 1969, he left his native Iowa to participate in San Francisco’s counterculture, where he began his lifelong association with poet Allen Ginsberg. Upon his arrival in New York in 1973, Ginsberg’s contacts gave Russell access to the city’s established avant-garde circles. Meeting composer Rhys Chatham at the premiere of *City Park* led to Russell’s tenure as music director of Downtown New York City venue The Kitchen, where he composed minimalist chamber music in addition to penning pop-folk songs for his band, the Flying Hearts (featuring David Van Tieghem and Peter Zummo). His music found supporters in such figures as David Byrne and Philip Glass. Russell eventually gained a faithful commercial audience in the queer nightlife scene, as a producer of off-kilter disco tracks for clubs such as Paradise Garage. He left behind an extensive catalog of works, much of which has been released posthumously by Audika Records.

David Van Tieghem has amassed a major body of achievements as a composer, percussionist, sound designer, actor, and collaborative artist. His solo percussion-theater performances, starting with *A Man and His Toys* (1977), have toured internationally and include a memorable appearance on *Late Night with David Letterman* in 1983. He has had essential roles in seminal works by Laurie Anderson, Steve Reich, Brian Eno, and Robert Ashley.

Peter Zummo is a genre-nonconforming composer and trombonist, whose work as a creator and performer finds a place in any genre. Working in close collaboration with artists in related media, including composers, poets, bandleaders, choreographers, directors, and filmmakers, he functions both as a supporting character and as a principal artist. His album *Zummo with an X* (1985) is considered a classic of new music and has seen multiple reissues since its original commercial release.

Nat Baldwin is a musician and writer from Maine, currently living in western Massachusetts. He has released several solo and collaborative works and runs the experimental music label Tripticks Tapes.

Lea Bertucci is an experimental musician, composer, and performer whose work describes relationships between acoustic phenomena and biological resonance through electroacoustic tactics. She has performed in the United States at the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gagolian, Pioneer Works, The Kitchen, and the Walker Art Center, and internationally at Tempo Reale, Florence; Muziekgebouw, Amsterdam; Museo Reina Sofia, Madrid; ReWire Festival, the Hague; Borderline Festival, Athens; and Unsound Festival, Krakow. Artist residencies include MacDowell, ISSUE Project Room, Headlands Center for the Arts, and the Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts.

Nick Hallett is a musician, artist, and curator. He has written the scores for two Bessie-awarded dance productions and served as the music director of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company from 2014 to 2022. He directs concerts and reperformances of experimental music as co-founder of Darmstadt NYC and composes vocal soundtracks for artist Shana Moulton. Hallett teaches at the New School and School of Visual Arts and is getting his master's at Wesleyan University. He is the curator of the 2023 season of live art at the New York City AIDS Memorial.

Alex Waterman is a composer, performer, producer, scholar, cellist, electronic musician, and storyteller. His installation works, films, and music productions have been exhibited internationally. He collaborated with composer Robert Ashley in the 2014 Whitney Biennial and has produced five books about musical notation and poetics. Waterman was a visiting assistant professor of music at Wesleyan University from 2015 to 2018 and has been The Kitchen's archivist since 2021.

Artist image by **Christoph Sawyer**.

Support

The New York City AIDS Memorial's 2023 programs are made possible, in part, by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



About the New York City AIDS Memorial

Founded as a grass-roots advocacy effort in early 2011, the New York City AIDS Memorial organization is now a 501(c)(3) corporation with an 18-person board.

The mission of the New York City AIDS Memorial is to honor the more than 100,000 New Yorkers who have died of AIDS and to acknowledge the contributions of caregivers and activists who mobilized to provide care for the ill, fight discrimination, lobby for medical research, and alter the drug approval process, ultimately changing the trajectory of the disease. The Memorial, dedicated on World AIDS Day, December 1, 2016, aims to inspire visitors to remember and reflect, and to empower current and future activists, health professionals, and people living with HIV in the continuing mission to end AIDS.

Today, the organization maintains the New York City AIDS Memorial as a highly visible and architecturally significant landmark and a community space for reflection and the recognition of men, women, and children lost to, as well as long-term survivors of, HIV/AIDS; bears witness to the lessons of the epidemic through engagement and accessible, public community-centered educational, arts, and cultural programming at the Memorial site; and virtually extends the reach of the Memorial through digital content and interactivity. Previous on-site multidisciplinary programs have included projects, installations, and events with artists including Jenny Holzer, Keith Haring, Jean-Michel Othoniel, Steven Evans, Neil Greenberg, Ishmael Houston-Jones, Miguel Gutierrez, Peter Cramer, Jack Waters, Pamela Sneed, Mazz Swift, Natalie Greffel, David Wojnarowicz, and Jim Hodges, among many others.

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