



**GOAT**  
**ISLAND**  
A LAST  
A QUARTET

**Goat Island** was a Chicago-based performance group founded in 1987. The group was a non-profit organization which produced collaborative performance works developed by its members for local, national, and international audiences. We performed a personal vocabulary of movement, both dance-like and pedestrian, that often made extreme physical demands on the performers, and attention demands on the audience. We incorporated historical and contemporary issues through text and movement. We created visual/spatial images to encapsulate thematic concerns. We researched and wrote collaborative lectures for public events, and often subsequently publish these, either in our own artists' books, or in professional journals. We made the films in this collection. Our nine live performance works include *Soldier, Child, Tortured Man* (1987); *We Got A Date* (1989); *Can't Take Johnny to the Funeral* (1991); *It's Shifting, Hank* (1993); *How Dear to Me the Hour When Daylight Dies* (1996); *The Sea & Poison* (1998); *It's an Earthquake in My Heart* (2001); *When will the September roses bloom? Last night was only a comedy* (2004); and *The Lastmaker* (2007). The company toured its works to the US and England, Scotland, Wales, Belgium, Switzerland, Croatia, Germany, and Canada. Goat Island ended with final performances of *The Lastmaker* at Swain Hall, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, February 2009.

Artist and filmmaker Lucy Cash began collaborating with Goat Island with the making of *It's Aching Like Birds* in 2001. She subsequently became an associate member of Goat Island, making four moving image works with the company as well as contributing to writing and live performance.

[www.goatlandperformance.org](http://www.goatlandperformance.org)  
[www.lucycash.com](http://www.lucycash.com)

# GOAT ISLAND A LAST A QUARTET

## IT'S ACHING LIKE BIRDS

(2001) 11 MIN

## DARK


(2003) 1 MIN

## DAYNIGHTLY THEY RE-SCHOOL YOU THE BEARS-POLKA

(2005) 9.5 MIN

## A LAST, A QUARTET

(2009) 27 MIN



# INTER-VIEWS AND THE FLOWER MIND AN EXPLODED VIEW OF GOAT ISLAND'S FILMS DAVID WILLIAMS

*'The challenge is to find a way to let the film perform the holes, the gaps, and the specific absences by which it takes shape'*

Trinh T. Minh-ha

*'Treachery is beautiful if it makes us sing'* Jean Genet

*'Is that everything? It seemed like he said quite a bit more than that'*  
'Bob' (Bill Murray) to a translator in Sofia Coppola's film  
*Lost In Translation*

By way of a preface to what follows, I'd like to begin by quoting at some length from an interview by Elizabeth Dungan with the filmmaker and cultural theorist Trinh Minh-ha. Alluding to the accelerated tempo-rhythms of cinema for instant consumption, and the temporal and perceptual propositions of Zen Buddhism and its paradoxical rhythms, Trinh describes her own approach to cinema as a site for what Matthew Goulish, in another context, has called 'slow thinking':

In times of coercive politics and transnational terror, slowing down so as to learn to listen anew is a necessity ... The question is not so much to produce a *new image* as to provoke, to facilitate, and to solicit a *new seeing*. Science without conscience, politics without ethics, technology without poetry result in deadly short-circuits. We've had to learn this, not only through disastrous political events, but more intimately through one's own body when it is under stress - the wired-up body that takes months to wind down, to recover, or to find its own rhythm. Non-being is what we use in working with being ... when we start taking care of this utter silence, life speaks to us in a different language, one in which we catch glimpses of stillness in movement and feel movement arising in stillness. Velocity in stillness ... Speed is here not opposed to slowness, for it is in stillness that one may be said to truly find speed. And rather than merely going against speed, stillness contains speed and determines its quality. Speed at its best ... *is still speed*. The speed of a flower mind.

(Trinh T. Minh-ha, *'Still Speed'*, The Digital Film Event, London & New York: Routledge, 2005, p. 13).

## Inter-view

As Gilles Deleuze once pointed out in conversation with Claire Parnet, in French there are two terms for 'interview': *entrevue* and *entretien*. *Entrevue*, from the verb *entrevoir* – to see or encounter one another, to meet. *Entretien*, from the verb *entretenir* – to maintain, cultivate, sustain or prolong: a 'holding together' that nourishes ('that's enter-tain-ment'). Both terms contain a sense of relationality and between-ness (the mutuality and exchange of *entre-/inter-*), and implicate the senses: of sight (*-vue/view*) and touch (*-tien*, from the verb *tenir*, to hold and to see). Both terms also suggest something uncertain, partial, incompletely or fleetingly or suddenly perceived, the glimpse of a possibility to be discovered in the in-between. So the interview is posited as the possibility of a 'third space' of seeing, holding, and tactile feeling, both in the dynamic axis between and in a vector of futurity, a forward looking (dialogue as the possibility of fore-sight). Something happens in this dialogical spacing; the event of a felt sighting and sounding of resonances between.

Perhaps it is possible to conceive of these films as 'inter-views', as articulated in the terms above, with or in response to the work of Goat Island. Rather than proposing documentation of live performances, it's important to recognize the status of the films as creative dialogues or responses – in part inspired and encouraged by the core Goat Island proposition of the 'creative response', a generative compositional strategy and disposition returned to repeatedly in the company's processes of making and teaching. The films are also translations, proceeding through both loyalty (to the spirit, enquiry and affective architectures of the 'original' live performances) and betrayal (transformation as becoming, a 'treachery' that can 'make us sing' what Paul Celan called 'the singable remains' – *Singbarer Rest* – rather than transformation as a failure to reproduce the selfsame). For in these films fragments of performance actions, images, texts, sounds are displaced, transformed and reconfigured in new architectural assemblages within which the spectator is implicated spatially, affectively, and corporeally.

In *It's Aching Like Birds*, for example, filmed in the gym building in Chicago where Goat Island used to rehearse, a complex architecture of interrelated spaces is elaborated:

the penumbral basketball court, with its subaquatic tonality, and an assortment of weathered attic spaces, lockers and corridors. As spectators we are asked to navigate the relations between spaces, things, materials, feels, and our own associations and memories: of childhood, disjunctions in scale, enclosure/entrapment, falling, cars, family, landscapes, weather, Pina Bausch choreographies, loss, care, the mortality of all things and forms, and so on.

In my uncertain memories of Goat Island's live work, including *It's An Earthquake In My Heart* (2001) from which these materials are sourced and reinvented, I was always more interested in what they *did* rather than what they *meant*; or rather, perhaps, my conviction was that their meanings resided precisely in what they did. These intensely physicalised ensemble performances were characterized by a continuous shifting of modes, a dizzying density of intertexts proliferating and unraveling, and meanings skidding, fracturing, realigning and multiplying in excess. And perhaps above all for me, in this vertiginous layering and mutability, a profound sense of moments of stillness arising in movement, and velocity in slowness and suspension. The work created spaces for thought in all of its rhythms; and attention itself became a material to work and at play in these performances.

A further paradox: in Goat Island's work, concept and form generated spaces of affect, sensed intensities that remained mysterious, un-settled, vibrant in the domain of intuition. They offered an exposure that was also a veiling, enabling not 'readings' (the drive to decipher, to decode the legible), but a listening to resonant alterity in the image and in representation's seams, and an attention to multiplicity and an openness to the passage of elsew/here and other/wise. In my memories, within the pieces themselves the precise location and formation of sharp-edged clarities, flarings into visibility, intervals, blurs, holes, absences, entrance and exit points, slide on unstable ground; but rhythms – and the hum of relations of speed and stillness – linger effortlessly, helping to focus, disperse and prolong precisely accented networks of relationships.



## Inter-rupt

*When Lucy Cash first sent me these films on DVD, she wrote a note on the back of a postcard of Cornelia Parker's Cold Dark Matter: an exploded view (1991). While watching the films, I kept returning in my mind to this image and my embodied experience of that work in the Tate Gallery, London. Here was a garden shed and its contents blown up for Parker by the British Army, its fragments then collected and reassembled as a proliferative mobile, atomized and suspended. In this way matter is anatomized in terms of its processes of flux and transformation. Material becomes molecular, dynamic, nomadising, its 'fall-out' moving imperceptibly and incessantly in a relational field. There were ghost architectures, disappearances, emergences. Inertia was released, fixity animated and refashioned as multiplicity, in process, caught in a liminal meanwhile of both flying and falling. The big bang. Still speed.*

## Inter-act

In *Daynightly They re-school you The Bears Polka* – the title itself a montage of fragments from a Celan poem – the two unedited camera shots place us im/possibly in the wall between two discreet and connected interiors, a classroom and a hallway with a descending staircase in the background. Invited to 'hold together' these two antipodal spaces, we are the very locus of montage and passage: an affective, embodied conduit, a connective tissue seeing and feeling between. As an installed work, the film concretised this spatial dynamic, with the two screens placed on either side of the spectators; here, with the DVD on my laptop, my eyes flit between congruent spaces on the screen in a micro-dance of separation and reparation.

In *A Last, A Quartet*, four screens juxtapose different rhythms and temporalities, as well as diverse modes of performing and spectating. We are invited to navigate routes and connectivities between two interior spaces – the main hall at Pulaski Park Field House in Chicago and a corridor along its outer edge – and two areas of woodland. Minute shifts in filtered light and sound in the fixed exterior shots offer attenuated, contemplative rhythms of change, punctuated by the passage of a chestnut horse led by someone on foot, then an anomalous trotting grey,

saddled but lacking a rider. The radical alterity – energetically, rhythmically, ontologically – of the untimely event/advent of an animal. In the main hall, two fencers practice a small desultory duel with swords and helmets, before the camera pans left to focus on the members of the company performing the precisely detailed and modulated choreographies of the 'dome dance' from *The Lastmaker*. The revolve of the camera ultimately describes a circular trajectory paralleling the interior of a dome, a shadow architecture informing the choreography. Meanwhile, in the corridor shot, a range of materials from *The Lastmaker* are refashioned and montaged into an intricately layered choreography of fragments disposed along a linear axis of passage.

As performance, these materials occur in multiple modes: functional tasks (carrying, moving objects), rehearsed or internalized markings of a performance deferred or to come (a restrained version of Mark Jeffery's hybrid of St Francis and Larry Grayson; Matthew Goulish's timed song), detailed choreographies (including that of the hand-held camera in its movements to and fro, and its longing return to the space of light-breeze-flowers-outside through the corridor's window: this choreography reflects the sense of an embodied consciousness and kinaesthetic intelligence behind the mechanical eye of the lens), a stand-in (the small girl), and various modes of something akin to acting (including Karen Christopher's uncanny channeling of Lenny Bruce's last performance, Matthew's heightened and interrupted recital of a section of Robert Creeley's poem 'Bresson's Movies'), and so on.

The dispersed, relational architecture of the film constructs an assemblage of rhythms and angles of incidence within which there can be no singular, privileged position or mode of viewing. Its cubist, multi-perspectival form and layered temporalities undo the apparent fixity of film, and the protean micro-shifts of the 'live' unfold into proliferative differences in the loop of a formally doubled repetition. In addition, circularity and linearity are set in frictional counterpoint in the spaces, the set up and trajectories of individual cameras (two outside shut-off in a fixed position, one rotating in an interrupted 360 degree pan, one moving freely although constrained within a narrow linear architecture), and the use of multiples of single unedited 16mm shots. Linear progression pulses, decays into aleatory forks



and curves, and unfolds into becomings through repetition. Singularity becomes multiplicity. The predicament of watchers here gives us agency, and makes of us performers. And throughout the film we encounter, glimpse, sense, remember, overlook, forget in an open field of multiple entrances and exits – a flow meeting other flows in an immersive assemblage of intensities for the activation of memory, intuition, the ‘in-sight’ of connectivity and possibility. To borrow a phrase from Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense* (1990) in which he endeavours to define ethics, the invitation or challenge is above all ‘not to be unworthy of what happens to us’.

When the red curtains are fully closed – formal bracketings at the beginning, middle and end of *A Last, A Quartet* – and we are confronted with this cultural sign of ending (the final curtain) and anticipation (the show to come), at moments it’s impossible to tell which side of the curtain we are on. Are we waiting to go on, or to watch what will be revealed? We wait in stillness in the landscape of the inter-, the trans-, the passage, our thoughts traveling at the speed(s) of a flower mind. Meanwhile the sun sinks ever lower behind the trees, and the white dog watches: ‘Keep on walking, keep on walking. To be new in ending is not the only thing to do. White dog, tell me, where is the door?’









**AFTER THIS,  
BIRDSONG**  
THERON SCHMIDT

The story is true.

That's me in the back.

Did you see the three people carrying the logs through the hallway? The third one is me.

So, I'm *there*.

Pulaski Park Fieldhouse, Chicago. I am one of the many bodies gathered just outside the frame: the cinematographer, the focus puller, the mic operator. The assistants who arrange the catering, the people who helped carry the equipment and lay the dolly tracks, the hired security guard required by the Parks Department. And me, writing in my notebook, staying out of shot. Except for this moment, when they ask for a few volunteers to help carry some fake trees.

And I'm also *then*.

It's February 2009. Lucy Cash and Goat Island have invited me to be a witness to the filming of two sequences that will become part of *A Last, A Quartet*. During this time, I speak at length with Lucy and with the company's director, Lin Hixson, as well as the five performers: Karen Christopher, Matthew Goulish, Mark Jeffery, Bryan Saner, and Litó Walkey. These are long conversations that drift in and around the emotions of the two days of filming: the intensity of making the work, as well as the awareness that this would be the group's final creative act together. So the thoughts that you read here are formed by these conversations.

And this writing is also a conversation with you, whom I do not know. Where are you when you watch these films? You may be one of several people gathered on the other side of the screen from where we are. Or maybe it's just you, on your own, with these films for companionship. You might be at your home, or in a library, or a classroom. You might be fortunate enough to be watching these films in their intended configuration: across four adjacent screens and with occasional glitter ball for *A Last, A Quartet*, or as two screens facing each other for *Daynightly They re-school you The Bears-Polka*. You might be someone who has seen a Goat Island performance, or you may be watching this long after they have all been forgotten.



These words move between two times, forming a thread that connects this weekend in Chicago with wherever and whenever you might find yourself now. But this duality of times and places, and the interrelatedness between them, is also one of the themes that these films explore in both their content and their form. *How can these two places talk to each other?* the films ask. *How are these two times happening at once?*

When you watch these films, *where are you?*

### Let's have a change of scenery.

It begins with a shared space.

Karen tells me how Goat Island's process always begins with research that engages with *actual* spaces and *actual* relationships. *Actually trying to be*, she says. *Not talking about something, but doing it. Performing it. Activating it.*

For *The Lastmaker* – the Goat Island performance to which *A Last, A Quartet* stands in relation – this process begins with an interest in the Hagia Sophia, famous for its spectacular architecture but also its history of multiple uses: as a cathedral, then a mosque, and now a museum. Since Goat Island cannot afford to travel to Istanbul, they instead visit the Džamija in Zagreb (where they were already touring their work), which has a similar, though more compressed, history of changing use. From these investigations, they create a sequence that they refer to as the 'dome dance'. It follows a precise mathematical structure that moves in and out of phase, derived from the geometry of the mosque's dome, while its individual fragments of movement are responses to the architecture and multiple histories of the space.

In Chicago, they look for a location where they might film this sequence. Lucy and Bryan visit the Pulaski Park Fieldhouse. *Sure, you can see the space*, they are told, *but there are people using it right now*. They open the doors. And come across this group of people, dressed in medieval clothing, practicing swordplay. The story of Lancelot is one of the other reference points for *The Lastmaker*, and is explicitly referenced later in *Quartet* in the poem that Matthew rehearses. So to come across these practicing knights is an extraordinary serendipity.

*It's almost like the space was uncovering something from the live performance and offering itself up to the film*, Lucy says.

And as the camera begins its 360 degree journey through the fieldhouse, it is two of these modern-day knights whom it first encounters. They are here because of that thematic connection; but they are also here because, like Goat Island, they are some of the many users of this space. Passing them by, we linger over the 'dome dance', framed by a proscenium arch, as it evokes another architecture. One space is mapped onto another; one set of movement echoes actions from another time. The company descends into the auditorium before leaving the way we came in. 'U vezi sa,' they say, one last time. *In connection to*. They leave us alone in the empty room.

This is a process that begins and ends with a careful attention to space, to its histories and its other users. *What I really like about how Lucy works with texture*, Mark tells me, *is that it becomes this very tactile, this very embodied, this very intuitive relationship to space and to texture*. He describes the three longer films as a trilogy of types of space. *It's aching like birds* revisits the gymnasium and its intimate back spaces where Goat Island made their early work, and we feel its closeness, the sense of being locked-in. *Daynightly* is more institutional, occupying the place of learning; the film follows a strict rigour, a self-imposed constraint. And *Quartet*, as the finale, opens outward to explore the feeling of community. This fieldhouse is a civic space. An egalitarian space. One built for the people. One built for you and me.

Here, this dome-dancing camera says. Take it. It's yours.

### There's a moment coming.

On the second day, we move into the corridor that runs outside the auditorium.

*They seem more relaxed here*, I write in my notebook. The company imagines that they have left the performance space, that it lays waiting while an audience gathers to greet them. Meanwhile they are running through their preparations: trying out fragments of the performance, remembering the words they will say, checking in with their bodies and with each other. They are not *really* performing. But neither are they not-performing.



They are in-between performance. Or perhaps beside-performance. Matthew describes this as a dynamic that is already inherent in *The Lastmaker*. *The actual performance is displaced somehow*, he says. *Sometimes we're preparing to do something, sometimes we actually do it, and sometimes we re-enact it and it's happened before.*

*The Lastmaker* is interwoven with references to Robert Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac* (1974), and this section of *Quartet* is particularly haunted by that earlier film. But Litó also tells me how strongly she has been influenced by Bresson's thinking about acting, and by that slim volume, *Notes on the Cinematographer*. 'Nothing too much, nothing deficient,' Bresson writes. Litó talks about the influence of his idea of non-projection, and the importance of activity as activity. About being in the centre of activity and being as specific as possible. Like the swordfighters in the first shot, here the performers are remembering their performance, and also preparing themselves for it. Suspended between moments, this activity returns partly to its status as activity. Running. Doing forward rolls. Marking time. This activity partly returns, but not completely. It is not entirely in sync with itself.

If the first shot is about the texture of space, then this one brushes against the feeling of time. When is the gesture that each person performs? It sits in relation to its past and its future, both re-enactment and preparation. Karen practices her Lenny Bruce routine, adapted from the last filmed performance by Bruce and a few lines from George Carlin. This is a text about the slippery hold we have on the present. But her action is equally elusive: she is re-enacting an event at which she was not present, but which was captured on film. (*It's aching like birds* also performs this kind of loop: actions learned from watching videos of Pina Bausch performances are mapped onto new bodies. Later they are filmed. The original degrades. A new original grows in its place.) Karen describes her new action as one of referral, not imitation; she borrows Bruce's rhythm, and some of his flinches, but she can only wonder what it would be like to have his fingers. His face.

And now you are watching Karen on film. 'There's a moment coming,' she says he says. When did this happen? Is it happening now? When is this 'now'? What does it feel like?

*The last take is hurried against the fading light, I write.  
Snow barely forming. The late-afternoon sky.*

**It's a perfect way to end a perfect day.**

And then there's the child.

The performers leave the space, and a young girl takes over one of Litó's actions. She introduces a bird to the space. She moves the minarets of the model Hagia Sophia.

She means something different for each person I talk to. They're all wary of the heavy symbolism associated with children. Of reductive connotations of innocence, or sweetness. But they see something more than this in the gesture. Lin talks about the idea of legacy. Of what remains. Matthew talks about re-enactment and rehearsal. The way that children re-enact adulthood as a way to rehearse for their own futures. Litó recalls a specific suggestion Lucy gave the young performer: *you're performing for the bird*. And the bird was also there for her. For Karen, it's important that the symbolism remain open. *When something's only readable in one way and stops other possible readings*, she says, *then that can be a stumbling block for us*. And they all talk about how important it is that this is not just 'a child', but a specific person, with her own private life. She's the daughter of a friend, a part of the extended family – so in a way, she's been there all along.

And then the next time, she's not there.

I write in my notebook about the lastness of film. The irreversibility of the chemical imprint, the small aperture through which everything which is to be remembered must pass. The weight of the idea that whatever each performer does for the camera will forever be the definitive version.

But this idea of lastness is complicated by the use of two takes, each slightly different, to which we are alerted by the presence and then absence of the child. Neither version is definitive. This is not what these films are intended to be. They do not set out to document what is happening at some particular place, but are themselves part of the fabric of the event. The activities they depict are not fixed in their time, but are flickering between moments, looking behind them at the same time as they imagine what is to come. The anticipation of a memory. The remembrance of a future.

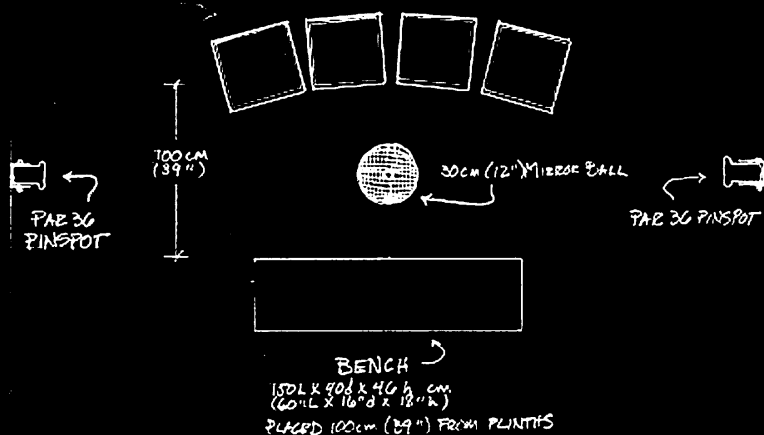
A LAST A QUARTET

FOUR MONITOR FILM INSTALLATION BY GOAT ISLAND  
RECOMMENDED INSTALLATION SPECS.

SCALE 1:25 METRIC (1/2" = 12") DRAWN BY BRYAN SANER

PLAN

4 PLINTHS + 4 @ 14" CORE MONITORS  
PLINTHS ARE APPROXIMATELY  
30x40x100cm (16"x16"x39")  
SPACED 0.5cm (2/32") APART  
ARRANGED IN A SEMI-CIRCLE



Pictured: cover Karen Christopher, Matthew Goulish, Bryan Saner, Litó Walkey (feet only) p2 Mark Jeffery p6 top Karen Christopher, Bryan Saner, Lin Hixson, Ole Birkeland, Matthew Goulish, Lucy Cash p6 bottom [new image] p7 top [new image] p7 bottom Mark Jeffery, Matthew Goulish p10 top Mark Jeffery, Litó Walkey, Bryan Saner, Karen Christopher p10 bottom Karen Christopher, Litó Walkey, Bryan Saner, Matthew Goulish, Lucy Cash, Ole Birkeland p11 top [new image] p14/15 Litó Walkey, Mark Jeffery p16 Zeld Morris p18 Lucy Cash p19 Bryan Saner p22 Litó Walkey p27 Karen Christopher p29 [new image]

*You're watching the performance of the echo of a performance,* Matthew says. Here lastness is not final, but a shape that echoes forward and backward through time. And you, wherever you are, are part of this reverberation. These films do not capture or close the past, but open up a space for exchange. A moment of encounter between different spaces. Mine, back here, with the fake trees. And yours. Out there.

On the other side of the woods.

### From the forest, the dark forest ...

The quartet is completed by two shots of a forest.

In one screen, the camera takes a close focus; in the other, it looks further off. In one, it is the middle of the afternoon and the light is evenly spread. The shadows of the clouds wander slowly over the forest floor. Two different horses pass through. The other is filmed at 'magic hour', just before sunset. Even in the short duration of this shot, you can see the sun move on its arc across the field of the image. We are spinning in its light.

Bryan talks about the simultaneity of these two kinds of spaces, the forest and the fieldhouse. He imagines it as a gesture of inclusiveness, a gesture of global respect. *It acknowledges that there's another world,* he says. *And that it is always there. And that it may have a relationship to us, even though we haven't thought about it.*

How can we cultivate our peripheral awareness? We share this moment together. But all around us, the forest breathes.

As if we were not here, the birds sing.

**David Williams** is Reader in Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is co-editor, with Carl Lavery, of *Good Luck Everybody: Lone Twin - Journeys, Performances, Conversations* (PR Books, Aberystwyth, 2011).

**Theron Schmidt** is a writer and performance-maker. He currently teaches theatre and performance studies at King's College London.



### Goat Island core company members

Karen Christopher, Matthew Goulish, Lin Hixson (Director), Mark Jeffery, Bryan Saner, and Litó Walkey.

### Goat Island associate members

Cynthia Ashby, Lucy Cash, CJ Mitchell, Judd Morrissey, Margaret Nelson, John Rich, Charissa Tolentino, and Chantal Zakari.

### Credits

DVD coordination: Lucy Cash and Karen Christopher  
DVD booklet and cover design: David Caines Unlimited  
DVD booklet photography: John W. Sisson Jr  
*Inter-views and the flower mind* David Williams  
*After this, birdsong* Theron Schmidt

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