

A 110th Street Films Production
In Co-production with ZDF
In Collaboration with ARTE

MONK IN PIECES

A film by Billy Shebar

94 min. | USA, Germany, France | 2025

World Premiere

2025 Berlin International Film Festival - Panorama

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LOGLINE

Visionary composer and performer Meredith Monk overcame hostile critics to become one of the great artists of her generation. In her seventh decade of creativity, she ponders how such singular work can go on without her.

SYNOPSIS

Meredith Monk – composer, performer, and interdisciplinary artist – is one of the great artistic pioneers of our time, yet her profound cultural influence is largely unrecognized. With Monk’s music at its center, and featuring interviews with Björk and David Byrne, *Monk in Pieces* is a mosaic that mirrors the structure of Monk’s own work, and illuminates her wildly original vocabulary of sound and imagery.

As a female artist in the male-dominated downtown arts scene of the 1960s and ‘70s, Monk had to fight for recognition and resources. Early reviews in the New York Times were vicious and sexist: “A disgrace to the name of dancing,” wrote Clive Barnes, and “so earnestly strange in a talented little-girl way,” wrote John Rockwell. Yet as her celebrated contemporary, Philip Glass, says, “she, among all of us, was – and still is – the uniquely gifted one.”

In the film’s final chapters, Monk faces mortality. We see her warily entrust her masterpiece, *ATLAS*, to director Yuval Sharon and singer Joanna Lynn-Jacobs for a new production at the Los Angeles Philharmonic. For 60 years, Monk has directed and performed in all of her music theater works; now she must learn to let go. What will happen to such singular work after she is gone?

DIRECTOR’S STATEMENT

I first heard Meredith Monk’s music in 1989, when my wife Katie Geissinger joined the cast of *ATLAS*. It was like nothing I’d ever heard before. As Katie continued to work with her, my love of Monk’s music deepened, and so did my curiosity about her unique creative process, and her extraordinary resilience in the face of a fickle, and at times sexist, critical establishment.

Three years ago, Monk opened the doors of the Tribeca loft where she’s been working since 1972, to me and my film crew, allowing us to capture the rhythms of her daily life and the creation of her newest work *Indra’s Net*. She also granted me access to a rich archive of film, photos and notebooks, affording deep insights into her evolution as an artist. Rather than attempting a comprehensive biopic, I’ve created a mosaic mirroring the

structure of Monk's own work. Each chapter is anchored by a single Monk song and offers a unique window on her life's work.

The '60s counterculture in which Monk found her voice took a stand against racial and gender-based discrimination, consumerism, and the Vietnam War. While her work is not overtly political, it embodies all of these values, and feels as mind-expanding today as it did when she started. Monk's music has healing power for those who experience it. That, above all, is what motivates her to keep creating, and motivated me to make this film.

— Billy Shebar

BIOS

Meredith Monk is a composer, singer, director, choreographer, filmmaker, and creator of new opera, music-theater works, films and installations. Recognized as one of the most unique and influential artists of our time, she is a pioneer of what is now called “extended vocal technique” and “interdisciplinary performance.” Her groundbreaking exploration of the voice as an instrument, as an eloquent language in and of itself, expands the boundaries of musical composition, creating landscapes of sound that unearth feelings, energies, and memories for which there are no words. Over the last six decades Monk has received numerous awards and honors including a MacArthur Fellowship, Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters from the Republic of France, induction into the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a GRAMMY® nomination, the Dorothy and Lillian Gish Prize, and a National Medal of Arts. Celebrated internationally, her work has been presented at major venues throughout the world.

Monk has recorded with the ECM New Series label since 1981, and her music has been featured in films by Terrence Malick, Jean-Luc Godard, David Byrne and the Coen Brothers. She has also created vital new repertoire for orchestra, chamber ensembles and solo instruments, with selected scores published by Boosey & Hawkes. From Fall 2023 to Spring 2024, *Meredith Monk: Calling*, her first European exhibition, was realized as a collaboration between Oude Kerk Amsterdam with Hartwig Art Foundation, and Haus der Kunst München. Currently celebrating her 60th Performance Season, Monk offered sold-out performances in September 2024 at the Park Avenue Armory in New York of her newest work, *Indra's Net*, the third part of a trilogy exploring our relationship with the natural world. She continues with a host of events centered in New York City through the spring of 2025.

Meredith Monk's website: <https://www.meredithmonk.org/>

Monk's complete works: <https://www.meredithmonk.org/repertory>

Billy Shebar (director) is an Emmy-nominated filmmaker known for *High Noon on the Waterfront* (2022), with John Turturro and Edward Norton, which premiered at the

Telluride Film Festival and was broadcast on TCM and HBO; and *Dark Matter* (2007), starring Meryl Streep, which won the Alfred P. Sloan Prize at Sundance. He collaborated with animator Bill Plympton on the New York Times viral web series *Trump Bites* (2018-2020) and with animator Yoni Goodman on the three-part crime series *Doctor's Orders* (2021), which continues to stream on Max, Hulu, Amazon, and other platforms.

David C. Roberts, a former diplomat and academic physicist, is now a filmmaker and writer based in New York. His articles have appeared in The New York Times, The Atlantic, and the Wall Street Journal among others.

Susan Margolin (producer) is a pioneer of digital distribution and a producer of award-winning documentaries including *Desperate Souls*, *Dark City and the Legend of Midnight Cowboy*, *The Rape of Recy Taylor* (Starz), *Paper Children* (YouTube Originals), *A Crime on the Bayou* (Starz), *A Tree of Life* (HBO), and *Generation Startup* (Netflix).

Sabine Krayenbühl (editor) is known for her work on the Oscar-nominated *My Architect* (HBO), *The Price of Everything* (HBO), *Letters from Baghdad* (PBS), *Obsessed with Light*, and *Mad Hot Ballroom*, one of the highest-grossing documentaries of all time.

Jeff Hutchens (cinematographer) has received Emmy and ASC nominations for his extensive work in film and television. He recently directed the narrative feature *Remember This* (2023), starring David Strathairn.

Paul Barritt (animator) has created animation for theater, opera (including the Los Angeles Philharmonic's acclaimed 2017 *Magic Flute*) and film, garnering AFI and Sundance nominations for *White Morning*.

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A film by
Billy Shebar

Featuring
Meredith Monk
Björk
David Byrne
John Schaefer
Ping Chong
Joanna Lynn-Jacobs
Lanny Harrison
Julia Wolfe

Directed, written and produced by
Billy Shebar and David Roberts

Producer
Susan Margolin

Co-producers
Katie Geissinger
Sabine Krayenbühl

Commissioning Editor ZDF/ARTE
Sabine Bubeck-Paaz

Consulting Producers
Jax Deluca
Caroline Libresco
Daniel Polin

Archival Producers
Judy Aley
Vanessa Maruskin

Associate Producers
Natalie Berger
Hirsh Sisodia

Cinematographers

Jeff Hutchens
Ben Stechschulte

Editor

Sabine Krayenbühl

Animation

Paul Barritt

Sound Design

Dominic Bartolini

Production Sound

Aaron Chandler
Brian Perry

Additional Editing

Eric Nagy
John Sears

Assistant Editor

Miles Shebar

Voice Actors

Peter Alexander
Kurt Kingsley
Miles Shebar
Barbara Warren

Chorus of Scholars

Daniel Belgrad
Brigid Cohen
Hasia Diner
Erika Doss
Ryan Ebright
Nadine Hubbs
Vijay Iyer
Miki Kaneda
Fred Turner

Post-Production Supervisor

Emy Fowler

Music Supervisor

Justin Feldman

Digital Intermediate Services

Module Post

Online Editors

Michael Kosciesza

Amy Jeon

Colorist

Steve Beganyi

Photo Restoration

Nora Colgan

Consultant for Meredith Monk / The House

Peter Sciscioli

Story Consultants

Trish Dalton

Melissa Hacker

Research Consultant

Ryan Ebright

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Jewish Film Institute
Ellyne Skove
Geoff Chasin and Stella Owen
Elliott Joseph

www.monkinpieces.com