

LEAR '87 ARCHIVE (CONDENSED)



2003, 3-disc, 6 hour DVD

(please note: Through funding by the University of Notre Dame's Institute for Studies in the Liberal Arts, 500 copies of LEAR '87 ARCHIVE (CONDENSED) have been made available for free to U.S. theater companies and to college and university theater and performance studies departments.)

"The name Mabou Mines has become a kind of totem in today's theatre. To their peers, this New York based company represents a model of avant-garde theatricality -- in writing, in acting, in directing, in production, in technology and in collaboration. Jack Kroll, *Newsweek*

Here is a 6 hour archive of the New York theatrical collaborative Mabou Mines and Lee Breuer's work on their controversial 1990 production of *Lear*... a fully gender-reversed version of Shakespeare's play, transposed to America in the 1950's. *Lear* starred Ruth Maleczek as Lear, with Lola Pashalinski, Isabell Monk, Greg Mehrten, Karen Kandel, Ellen McElduff, Joan MacIntosh, Bill Raymond, and Ron Vawter. Alisa Solomon was the dramaturg. Pauline Oliveros provided the music.

Based in New York City, Mabou Mines is the premier avant garde performing ensemble in the country -- in fact, the longest-lived theatrical collaborative in history, having celebrated it's 40th anniversary in 2011. Years before "performance art" was popularized, Mabou Mines was a *performance* company, taking as its first principle the idea that life is performance, that the study and practice of one is the study and practice

of the other.

Fully gender-reversing Shakespeare's "King Lear", plus racially reversing Gloucester and her family (translating "bastard" to a mixed race child) is no small feat. In 1987, for Mabou Mines, it was theatre-as-usual—a normal way to develop new work. The task they set themselves was to do the whole play, changing only references to gender and royalty. The work began with a two week workshop in a basement of a theater in Atlanta, Georgia. The talent in that basement—both the company members and their collaborators—was formidable. The gist of the videotape experiment was to record process—to make available the work of superb and radical artists tackling what is probably the most patriarchal play and the darkest in the English language—testing it to see what would happen to power relations and lines of affection when all the roles were gender-reversed.

Shot with three simultaneous cameras, *LEAR '87* documents the early work on the play, where Breuer and the cast transpose the play to America in the 1950's, translated relationships from a masculine to feminine universe, and rehearsed about half of the play. The archive is an intimate portrayal of their theatrical labors... a master class, of sorts, in avant garde performance work. It is also an unlocking of a monumental and devastating play. The best of one hundred hours of recorded material is condensed to six in the DVD set, which is accompanied by a 26 page handbook with guides for tracking the work through the hours.