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Press Room



Images of Jimmy López (left) and Nilo Cruz (right) are available for download from the Cal Performances [press room](#).

**CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY AWARDED  
PRESTIGIOUS *HEWLETT 50 ARTS COMMISSIONS* GRANT FROM  
THE WILLIAM AND FLORA HEWLETT FOUNDATION**

**Grant supports commissioning project for a new oratorio  
exploring the US immigrant experience and the lives of Dreamers,  
by composer Jimmy López and playwright Nilo Cruz**

**Berkeley, November 14, 2017** — Cal Performances at UC Berkeley has received a *Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions* grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in support of a major project that will see composer Jimmy López and playwright Nilo Cruz collaborate on a new oratorio for orchestra, chorus, and soprano, entitled *Dreamer*. The piece will explore the US immigrant experience, in particular that of Dreamers—undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as children—and what it means for cities to provide sanctuary from prosecution and deportation. Conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Philharmonia Orchestra of London will perform *Dreamer* during their Cal Performances residency in March 2019. The *Hewlett 50 Arts Commissions*, a

five-year, \$8 million initiative celebrating the foundation's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, supports the creation and premiere of new works by world-class performing arts organizations in Bay Area communities.

Matías Tarnopolsky, executive and artistic director of Cal Performances, says, “Commissioning new work is central to Cal Performances’ mission, especially work that reflects pressing issues of the day. Issues surrounding our political climate—from sanctuary cities to building walls—are felt profoundly here in the Bay Area. I believe resolutely that it is the responsibility of the arts to elevate our discourse, and that music gives voice to ideas that words alone cannot. The commissioning and performances of Jimmy López and Nilo Cruz's *Dreamer* achieves these signature goals.”

With the participation of López and Cruz, the process of creating *Dreamer*, from concept to premiere, will be open to immigrant communities and the audiences served by Cal Performances. One aspiration of the project is to form a cohort of Dreamers who will serve as members of the creative team, ensuring meaningful connections between the artists, Cal Performances, and the community. To develop themes for the piece, López and Cruz will meet with the cohort of Dreamers, exploring their personal stories, struggles, and successes.

Speaking of the work, López says, “Our oratorio will center on the story of a so-called Dreamer, who came to the United States as a child in search of a better life, but whose legal status has remained in limbo due to the fact that she and her parents arrived to the US illegally. There are thousands of children living in the Bay Area who find themselves in this legal conundrum, and whose only hope lies in the passing of the Dream Act, which was first introduced in 2001, but has since has failed to pass despite being reintroduced several times. We will research those stories, gather testimonies, and create a narrative describing the travails of crossing the border, the difficulty of assimilating into a completely different culture, and the uncertainty that the future now holds.”

Composer Jimmy López Bellido earned his PhD in music in 2012 from UC Berkeley, where he studied with Edmund Campion; his master's degree in music from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, where he studied with Veli-Matti Puumala and Eero Hämeenniemi; and was originally a student of Enrique Iturriaga at the National Conservatory of Music in Lima. An album of his orchestral works was released by Harmonia Mundi in 2015.

López's music has been performed by leading orchestras around the world including the Chicago Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Boston Symphony, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, and the national symphony orchestras of Argentina, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Spain, among others. As part of its Renée Fleming Initiative, the Lyric Opera of Chicago commissioned López to compose a full-length opera based on Ann Patchett's bestselling novel *Bel Canto*, which he wrote with librettist Nilo Cruz. *Bel Canto* premiered in December 2015 to wide critical acclaim and became the bestselling opera of the Lyric's 2015–16 season. It went on to be nominated for a 2016 International Opera Award and was broadcast on PBS's *Great Performances*. López's work *Fiesta!* has been performed nearly 80 times worldwide, making it one of the most-performed contemporary orchestral works composed in the past 10 years. López is currently the Houston Symphony's composer-in-residence for the 2017–18 and 2018–19 seasons.

Nilo Cruz is a Cuban-American playwright whose work has been produced widely around the United States and Europe. His plays have been performed at the McCarter Theatre, New York's Shakespeare Festival's Public Theatre, Manhattan Theatre Club, Arena Stage, Mark Taper Forum, Magic Theatre, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, and many others. Internationally, his work has been produced in Canada, England, France, Australia, Germany, Belarus, Russia, Bulgaria, Costa Rica, Colombia, Cuba, and in cities throughout Spain. In 2003 Cruz won the Pulitzer Prize and the Steinberg Award for Drama for his play *Anna in the Tropics* and was nominated for a Tony Award. Cruz is a frequent collaborator with composer Gabriela Lena Frank. Together they have completed a set of orchestral songs, *La centinela y la paloma* (*The Keeper and the Dove*), for soprano Dawn Upshaw and the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra (premiered under the baton of Joana Carneiro in 2011); *The Saint Maker* for soprano Jessica Rivera, mezzo-soprano Rachel Calloway, the San Francisco Girls Chorus, and the Berkeley Symphony in 2013; and *Journey of the Shadow* for narrator and ensemble (San Francisco Chamber Orchestra premiere in 2013).

For the creation of *Dreamer*, Cal Performances will partner with Alameda County community organizations, UC Berkeley's Undocumented Student Program, and other organizations supporting immigrants and refugees, and with presenting partner Stanford Live.

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, a nonpartisan, private charitable foundation, that has been making grants to support the performing arts in communities across the San Francisco Bay

Area for more than 50 years. More information about the awards can be found at [hewlett.org/50Commissions](http://hewlett.org/50Commissions).

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