



For Immediate Release: August 13, 2026

[Cal Performances Press Room](#)



Photos of The Australian Ballet in Christopher Wheeldon's *Oscar* (left) and baritone Lester Lynch (right) are available for download from the Cal Performances [Press Room](#).

[A video trailer for *Oscar*](#) can be found on YouTube.

[A video of Lester Lynch](#) singing "Deep River" can also be viewed on YouTube.

CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS

The 2026–27 Season Opening Weekend Featuring:

**The Australian Ballet in the North American Premiere of
Oscar® by Christopher Wheeldon
Friday–Sunday, September 25–27 at Zellerbach Hall**

**Lester Lynch, *baritone*, with Kevin Korth, *piano*,
Sunday, September 27 at Hertz Hall**

Berkeley, CA, August 13, 2026—Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents the opening weekend of its 2026–27 season (Friday, September 25 through Sunday, September 27) featuring world-renowned performers, thought-provoking programs, and noteworthy debuts. **The Australian Ballet** returns to Berkeley for the first time in more than a decade—on this occasion accompanied by the **Berkeley Symphony Orchestra**—with the North American premiere of Tony Award–winning choreographer **Christopher Wheeldon's** *Oscar*, inspired by the life and writing of Oscar Wilde, for four performances

at Zellerbach Hall on Friday, September 25 at 7:30pm; Saturday, September 26 at 1pm and 7:30pm; and Sunday, September 27 at 3pm. Across campus, dramatic baritone **Lester Lynch** makes his Cal Performances debut, joined by pianist **Kevin Korth** and a specially assembled string quartet for a program featuring works by Schubert, Mahler, Barber, and others, plus arrangements by Gordon Getty, on Sunday, September 27 at 3pm at Hertz Hall. Although divergent in terms of both artistic disciplines and scale, the two weekend programs are united by a common theme of longing for love amid the harsh realities of the world.

The Australian Ballet in *Oscar* by Christopher Wheeldon

Commemorating the 60th anniversary of its first US performance, The Australian Ballet brings *Oscar* stateside for a limited tour comprising only these Cal Performances dates and a four-night run at New York's City Center. The Australian Ballet's third full-length collaboration with celebrated choreographer Wheeldon, *Oscar* is set during a dark time in the life of the great Irish-born, London-dwelling author Oscar Wilde. Prosecuted and jailed at a time when sexual relations between men were criminalized in Britain, Wheeldon's production depicts Wilde languishing in his London prison cell as memories from his creative yet turbulent life intertwine with scenes from Wildean classics like *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and the short story "The Nightingale and the Rose." Through Wheeldon's signature blend of the classical and the contemporary and his flair for cinematic storytelling, *Oscar* captures its namesake's wit and vulnerability in a production that is, by turns, romantic and buoyant, stately and foreboding. The work is further enriched by composer Joby Talbot's lush orchestral score, to be performed live at Cal Performances by the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra—conducted by Australian Ballet Music Director and Chief Conductor Jonathan Lo—along with intricate set and costume designs by Jean-Marc Puissant.

At the center of the production is Christopher Wheeldon, whose distinctive choreographic voice has made him one of the most influential figures in contemporary ballet. Wheeldon (an OBE, Officer of the Order of the British Empire) is one of the world's most acclaimed choreographers, whose works have been created for leading ballet companies including the Royal Ballet, New York City Ballet, and San Francisco Ballet. A Tony Award- and Olivier Award-winning director and choreographer, he is celebrated for acclaimed ballets such as *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Like Water for Chocolate*, as well as Broadway hits including *An American in Paris* and *MJ The Musical*.

"David [Hallberg, artistic director of The Australian Ballet] and I spoke very openly about finding a subject that expressed a different way of telling stories in full-length ballet," Wheeldon said. "We're very used to the heteronormative worlds of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Swan Lake*, and *The Sleeping Beauty*.

“There’s an enormous amount of talent in this company,” he added. “The company is on the level of many of the great companies in Europe and in the States.”

“There’s no denying that any full-length creation by Christopher Wheeldon is an immense artistic moment for the industry,” Hallberg said, “so it’s a great honor to premiere *Oscar* with The Australian Ballet. This production will offer audiences a visually stunning and emotionally resonant journey into the world of one of history’s most iconic literary figures told by one of the great storytellers of today.”

Lester Lynch

Baritone Lester Lynch is joined in his Cal Performances recital by pianist Kevin Korth, a faculty member of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and a collaborator with the likes of Frederica von Stade, Isabel Leonard, and Jake Heggie. For the performance opener, Samuel Barber’s *Dover Beach*, they’ll be joined by a string quartet composed of some of the Bay Area’s most accomplished musicians: violinist and Berkeley Symphony Artistic Director René Mandel, plus San Francisco Symphony musicians Florin Parvulescu (violin), Katarzyna Bryla (viola), and Anne Richardson (cello).

Reminiscent of the emotional landscape of *Oscar*, Lynch and Korth’s program explores works that depict love, loss, and mortality. Among these is Samuel Barber’s plaintive and simmering *Dover Beach*, set to Matthew Arnold’s poem of the same name—a work that pines for human connection amid a world of doubt and disillusionment: “Ah, love, let us be true / To one another! For the world, which seems / To lie before us like a land of dreams... / Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light.” Also featured on the program are Mahler’s *Rückert Lieder*—a lyrical collection of five songs meditating variously on subjects including transcendent love, solitude, the act of artistic creation, and the enchantment of fragrance—along with works by Schubert, Tosti, Mussorgsky, and Hahn, plus arrangements by contemporary American composer and longtime Bay Area-based philanthropist Gordon Getty of two much-loved traditional songs, “Shenandoah” and “Danny Boy.”

***Illuminations*: “Innocence & Experience”**

The Australian Ballet’s performances of Christopher Wheeldon’s *Oscar* are featured as part of Cal Performances’ annual *Illuminations* series, which connects extraordinary artistry with groundbreaking scholarship to explore pressing topics of today. In 2026–27, *Illuminations*: “Innocence & Experience” themed events investigate how these intertwined forces transform each other and influence our sense of the world. The six distinct *Illuminations* performances during the season tell poignant and transformative stories—of youthful idealism facing power, beauty shadowed by vulnerability, bodies carrying the weight of history—inviting participants to cultivate a deeper understanding of the forces

shaping our humanity. “The Philosopher’s Guide,” a [Cal Performances’ Beyond the Stage blog post](#), describes *Oscar* and the other performances on this season’s *Illuminations* series. Added *Illuminations* discussion/Q&A events throughout the season, as well as videos with UC Berkeley scholars expanding on the ideas of “Innocence & Experience,” will be updated at calperformances.org/illuminations.

CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

Cal Performances presents

Friday, September 25, 7:30pm

Saturday, September 26, 1pm

Saturday, September 26, 7:30pm

Sunday, September 27, 3pm

Zellerbach Hall

Bancroft Way at Dana Street

UC Berkeley campus

Dance

[The Australian Ballet](#)

Oscar® by Christopher Wheeldon

Christopher Wheeldon, *choreography*

Berkeley Symphony Orchestra

Jonathan Lo, *conductor*

Joby Talbot, *composer*

Jean-Marc Puissant, *stage and costume design*

Jon Goldman, *lighting design*

David Bergman, *video design*

Program:

Christopher Wheeldon/*Oscar* (North American Premiere)

Inspired by the legacy and lore of one of literature’s most extraordinary minds, Christopher Wheeldon’s visionary ballet blends choreography with the story of Oscar Wilde. *Oscar* explores themes of romance, sacrifice, and forbidden love, weaving elements of Wilde’s biography together with references to his timeless stories and characters. Admired for both its artistic vigor and the emotional nuance of its programs, The Australian Ballet returns to Berkeley for the first time since the company’s performances of *Swan Lake* in 2014. Joby Talbot’s orchestral score is performed live by the Berkeley Symphony Orchestra, Jonathan Lo, conductor, and designer Jean-Marc Puissant’s set and costume designs complete the production.

An *Illuminations*: “Innocence & Experience” event. Visit calperformances.org/illuminations for details.

Tickets: \$60–\$215 (prices subject to change)

Sunday, September 27, 3pm

Hertz Hall

Bancroft Way at College Avenue

Recital

[Lester Lynch](#), *baritone*

Kevin Korth, *piano*

René Mandel, *violin*

Florin Parvulescu, *violin*

Katarzyna Bryla, *viola*

Anne Richardson, *cello*

Program:

Works by Schubert, Tosti, Mussorgsky, Mahler, Hahn, and Barber, as well as arrangements of select traditional songs by Gordon Getty

Dramatic baritone Lester Lynch has tackled many of the most iconic opera roles to great acclaim: Crown in *Porgy and Bess*, Wotan in *Das Rheingold*, the Conte di Luna in *Il Trovatore*, and the title roles in *Macbeth* and *Rigoletto*. He sings with both great power and silken subtlety, and brings dramatic flair and gravitas to his recital performances. For his Cal Performances debut, Lynch lends his voice to selections exploring love, loss, and mortality, including Samuel Barber's brooding *Dover Beach*, written for baritone and string quartet, as well as a selection of traditional songs and spirituals. Pianist Kevin Korth and a string quartet composed of some of the Bay Area's most accomplished musicians—created specially for this occasion—accompanies him.

Tickets: \$75–\$90 (prices subject to change)

Tickets for all performances are available at calperformances.org, by phone at (510) 642-9988, or in person at the Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall. Ticket Office hours through August 16 are Tuesday–Friday, noon–5pm; beginning August 17, hours will extend to Tuesday–Sunday, noon–5pm.

There is a \$15 per order service charge on ticket purchases made by phone or online that are not part of a subscription package; there is no fee for tickets purchased in person at the Zellerbach Hall Ticket Office. There is a \$20 service charge on all subscription orders.

UC Berkeley students can access exclusive discounts, including half-price tickets in all sections of the theater, beginning August 21. Information about UC Berkeley student tickets and discounts is available at calperformances.org/ucb-students; information about other discounts can be found at calperformances.org/discounts.

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