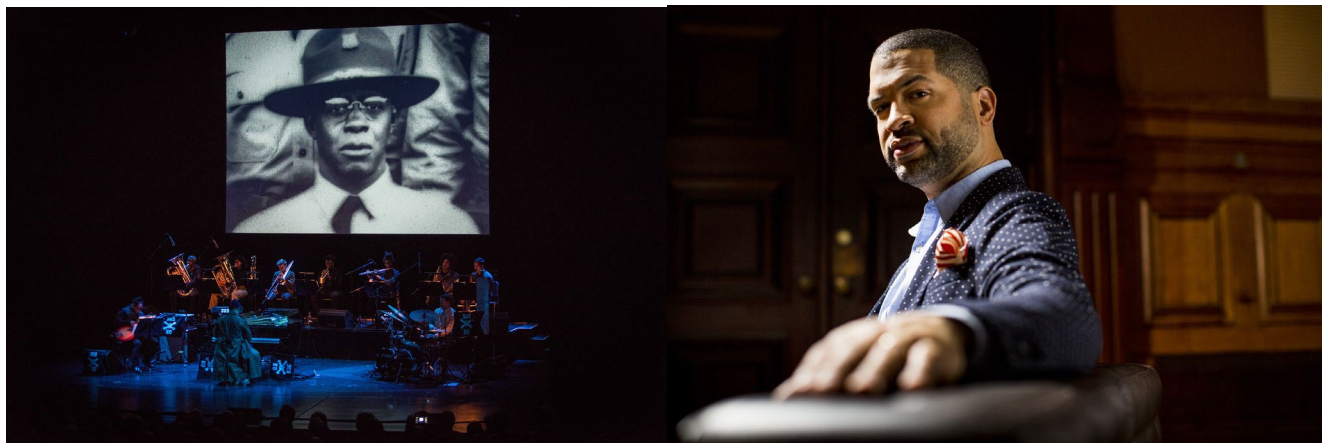




For Immediate Release: October 12, 2026

[Cal Performances Press Room](#)



Photos of Jason Moran (right) and Jason Moran and the Harlem Hellfighters performing *James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin* (left) are available for download from the Cal Performances [Press Room](#).
A video of pianist Jason Moran introducing James Reese Europe can be viewed on [YouTube](#).

CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS A FEATURED PERFORMANCE IN THE ILLUMINATIONS: “INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE” SERIES

**Composer and Jazz Piano Virtuoso
Jason Moran and the Harlem Hellfighters in
James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin
Saturday, November 21 at Zellerbach Hall**

Berkeley, CA, October 12, 2026—Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents the celebrated jazz composer, pianist, and MacArthur “Genius Grant” recipient **Jason Moran** in *James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin*, a multidisciplinary meditation on the life and legacy of one of the pioneers of ragtime and jazz—and one of the early 20th-century’s greatest, yet underrecognized, American musical figures—on Saturday, November 21 at 7:30pm at Zellerbach Hall. Joining Moran onstage is his **Harlem Hellfighters** ensemble, featuring his longtime Bandwagon bandmates **Tarus Mateen** (bass) and **Nasheet Waits** (drums) with a seven-piece horn section, accompanied by projections of the late legend by Oscar-nominated cinematographer **Bradford Young**.

Jason Moran Honors James Reese Europe

In the tradition of his past multimedia concert tributes to Harlem composers Thomas Wright “Fats” Waller and Thelonious Monk, Jason Moran joins his 21st-century Harlem Hellfighters ensemble in a program that celebrates James Reese Europe as (in Moran’s own words) “one of the seminal Big Bangs in Black music.” As on his 2023 album of this program’s music, *From the Dancehall to the Battlefield*, Moran not only revisits Europe’s seminal works, but follows the composer’s influence forward in time, weaving in cultural and musical elements ranging from Afrofuturism to the music of jazz avant-gardist Albert Ayler. The visuals of Bradford Young—the first African American cinematographer to be nominated for an Oscar (for his work on the 2016 Denis Villeneuve film *Arrival*)—provide a potent, impressionistic visual counterpoint, comprising historic images of James Reese Europe and his ensembles, World War I scenes, evocative landscapes and cityscapes, and more.

As Moran observes of the timelessness of Europe’s music, in a spoken-word segment of the program, “It is the humanity that I hear in these songs, in his bands ... [When Europe played Carnegie Hall] the new beat had arrived, because syncopation is about urgency, pushing the beat ahead to apply the anticipation of the oncoming downbeat, an outlook that is inherently futuristic.”

About Jason Moran

Jason Moran first gained attention in jazz circles in the late 1990s as an innovative young pianist and composer on the prestigious Blue Note label, blending currents of jazz and classical music with daring experiments combining music and spoken word. Following honors for his early recordings from the Jazz Journalists Association and multiple top finishes in the annual *Downbeat* Critics Poll, Moran went on to distinguish himself further for his ambitious stage productions, combining live jazz with dance, film, painting, and even skateboarding. Moran was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow in 2010 and served as the John F. Kennedy Center’s artistic director for jazz from 2011–2025. Cal Performances previously presented the West Coast premiere of *Two Wings: The Music of Black America in Migration*—an expansive 2022 concert produced by pianist Moran and mezzo-soprano Alicia Hall Moran that explored the Great Migration of six million Black Americans from the rural South to northern cities and beyond through music, personal history, and scholarship—and, in 2017, his tribute to Fats Waller.

Jason Moran Plays Philip Glass

The night before the performance of *James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin*, Moran joins nine other pianists representing a wide range of genres and backgrounds—a group that includes **Timo**

Andres, Aaron Diehl, and Simone Dinnerstein—to perform the complete cycle of Philip Glass’ Piano Etudes (Friday, November 20 at 7:30pm at Zellerbach Hall). More information is available at calperformances.org.

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

Jason Moran and the Harlem Hellfighters’ performance of *James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin* is a featured presentation 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 the theme’s connection to *James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin* as well as to other performances on this season’s *Illuminations* series. Jason Moran and other artists on the season speak on camera about “Innocence and Experience” in [The Crucibles of Experience video](#). More information about *Illuminations* performances, articles, and artist talks can be found at calperformances.org/illuminations.

The Life and Artistry of James Reese Europe

Born in 1880 in Mobile, Alabama, James Reese Europe relocated in childhood with his family to Washington, DC, where he took violin lessons from the grandson of Frederick Douglass. Europe moved to New York City in his early 20s. In 1910, he founded The Clef Club, a groundbreaking union and social organization for Black musicians whose resident ensemble made history in 1912 by performing a form of large-group ragtime leaning toward early jazz (though not yet known by that name) at Carnegie Hall. Europe and the Clef Club orchestra went on to make recordings of their proto-jazz for the Victor Talking Machine Company in 1913–14, arguably the first “jazz” recordings ever made. In the face of criticism of his music and its roots in Black culture, Europe said, “We have developed a kind of symphony music that, no matter what else you think, is different and distinctive My success had come ... from a realization of the advantages of sticking to the music of my own people.”

With America’s entry into World War I, Europe was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the all-African American 369th Infantry Regiment—nicknamed the “Harlem Hellfighters”—for which he not only directed the regimental band but also commanded the machine gun company. Excelling in both his roles, Europe became the first African American officer to lead troops into battle during World War I

and—despite being temporarily sidelined by a poison gas attack—went on to tour France with the band, captivating both Allied soldiers and French civilians with the group’s vibrant, syncopated sound. The 369th returned to America as heroes, marching in a post-war 5th Avenue victory parade, accompanied by Europe and the band. Tragically, Europe died soon after, in May 1919, after being stabbed while arguing with a band member during a concert intermission. Although revered by fellow musicians and audiences of his day, Europe soon faded from the history of the music he helped to launch—gone both too young (age 38) and too soon to benefit from a forthcoming jazz recording boom that would make legends of his successors.

Dubbing Europe “the Martin Luther King Jr. of music,” ragtime piano great Eubie Blake once said, “Before Europe, [Black] musicians were just like wandering minstrels ... Jim Europe changed all that. He made a profession for us out of music. All that we owe to Jim. If only people would realize it.”

CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

Cal Performances presents

Saturday, November 21, 7:30pm

Jazz

Zellerbach Hall

Bancroft Way at Dana Street

[Jason Moran and the Harlem Hellfighters](#)

UC Berkeley campus

James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin

Program:

James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin is jazz pianist and composer Jason Moran’s multidisciplinary meditation on the life and legacy of James Reese Europe, the underrecognized Black American composer and bandleader who landed in France with the Harlem Hellfighters on New Year’s Day 1918. The celebrated all-Black unit helped break the stalemate on the Western Front during the First World War, while composer Europe’s finely honed military music ensemble popularized the new spirit of jazz in a war-torn France fascinated with Black culture. Moran’s layered work explores the idea of memory in Black culture, bringing together his long-standing Bandwagon bandmates—bassist Tarus Mateen and drummer Nasheet Waits—with a seven-piece horn section and visuals by Oscar-nominated cinematographer Bradford Young.

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

Tickets: \$50–\$110 (prices subject to change)

Available at calperformances.org, by phone at (510) 642-9988, or in person at the Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall. Ticket Office hours are 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, and are also eligible to purchase a limited number of \$10 tickets for the best seats in the house for *James Reese Europe and the Absence of Ruin* through the [Golden Bear Circle](#) program beginning at noon on Thursday, November 5, online only. Information about all UC Berkeley student programs and discounts is available at [calperformances.org/ucb-students](#); information about other discounts can be found at [calperformances.org/discounts](#).

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