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[Cal Performances Press Room](#)



Photos, from left to right, of Lara Downes and Judy Collins (top row), and of Tarriona “Tank” Ball, Invoke Quartet, and Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir (bottom row), are available for download from the [Cal Performances Press Room](#).  
A video trailer for Lara Downes and Friends’ *This Land: Reflections on America* can be seen on [YouTube](#).

**CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS  
AN *ILLUMINATIONS*: “EXILE & SANCTUARY” FEATURED EVENT**

**LARA DOWNES AND FRIENDS**

**LARA DOWNES, *PIANO***

**JUDY COLLINS, *VOCALS***

**TARRIONA “TANK” BALL, *VOCALS***

**INVOKE QUARTET**

**OAKLAND INTERFAITH GOSPEL CHOIR**

***THIS LAND: REFLECTIONS ON AMERICA***

## MAY 9 AT ZELLERBACH HALL

### An all-star performance of jazz, folk, poetry, gospel, and genre-crossing string music inspired by George Gershwin's vision of the "musical kaleidoscope of America"

Berkeley, April 10, 2026—Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents celebrated pianist and radio personality **Lara Downes** in *This Land: Reflections on America* at Zellerbach Hall on Saturday, May 9 at 8pm. Joined by folk singer **Judy Collins**, poet and songstress **Tarriona "Tank" Ball** (of the Grammy award-winning New Orleans band Tank and the Bangas), roots-to-classical string ensemble **Invoke Quartet**, and the multicultural **Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir**, Downes presents an evening of poetry, song, instrumental music, and storytelling that reflects the rich and complex tapestry of the American experience. Anticipating the country's 250th birthday, the program features classical and popular works by Aaron Copland, Woody Guthrie, Nina Simone, George Gershwin, Duke Ellington, Margaret Bonds, Scott Joplin, and Judy Collins herself.

The project extends from Downes' 2025 recording *This Land*, which was inspired by Gershwin's vision of a "musical kaleidoscope of America." Downes explains: "You can't represent American music without engaging as many facets as possible. Folk, classical, roots, and more all feed into and inform each other. This work explores the crossroads where worlds meet—and as musicians, we learn so much when we collaborate across traditions."

#### ***Illuminations: "Exile & Sanctuary"***

*This Land: Reflections on America* is part of Cal Performances' *Illuminations: "Exile & Sanctuary"* series in the 2025–26 season, which brings artists and UC Berkeley scholars together to discuss how experiences of displacement and refuge shape narratives, identities, and communities. In the Cal Performances-produced videos, ["The Art of Exile"](#) and ["Sanctuary and the Search for Belonging"](#), Downes meaningfully contributes her perspective on the season's theme.

Also as part of the series, Downes will participate in a pre-performance artist Q&A with NPR correspondent [Chloe Veltman](#) about displacement and American music. The talk takes place on the Zellerbach Hall stage from 7–7:30pm and is free to all ticket holders that evening.

More information about *Illuminations*: “Exile & Sanctuary” can be found at [calperformances.org/illuminations](https://calperformances.org/illuminations).

### **Artists**

Recently named Classical Woman of the Year by NPR’s *Performance Today*, San Francisco native **Lara Downes** is a performing artist, recording musician, and engaging media personality, including as Resident Artist for San Francisco and Los Angeles radio group Classical California. A sought-after soloist, she performs with major orchestras across the US and has recitals and residencies at Lincoln Center, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Tanglewood and Ravinia. Her collaborations with a wide range of artists include The Miró Quartet, Pulitzer Prize winners Rhiannon Giddens and Rita Dove, bassist Christian McBride, and authors Jill Lepore, Adam Gopnik, and John McWhorter create shared spaces for listening, reflection, and connection – where music becomes both mirror and meeting ground. Downes is the inaugural Creative Partner of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, the creator and host of NPR Music’s *Amplify with Lara Downes* and the driving force behind The Declaration Project, a national initiative culminating in a 2026 Lincoln Center multimedia premiere marking the country’s 250th anniversary.

**Judy Collins**, sharing Downes’ cross-genre spirit, brings a career spanning more than 50 albums. A legendary vocalist and activist with Grammy nominations and multiple gold- and platinum-selling recordings to show for it, she has helped introduce artists such as Leonard Cohen and Joni Mitchell to wider audiences. Her most recent album, *Spellbound* (2022), is her first entirely original work. In 2019, Downes and Collins recorded Collins’ song [“Albatross”](#) for Downes’ Sony Masterworks album *Holes in the Sky*.

New Orleans-based slam poet and Grammy Award-winning recording artist **Tarriona “Tank” Ball** adds a dynamic, genre-blending voice to the program. With her band Tank and the Bangas, she merges soul, hip-hop, R&B, and jazz rooted in her hometown. The group won the 2017 NPR Tiny Desk Contest, was nominated for Best New Artist at the 2020 Grammy Awards, and earned the 2025 Grammy for Best Spoken Word Poetry Album with *The Heart, The Mind, The Soul*. Downes featured Ball on her NPR Music video series [Amplify](#), where Ball described the music and poetry as “unleash[ing] the radical power of joy.”

**Invoke Quartet**—Nick Montopoli (violin, banjo, vocals), Zach Matteson (violin, vocals), Karl Mitze (viola, mandolin, vocals), and Geoff Manyin (cello, vocals)—performs music from American traditions including bluegrass, Appalachian fiddle tunes, jazz, and minimalism. The ensemble blends these genres into a contemporary repertoire featuring original works composed by and for the group. For Downes’ upcoming July album, she and Invoke Quartet recorded Willie Nelson’s song “Changing Skies” a video excerpt of which can be viewed on [YouTube](#).

Rounding out the evening, the **Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir** contributes a rich spiritual and communal dimension. Led for 40 years by founding artistic director Terrance Kelly, the choir celebrates Black gospel and spiritual traditions “to inspire joy and unity among all people.” They have performed at Cal Performances, with the San Francisco Symphony, and with the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus, and return to the Zellerbach Hall stage to provide a foundation that grounds and uplifts the program.

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CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:  
**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS**

**Saturday, May 9 at 8pm**

**Zellerbach Hall  
Bancroft Way at Dana Street  
UC Berkeley**

*Vocal Celebration*

[Lara Downes & Friends](#)

*This Land: Reflections on America*

**Lara Downes**, *piano*

**Judy Collins**, *vocals*

**Tarriona “Tank” Ball**, *vocals*

**Invoke Quartet**

**Karl Mitze**, *viola, mandolin*

**Geoff Manyin**, *cello*

**Zach Matteson**, *violin*

**Nick Montopoli**, *violin, banjo*

**Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir**

**Program:**

In an eclectic presentation, pianist, NPR host, and San Francisco native Lara Downes is joined by an all-star cast of collaborators for a selection of classical and popular music exploring the richness and

complexity of the American experience as the nation approaches its 250th anniversary. The program, featuring folk legend Judy Collins, Grammy-winning singer and poet Tarriona “Tank” Ball of Tank and the Bangas, Invoke Quartet, and the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir, takes as its inspiration George Gershwin’s vision of a “musical kaleidoscope of America,” spanning a century of works and arrangements.

### **Pre-Concert Artist Talk**

7–7:30pm

Zellerbach Hall stage

Lara Downes joins NPR correspondent [Chloe Veltman](#) for a Q&A about the power of music to voice resilience, resistance, progress, and protest, particularly in the face of displacement, throughout the nation’s 250-year history. Downes and Veltman plan to consider the many Americas that coexist within our national story, and how music can create spaces of sanctuary and belonging.

An *Illuminations*: “Exile & Sanctuary” event. Visit [calperformances.org/illuminations](https://calperformances.org/illuminations) to learn more.

**Tickets:** \$38–\$125 (prices subject to change).

Tickets for all performances are available at [calperformances.org](https://calperformances.org), by phone at (510) 642-9988, or in person at the Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall, Tuesday–Friday, 12–5:30pm and Saturday–Sunday, 1–5pm.

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. Information about UC Berkeley student tickets and discounts is available at [calperformances.org/ucb-students](https://calperformances.org/ucb-students); information about other discounts can be found at [calperformances.org/discounts](https://calperformances.org/discounts).