

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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CONTACT:  
Christina Kellogg/510.643.6714  
ckellogg@calperfs.berkeley.edu  
Joe Yang/510.642.9121  
scyang@calperfs.berkeley.edu

**“A HARD-SWINGING, HEAD-TRIPPING, SCAT-SINGING JAZZ POET”\***

**KURT ELLING**

**SATURDAY, MAY 28 AT 8:00 P.M. AT CAL PERFORMANCES**

**BERKELEY, April 18, 2005** – Six-time Grammy nominee **Kurt Elling** will perform at **Cal Performances** on **Saturday, May 28 at 8:00 pm** in **Zellerbach Hall**. Calling Mr. Elling a jazz singer is like calling Michelangelo a sculptor; it’s true, but it fails to acknowledge the extraordinary range of talents and the soaring ambition the former divinity student brings to his craft. The silky-voiced baritone is a poet and philosopher as well as an innovative composer and lyricist, and as the *Chicago Tribune* noted “...Elling seems hell-bent on rewriting the definition of what jazz singing is all about.” In addition to masterful and exuberant singing and scatting as well as risk-taking impromptu vocalizing that he calls “ranting,” Mr. Elling also offers up thoughtful—even spiritual—explorations meant to enlighten as well as entertain. Serious and cerebral, Mr. Elling is nonetheless noted for his charismatic stage presence, his often self-effacing humor, and also for his occasional—and delightful—interjection of unlikely pop tunes into his sets; his recent performances have included a rousing version of Steve Miller’s “Space Cowboy,” complete with air guitar and an audience sing-along of the chorus. Mr. Elling will appear with his trio—**Laurence Hobgood**, piano; **Rob Amster**, bass; and **Frank Parker, Jr.**, drums.

**KURT ELLING**

In just over a decade, Mr. Elling has established himself as a premier jazz artist, composer and lyricist. Every one of his six self-produced recordings for the prestigious Blue Note label has been nominated for a Grammy Award, and he has been designated Male Jazz Vocalist of the Year by both *DownBeat* and *Jazz Times* many times over.

Born in Chicago in 1967, Mr. Elling is the son of a church musician and grew up performing sacred and classical music in choir settings. He became interested in jazz while attending college. While a graduate student at the University of Chicago Divinity School, his love for jazz singing became an obsession that led to his performing in local clubs.

\* *Chicago Tribune*

In 1995, Mr. Elling submitted a demo tape to Blue Note that was accepted almost immediately. Astonishingly, Blue Note considered the tape so worthy that after the addition of four tracks, *Close Your Eyes* became the first of Mr. Elling's six recordings. Since then, Mr. Elling has released five more successful recordings, including *The Messenger* (1997), *This Time It's Love* (1998), *Live in Chicago* (2000), *Flirting With Twilight* (2001), and *Man in the Air* (2003). He has also appeared on several recordings by such luminaries as Charlie Hunter, Manhattan Transfer, Bob Mintzer, and The Yellowjackets. Mr. Elling is the founder and member of **The Four Brothers**, a jazz vocal group that includes Kevin Mahogany (occasionally replaced by Peter Eldridge) and the venerable Mark Murphy and Jon Hendricks.

Mr. Elling has been commissioned to write and star in multi-discipline creations for Chicago's Steppenwolf Theater, including *LA/CHI/NY—A Journey Through the Streets of America* and *Encounter Without Prejudice: An Open Tribute to Allen Ginsberg*. In addition to a busy performing, recording and touring schedule, Mr. Elling works on behalf of jazz musicians as Vice Chair of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, the organization that, among many other projects, produces the Grammy Awards.

### **LAURENCE HOBGOOD**

"I really rely on my rhythm section," Mr. Elling has said, and none—one would imagine—more so than pianist extraordinaire **Laurence Hobgood**. Mr. Hobgood has been Mr. Elling's closest collaborator for over ten years but had already won critical praise as a jazz pianist and leader before teaming up with the singer. Like Mr. Elling, his first musical experiences were church based; he began formal piano study at age 6 in the preparatory program of the Southern Methodist University School of Music in Dallas, where his father was chairman of the theater program. After an award-winning academic career in both classical and jazz studies at the University of Illinois, Mr. Hobgood moved to Chicago in 1988 where he formed a critically praised quintet and eventually met Mr. Elling in 1993.

In 1994, Mr. Hobgood co-produced, composed, arranged, and played on Mr. Elling's now legendary first demo tape. Mr. Hobgood has been closely associated with Mr. Elling ever since, serving as an accompanist, arranger and musical director. In 2002, he won his own

Grammy for “Best Instrumental Arrangement Accompanying a Vocal Performance” for his work on Mr. Elling’s fifth CD release, *Flirting With Twilight*. In 2002, Mr. Hobgood joined the faculty of the music conservatory of Chicago’s Roosevelt University/Chicago College of the Performing Arts.

### **ROB AMSTER**

Two facts say everything about **Rob Amster**’s early promise and talent as a bassist: first, at age 20 he was recruited into Buddy Rich’s band and second, he managed to survive and thrive under the direction of Mr. Rich, a leader notorious for his harsh treatment of bass players. Mr. Amster began playing rock bass in high school, but an encounter with a Jean-Luc Ponty album sparked an interest in jazz and led him to his high school’s jazz department and later to studies at Berklee College of Music and the University of Miami. From 1987 to 1994, Mr. Amster performed with many important artists, including Dizzy Gillispie, Joe Lovano, Paquito D’Rivera, Milt Jackson, and Jon Hendricks. In 1994, he began working with Mr. Elling; he played bass at the series of demo sessions that became Mr. Elling’s first release, *Close Your Eyes*. He has toured and recorded with Mr. Elling ever since, although he has also found time to tour with Maynard Ferguson’s band and to play with such notables as jazz guitar great Larry Coryell and vocalist Rebecca Paris.

### **FRANK PARKER, JR.**

Drummer, instructor, clinician, composer—and music business expert—**Frank Parker**, joined up with Mr. Elling in 2000 after stints with The Chicago Jazz Ensemble, rhythm and blues singer Jerry Butler, the jazz-funk-dance based group Seance Divine, and as a leader of his own ensembles. Mr. Parker won numerous awards at solo contests and band competitions as a high school student in Illinois. He received a music scholarship to attend Western Illinois University in Macomb, Illinois, and after graduating in May 1995 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music Business, he completed an internship at Jay B. Ross & Associates Entertainment Law firm. The busy Mr. Parker—recognized for his rhythmic diversity that makes him equally comfortable with jazz, funk, blues, rock, hip-hop, fusion, and Latin music—continues to pursue a varied musical career as a sideman, leader and educator.

## TICKET INFORMATION

Tickets for **Kurt Elling** on **Saturday, May 28 at 8:00 p.m.** in Zellerbach Hall are priced at **\$18.00, \$24.00, and \$32.00**. Tickets are available through the Cal Performances Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall; at (510) 642-9988 to charge by phone; at [www.calperfs.berkeley.edu](http://www.calperfs.berkeley.edu); and at the door. Half-price tickets are available for purchase by UC Berkeley students. UC faculty and staff, senior citizens and other students receive a \$2 discount, and UC Alumni Association members receive a \$3 discount (Special Events excluded). For more information, call Cal Performances at (510) 642-9988, or visit the Cal Performances web site at [www.calperfs.berkeley.edu](http://www.calperfs.berkeley.edu).

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## CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

### CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

**Saturday, May 28 at 8:00 p.m.**

**Zellerbach Hall, UC Berkeley Campus**  
Bancroft Way at Telegraph, Berkeley

#### *Jazz*

**Kurt Elling**, vocals

**Laurence Hobgood**, piano

**Rob Amster**, bass

**Frank Parker, Jr.**, drums

#### **Program:**

Jazz vocalist Kurt Elling, widely acclaimed for his innovative approach to singing, will perform a variety of standards and original compositions with a trio of long-time musical collaborators.

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