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Press Room



Images of Black Arm Band (left) and The Nile Project (right) are available for download from the Cal Performances [press room](#).

**CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS
AUSTRALIAN MUSIC-THEATER ENSEMBLE
BLACK ARM BAND, IN *DIRTSONG*, FEBRUARY 12
AND WELCOMES BACK THE NILE PROJECT, FEBRUARY 18**

Residency activities planned on campus and in the community include SchoolTime performances for K-12 students, teacher workshops, and a community music session

Berkeley, January 23, 2017— As part of the *Inclusion* thematic strand of the 2016/17 season's Berkeley RADICAL programming, Cal Performances at UC Berkeley welcomes two dynamic and culturally engaged international ensembles to Zellerbach Hall. On Sunday, February 12, Australia's [Black Arm Band](#), a collective of Australia's premier Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal musicians representing diverse musical and cultural backgrounds, places the Aboriginal struggle at the center of its music-theater work, *Dirtsong*. Returning to Cal Performances on Saturday, February 18, [The Nile Project](#) draws on a rich mix of musical communities from the 11 Nile countries gathered around a shared, precious resource: water. The group appears on the heels of its first studio album, *Jinja*,

released on January 18, the follow-up to its live recording debut, *Aswan*, from 2013. Cal Performances' *Inclusion* programming strand seeks to explore how universal themes can arise from diverse, culturally specific artists, and embraces the idea that the interaction (between audience and performer) that occurs in live performance is one of the most democratizing acts in our society.

With its multimedia presentation *Dirtsong*, Black Arm Band presents a production *Singapore Today* has called “a soulful, vivid telling of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia, and the Aboriginal people’s connection with their homeland in the past, present and future.” *Dirtsong* is sung in 11 different Aboriginal languages, and combines traditional music with new songs inspired by famed indigenous author Alexis Wright. Performed with a live band against a backdrop of evocative film imagery, *Dirtsong* unfolds as a series of musical conversations in which the artists reflect on their country, history, and community.

Returning after a memorable Cal Performances debut and campus residency in 2015, The Nile Project uses the medium of musical collaboration to spread its message of civic engagement and ecological responsibility. The initiative connects vocalists, percussionists, and instrumentalists from the 11 Nile countries for concerts that have been described as “euphoric” by *The New York Times*, and “seductive and beautiful” by *Afropop*. The touring ensemble features performers from countries including Sudan, Ethiopia, Egypt, Burundi, and Kenya, playing traditional instruments such as the ubiquitous *tanbour*, the Ethiopian *krar* stringed instrument, the Egyptian *kawala* flute, and the *ikembe* thumb piano from Burundi, as well as a host of percussion and stringed instruments, guitars, and voices. The project’s mission is to inspire, inform and empower Nile citizens to collaboratively cultivate the sustainability of their shared ecosystem using music as a common meeting ground. The ensemble flows from a larger collective of 35 musicians—most of whom work across genres—that in turn arises from a long, thoughtful recruitment and collaboration process. The Nile Project strives to include musicians from many different cultural communities along the Nile, while finding a compelling combination of instruments and voices to support and balance one another. Partnering with six universities in Egypt, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, The Nile Project launched its inaugural class of Nile Fellows, a 12-month leadership program for 24 students from partner universities who will establish Nile Project Clubs on their campuses. Recent invitations to lead workshops and performances for key diplomats and policymakers at the United Nations, the European Commission, and the African Union attest to the significance of these collaborations.

Two tracks from the group's new studio recording, *Jinja*, can be streamed [here](#). A download of the full album is available to media by request.

Residency activities are planned with both Black Arm Band and The Nile Project on campus and in the community. SchoolTime performances for K-12 students take place on Monday, February 13 at 11am with Black Arm Band, and on Thursday, February 16 at 11am with The Nile Project. Pre-registration is required by downloading the order form posted at calperformances.org/learn/k-12. Black Arm Band serves as the centerpiece for the Cal Performances Classroom residency in Richmond, California. These Cal Performances will provide teachers with professional development resources that describe how Black Arm Band creates music and investigates Australian Aboriginal culture and history, as well as four classroom visits by teaching artists who will guide students to engage in their experience of the Black Arm Band performance helping them create their own art and music in response.

Teacher workshops also support students' engagement with The Nile Project. Cal Performances repeats a partnership with the Berkeley Unified School District in an intensive residency where every sixth-grade teacher participates in the workshop and their classes meet with teaching artists over three sessions. Every sixth-grade student in the district will attend the SchoolTime performance.

The artists of The Nile Project will host a *Nile Gathering Reunion* on Friday, February 17 at the Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life on Allston Way in nearby downtown Berkeley. The program, which is free and open to the public, begins at 4pm with a *Music Collaboration, Water Cooperation* lecture demonstration, followed by a vocal- and percussion-based community music session at 6:30pm. Mina Girgis, Nile Project CEO and producer, presents a pre-performance talk on Saturday, February 18 at 7pm; the event is free to concert ticketholders.

About Cal Performances

Cal Performances is the performing arts presenter and producer of the University of California, Berkeley, fulfilling its mission by presenting, producing, and commissioning renowned and emerging artists in music, dance, and theater. Cal Performances reaches more than 150,000 people annually through concerts and campus and community events, including talks, symposia, lecture demonstrations, and academic courses based on Cal Performances' season. Under the leadership of

Matías Tarnopolsky, the organization launched Berkeley RADICAL (Research and Development Initiative in Creativity Arts and Learning) to cultivate the artistic literacy of future audiences and connect some of the most innovative artists in the world with the intellectual capital of UC Berkeley. The 2016/17 season is the second season for Berkeley RADICAL, and embraces three strands of artistic exploration: *Inclusion*, *Innovation*, and *Immersion*. More information on Berkeley RADICAL can be found at calperformances.org/berkeley-radical.

Ticket Information

Tickets for *Black Arm Band: Dirtsong* on Sunday, February 12 at 7pm in Zellerbach Hall range from \$26–\$54. Tickets for *The Nile Project* on Saturday, February 18 at 8pm in Zellerbach Hall range from \$26–\$54. All ticket prices are subject to change. Half-price tickets are available for UC Berkeley students. Tickets are available through the Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall, at [\(510\) 642-9988](tel:5106429988), at calperformances.org, and at the door. For more information about discounts, go to calperformances.org/discounts.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Sunday, February 12 at 7pm

Zellerbach Hall

Dirtsong

Black Arm Band

Shellie Morris, vocals
Ursula Yovich, vocals
Tjupurru, didjeribone
Michael Meagher, music director and bass
Nicole Lampton, vocals
Troy Brady, vocals
James Henry, vocals
Rory McDougall, drums
Benito Cortez, violin, viola
Patrick Wolff, tenor saxophone, clarinet
Jacob Smolowe, piano
Michelle Preshaw, lighting designer
Natasha Gadd, Rhys Graham, Daybreak Films, screen visuals

Program: Australia’s foremost Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander musicians, representing diverse musical and cultural backgrounds, gather together as Black Arm Band. The group’s music-theater piece *Dirtsong*, “a soulful, vivid telling of the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australia” (*Singapore Today*), is performed in 11 different Aboriginal languages and combines traditional music with new songs inspired by famed indigenous author Alexis Wright. Performed with a live band against a backdrop of evocative film imagery.

Berkeley RADICAL: These performances are part of Cal Performances’ Berkeley RADICAL *Inclusion* strand, embracing the idea that in the world of the arts, no person, no group, no art form is excluded. More information at calperformances.org/berkeley-radical-inclusion.

Tickets: \$26–\$54 (prices subject to change.)

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Monday, February 13, 11am
SchoolTime Performance
Black Arm Band

Zellerbach Hall
Bancroft Way at Dana Street
UC Berkeley campus

Black Arm Band presents a matinee performance for grades K-12. Pre-registration is required by downloading the registration form from calperformances.org/learn/k-12.

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Saturday, February 18, 8pm

Zellerbach Hall

The Nile Project

Adel Mekha, vocals, percussion (Egypt, Nubia)
Ahmed Omar, bass, tanbour (Eritrea, Egypt)
Asia Madani, vocals, percussion (Sudan)
Dave Otieno, electric guitar (Kenya)
Ibrahim Fanous, krar (Eritrea)
Kasiva Mutua, vocals, percussion (Kenya)
Michael Bazibu, vocals, entongoli, adungu, endingidi, percussion (Uganda)
Mohamed Abozekry, oud, (Egypt)
Nader El Shaer, vocals, kawala, keytar, farsifa (Egypt)
Saleeb Fawzy, vocals (Egypt)
Selamnesh Zemene, vocals (Ethiopia)
Steven Sogo, vocals, bass, ikembe, umiduri (Burundi)

Program: Returning after a memorable Berkeley debut and campus residency in 2015, The Nile Project delivers a “euphoric” (*The New York Times*) message of civic engagement through musical collaboration. The initiative connects vocalists, percussionists, and instrumentalists from the 11 nations of the Nile Countries for concerts of “seductive and beautiful music” (*Afropop*).

Pre-Performance Talk

Zellerbach Hall

Saturday, February 18, 7pm

Mina Girgis, Nile Project CEO and producer, gives a pre-performance talk free to all ticket holders.

Berkeley RADICAL: These performances are part of Cal Performances' Berkeley RADICAL *Inclusion* strand, embracing the idea that in the world of the arts, no person, no group, no art form is excluded. More information at calperformances.org/berkeley-radical-inclusion.

Tickets: \$26–\$54 (prices subject to change.)

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The Nile Project Residency Activities

Nile Gathering Reunion

**Magnes Collection of Jewish Art
and Life**

Friday, February 17

2121 Allston Way, Berkeley

Part 1, 4pm

Music Collaboration, Water Cooperation

An interactive session with the artists concerning how music creates an environment that encourages a spirit of inclusion and invitation when dealing with culturally specific—and sometimes conflicting—perspectives.

Tickets: Free and open to the public.

Part 2, 6:30pm

Community Music Session

Musicians of The Nile Project lead participants in a percussion- and vocal-based community music session. Open to any and all levels of musicianship.

Tickets: Free and open to the public.

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Thursday, February 16 at 11am

Zellerbach Hall

SchoolTime Performance

Bancroft Way at Dana Street

Nile Project

UC Berkeley campus

Musicians from The Nile Project present a matinee performance for grades K-12. Pre-registration is required by downloading the registration form from calperformances.org/learn/k-12

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*Cal Performances Classroom activities with Black Arm Band are generously supported by
the Jacques M. Littlefield Foundation.*

Cal Performances Classroom activities throughout the season are made possible, in part, by Wells Fargo.