FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 27, 2019
Press Room

Images of W. Kamau Bell, Roy Wood Jr, Natasha Rothwell, and Punkie Johnson are available for download from the Cal Performances press room.

CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY
AND THE STUDENT CURATORS OF CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENT
FRONT ROW WITH W. KAMAU BELL AND FRIENDS
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6 AT 7PM IN ZELLERBACH HALL

Bell leads a program centered on race, identity, and the creative process with guests Roy Wood Jr, Natasha Rothwell, and Punkie Johnson

Berkeley, February 27, 2019 — Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents the fourth annual Front Row event, Wednesday, March 6 at 7pm in Zellerbach Hall, created by UC Berkeley students for UC Berkeley students. Presented in association with the Student Curators of Cal Performances, a group of UC Berkeley students mentored by Cal Performances interim artistic director Rob Bailis and staff, Front Row with W. Kamau Bell and Friends will feature the popular sociopolitical comedian, cultural commentator, and radio and television host along with his guests Roy Wood Jr, Natasha Rothwell, and Punkie Johnson, in a program of stand-up comedy performance, conversation, and Q&A that celebrates the power and presence of African-American artists and entertainers as leaders, cultural critics, and change makers.
Bell, a Berkeley resident, is known for confronting race, politics, and social issues head-on in his acclaimed comedy programs, which span multiple formats, from radio and podcasts to television and live performance. For United Shades of America, his Emmy-winning CNN docu-series, he traveled the country, engaging diverse audiences on contentious issues like immigration, white nationalism, and gang violence. Bell first developed a cult following with The W. Kamau Bell Curve: Ending Racism in About an Hour, his thought-provoking one-man show that premiered in 2007, and he later created the FX comedy series Totally Biased with W. Kamau Bell. He hosts the popular podcasts Denzel Washington is The Greatest Actor of All Time Period and Politically Reactive, as well as the live public radio show Kama Right Now! In 2016 he created the Showtime special Semi-Prominent Negro, and in June 2018 he made his Netflix debut with the stand-up comedy special Private School Negro. Bell’s published writing includes his book The Awkward Thoughts of W. Kamau Bell, a reflection on issues both personal and public, from his experience of fatherhood and his interracial marriage, to his creative process and journey to discover his voice as a comedian. Bell is on the advisory boards of Hollaback! and Donors Choose, and is the ACLU Celebrity Ambassador for Racial Justice.

Together with the student curatorial committee, Bell invited comic Roy Wood Jr., producer/actress/writer Natasha Rothwell, and comic Punkie Johnson to join him in an evening of stand-up comedy performance and conversation. This year’s line-up speaks directly to the impact and importance of African-American contributions to our culture and our nation.

Noted for his Comedy Central stand-up specials, Father Figure and Roy Wood Jr.: No One Loves You, Roy Wood Jr. is currently a correspondent on Comedy Central’s The Daily Show with Trevor Noah and the host of the network’s storytelling series This is Not Happening. Wood has appeared on The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson, Conan, The Tonight Show with Jimmy Fallon, Late Night with Seth Meyers, and The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, and performed on USO tours to Guam and the Philippines.

Natasha Rothwell is a series regular and co-producer on Issa Rae’s Insecure (HBO), for which she was nominated for a 2019 NAACP Image Award; voices characters on DuckTales, Bojack Horseman, and Bob’s Burgers; and can be seen in Love, Simon as well as the upcoming films Sonic the Hedgehog and Wonder Woman 1984. She is a staunch advocate for the arts and arts education, having worked with the Upright Citizens Brigade Theatre, KIPP NYC College Prep High School, Arena Stage, Los Angeles Public Libraries, the Young Storytellers, and the Story Pirates.
In addition to appearing as a regular at The World-Famous Comedy Store in Hollywood, Punkie Johnson has appeared on Corporate on Comedy Central, Adam Ruins Everything on TruTV, Please Understand Me on Amazon, and Abamed's Ramadan Diary on Comedy Central Digital, and will appear in the upcoming film The Opening Act opposite Jimmy O. Yang and Bill Burr.

*Front Row* is a key program of Cal Performances’ Berkeley RADICAL (Research and Development Initiative in Creativity Arts and Learning) initiative, which cultivates the artistic literacy of future audiences and connects some of the most innovative artists in the world with the intellectual capital of UC Berkeley. The Student Curators of Cal Performances conceive and participate in all aspects of producing *Front Row*, with the aim of engaging the UC Berkeley student population in timely cultural issues. Under the mentorship of Cal Performances staff, student curators select and recruit the headline artist, drawing from a wish list of acclaimed Bay Area-based artists. The inaugural *Front Row* event in 2016 was hosted by Metallica drummer and co-founder Lars Ulrich, and in 2017 Daniel Handler, A.K.A. Lemony Snicket, hosted the second annual event. Margaret Cho and Friends was third *Front Row*, presented in 2018, and featured the outspoken comedian along with fellow Asian-American comedians Ali Wong, Aparna Nancherla, and Hari Kondabolu in a program centered on issues of race, identity, and power.

The Student Curators of Cal Performances are a diverse group of 10 undergraduate students at UC Berkeley representing a wide range of academic pursuits. The declared majors of those on the curatorial team include peace and conflict studies, molecular and environmental biology, economics, legal studies, English, and theater. This year’s group includes four returning members from the 2018 Front Row curatorial cohort, and three of the students on the committee are also members of the Student Ambassadors for the Arts (SAFTA). New members of the committee were recruited in an open call to campus by Cal Performances, and all students on the curatorial team volunteer their time.

*Front Row* is generously supported by The Wallace Foundation and Chevron.

**Ticket Information**

Tickets for Front Row with W. Kamau Bell and Friends on Wednesday, March 6 at 7pm in Zellerbach Hall are $5 and are available exclusively to current UC Berkeley students. There is a ticket limit of one per person online at [calperformances.org](http://calperformances.org) or via telephone at (510) 642-9988. An additional
ticket may be purchased (for a maximum of two per person) in person at the Zellerbach Hall Ticket Office with a valid UC Berkeley ID. Tickets are general admission.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Wednesday, March 6, 7pm

Special Event

Front Row with W. Kamau Bell and Friends

Program: Cal Performances presents the fourth annual Front Row event, curated by a team of UC Berkeley students. Sociopolitical comedian, cultural commentator, and radio and television host W. Kamau Bell is joined by fellow comedian Roy Wood Jr, actress Natasha Rothwell, and comedian Punkie Johnson in a program of stand-up comedy performance, conversation, and Q&A that celebrates the power and presence of African-American artists and entertainers as leaders, cultural critics, and change makers. Front Row is designed specifically by UC Berkeley students for UC Berkeley students.

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