Saturday, January 18, 2014, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Chick Corea, piano
Béla Fleck, banjo

Duets

Jazz at Cal Performances is sponsored by Nadine Tang and Bruce Smith.
Cal Performances’ 2013–2014 season is sponsored by Wells Fargo.
When his grandfather bought him a banjo in September 1973, it became his full-time passion. That week, Mr. Fleck entered New York City's High School of Music and Art. Living in New York City, Mr. Fleck was exposed to a wide variety of musical experiences. Particularly impressive was a concert by Return to Forever, featuring Chick Corea and Stanley Clarke. This concert encouraged further experimenting with bebop and jazz on the banjo, signs of things to come.

After high school, Mr. Fleck moved to Boston to play with Jack Tottle’s Tasty Licks, and at 19 years old made his first solo banjo album, Crossing the Tracks, on Rounder Records. After the breakup of Tasty Licks, Mr. Fleck spent a summer on the streets of Boston playing with bassist Mark Schatz. He and Mr. Fleck moved to Lexington, Kentucky, to form Spectrum, which toured until 1981. While in Spectrum, he and Mr. Schatz traveled to California and Nashville to record his second album, Natural Bridge, with David Grisman, Mark O’Connor, Ricky Skaggs, Darol Anger, Mike Marshall, and other great players.

That same year, Mr. Fleck joined the progressive bluegrass band New Grass Revival, lead by Sam Bush on mandolin, fiddle, and vocals. With the addition of Pat Flynn on guitar and John Cowan on bass and vocals, New Grass Revival took bluegrass music to new limits, exciting audiences and critics alike. Through the course of five albums, they charted new territory with their blend of bluegrass, rock, and country music.

During the 1980s, Mr. Fleck also recorded a series of solo albums for Rounder, including the groundbreaking 1988 album Drive. He also collaborated with Mr. Bush, Jerry Douglas, Edgar Meyer, and Mark O’Connor in an acoustic super group called Strength in Numbers, whose MCA release, The Telluride Sessions, is also considered an evolutionary statement by the acoustic music community.

In 1988, Dick Van Kleek, Artistic Director for PBS’s Lonesome Pine series, offered Mr. Fleck a solo show, for which Mr. Fleck assembled a band with harmonicist Howard Levy, bassist Victor Wooten, and percussionist Roy Wooten. The resulting televised concert became the first performance of Béla Fleck and the Flecktones.

The Flecktones’ self-titled CD, released in 1990, was nominated for a Grammy, and the band’s second recording, Flight of the Cosmic Hippo, followed suit. Over the years, the Flecktones have shared the stage with the Dave Matthews Band, Sting, Bonnie Raitt, and the Grateful Dead, and their albums have featured guest contributions from artists as diverse as Chick Corea, Bruce Hornsby, Branford Marsalis, John Medeski, Andy Statman, the Alash Group, and Mr. Matthews.

In 2006, the band released The Hidden Land, which won the Grammy for Best Contemporary Jazz Album in 2007. In 2009, Jingle All the Way, the band’s holiday album, won the Grammy for Pop Instrumental Album.

Any world-class musician born with the names Béla (for Bartók), Anton (for Dvořák), and Leos (for Janáček) would seem destined to play classical music, and in 2001 Mr. Fleck made the classical connection with Perpetual Motion, his acclaimed Sony Classical recording, which won a pair of Grammys, including Best Classical Crossover Album.