

CONTACT: **Louisa Spier**
Cal Performances
(510) 643-6714
lspier@calperformances.org

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: October 14, 2021

Updated in red October 21, 2021

[Press Room](#)



Images of Angélique Kidjo are available for download from the Cal Performances [press room](#).

**CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS
2021–22 SEASON ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE
ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO**

**PERFORMING HER ACCLAIMED REINTERPRETATION OF
THE TALKING HEADS' *REMAIN IN LIGHT*
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2021
IN ZELLERBACH HALL**

AND THE **BAY AREA PREMIERE
OF HER NEW MUSICAL THEATER WORK
YEMANDJA: A STORY OF AFRICA
PART OF CAL PERFORMANCES' 2021–22 SEASON'S
ILLUMINATIONS: "PLACE AND DISPLACEMENT" SERIES,
SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2022
IN ZELLERBACH HALL**

Kidjo will participate in activities with campus partners, faculty, and students as part of her season-long UC Berkeley residency

Berkeley, October 14, 2021 — Cal Performances at UC Berkeley welcomes singer, composer, activist, and humanitarian **Angélique Kidjo** as the organization’s first season-long artist-in-residence, visiting for two performances and participating in an array of public programs and collaborations with students, faculty, and campus partners. A formidable presence on international stages, Kidjo is a four-time Grammy winner and was recently named one of *Time* magazine’s “100 Most Influential People of 2021” for her work as a performer, mentor, and cultural ambassador. The Benin-born singer has been honored for her activist work by the World Economic Forum and Amnesty International, and was included on the BBC’s list of Africa’s 50 most iconic figures and the *Guardian*’s list of the “Top 100 Most Inspiring Women in the World.” For her latest recording, *Mother Nature*, released earlier this year, she joins forces with some of the most captivating young creators of West African music, Afrobeat, Afro-pop, hip hop, and R&B, the results reflecting a newly heightened awareness of Kidjo’s own musical legacy and the remarkable influence she has had on younger generations.

In Berkeley, Kidjo performs her unique take on the Talking Heads’ seminal 1980 album *Remain in Light* on Friday, October 29 at 8pm in Zellerbach Hall; she returns to campus in the spring with the **Bay Area** premiere of *Yemandja: A Story of Africa*, a new musical theater production co-commissioned by Cal Performances, on Saturday April 23 at 8pm in Zellerbach Hall. *Yemandja* is presented as part of the 2021–22 season’s *Illuminations: “Place and Displacement”* series, which explores effects of migration and gentrification on individuals and communities through a wide variety of performances, public programs, and academic encounters.

“One of the great pleasures this season is welcoming Angélique Kidjo, who hasn’t appeared here in nearly a decade, back to Berkeley as our first season-long artist-in-residence,” said Jeremy Geffen, Cal Performances’ executive and artistic director. “Having been a presenter, collaborator and fan of her work for years, I know firsthand of her passion, conviction, and boundless curiosity. She brings inextinguishable energy—more so than most of her more junior colleagues, actually!—to bear in both her performances and her community outreach work.

“As an immigrant who fled a dictatorship in her home country of Benin, Angélique draws from her personal experiences a deep sense of conviction as well as profound passion for exploring the breadth and depth of the human experience—qualities that make her the perfect partner for our season-long *Illuminations* programming. And most importantly, she comes to our campus hoping to learn as much as to share. By inviting her to meet with faculty and students, Cal Performances reinforces and supports the university’s values of cultivating and sustaining a diverse, equitable, informed, and inclusive and accessible community.”

Kidjo anticipates working closely with students, remarking: “I want to know more about the driving force behind UC Berkeley students—how they see the future, how we can share the road with them, and how they can educate us—because they are living in a world changing faster than anything we have seen before.” She continues, “What is interesting for me as a mother, an artist, and as a citizen of this world, is the question, ‘How do we create a better world for one another, within all these challenges we are facing?’ We are going to have a great time together this season, but also come out of this with something substantial to build our future on.”

During her campus visits, Kidjo will work closely with students, faculty, and a host of campus partners in a series of academic collaborations and public programs rooted in issues close to her heart, including questions of equity in the fields of technology and data collection. Her residency this fall includes interactions with students at the Haas School of Business, the Mastercard Foundation Scholars, and others. Two panel discussions with UC Berkeley faculty taking place on Thursday, October 28 will be free and open to the public:

- **“Music, Diaspora, and the World,”** planned for 12–1:15pm in the Social Science Matrix conference room on the eighth floor of the Social Sciences Building (formerly Barrows Hall) is co-sponsored by Townsend Center for the Humanities and the Social Science Matrix. For it, Kidjo will join UC Berkeley faculty members Tianna Paschel, associate professor in the Department of African American Studies and the Department of Sociology; Ivy Mills, lecturer on the Visual and Literary Cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora; and Victoria Grubbs, Lecturer and Black Studies Collaboratory Postdoctoral Fellow, for a conversation

addressing the history and circulation of African musical forms and musicians, and their worldwide significance and social power.

- **“Place and Displacement: Bias in Our Algorithms and Society”** is presented in collaboration with the Division of Computing, Data Science, and Society, and is planned for 4–5:30pm in Zellerbach Hall. This panel discussion will feature Kidjo in conversation with Jennifer Chayes, Associate Provost of the Division of Computing, Data Science, and Society, and Dean of the School of Information; PhD candidate Devin Guillory, who works in the fields of computer vision and machine learning; and Nika Haghtalab, an assistant professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences. Experts in computer science and machine learning, the UC Berkeley faculty will join Kidjo to explore how algorithms and machine learning tools reflect the biases of individuals and the data used to train them. It will also touch on current research and promising interventions that aim to make algorithms more just and equitable.

Both sessions will be livestreamed and made available afterwards on the [Beyond the Stage](#) section of Cal Performances’ website. Advance registration is recommended at calperformances.org/beyond-the-stage.

Kidjo’s first visit to Berkeley this season features a performance of her acclaimed re-imagining of the Talking Heads’ landmark 1980 album *Remain in Light*. For her 2018 recording of this music, Kidjo partnered with hip-hop/R&B producer Jeff Bhasker (Rihanna, Kanye West, Drake, Jay-Z) to connect the record’s Afropop influences to her own musical interests, which cover the African continent. For the project, Kidjo departs from the original’s bare, “new wave” sound through lush horn arrangements, propulsive percussion, and soaring vocal harmonies, mining the songs for topics that resonate with her today, and adding her own lyrics in languages from her home country of Benin.

Kidjo returns in the spring semester to perform the **Bay Area** premiere of the Cal Performances-commissioned *Yemandja: A Story of Africa*. Named after a Yoruban deity, *Yemandja* is Kidjo’s first foray into musical theater, a parable about gods and humans that explores through song what happens when people are robbed of their culture. In this fully staged production—directed by

Chicago-based director, actor, and playwright Cheryl Lynn Bruce and featuring stage design by the revered contemporary painter Kerry James Marshall—Kidjo explores themes of love, betrayal, honor, and revenge against the backdrop of slavery in 19th-century West Africa. Kidjo sings a libretto written by her daughter, Naïma Hebrail Kidjo, supported by a full cast of musicians, singers, dancers, and actors.

Yemandja: A Story of Africa is co-commissioned by Cal Performances, Arts Emerson, the Broad Stage at Santa Monica College, Ruth and Stephen Hendel, the Kennedy Center, and MASS MoCA.

Ticket Information

Tickets for *Angélique Kidjo: Remain in Light* on Friday, October 29 at 8pm in Zellerbach Hall range from \$36–\$96 (prices subject to change). Tickets for *Angélique Kidjo: Yemandja: A Story of Africa* on Saturday, April 23 at 8pm in Zellerbach Hall range from \$36–\$88 (prices 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, at calperformances.org, and at the door. For more information about discounts, visit calperformances.org/discounts.

Proof of a COVID-19 vaccination is required for entry to Zellerbach Hall. Masks must be worn by all attendees throughout the events taking place there. More information about the precautions Cal Performances is taking to protect the health and safety of its audiences, performers, and staff can be found [on Cal Performances' COVID-19 Protocols page](#).

#

CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Friday, October 29, 8pm

Zellerbach Hall
Bancroft Way at Dana Street,
UC Berkeley campus

Pop Music

Angélique Kidjo
Remain in Light

Program: For one of her recent recording projects, global pop star and four-time Grammy Award winner Angélique Kidjo partnered with producer Jeff Bhasker (Rihanna, Kanye West, Drake, Jay-Z) to revisit, reimagine, and repatriate the Talking Heads' landmark 1980 album *Remain in Light*. Kidjo, Cal Performances' artist-in-residence for the 2021–22 season, is an artist with a gift for assimilating a

wide range of music into a sound that is completely her own and always infused with her powerfully positive message. Here, she connects with the record's original Afropop influences and filters its new-wave sensibility through her own musical interests—which cover the African continent—mining the songs for topics that resonate with her today and adding her own lyrics in languages from her home country of Benin.

Tickets: \$36–\$96 (prices subject to change)

Saturday, April 23, 8pm

Theater/Pop Music

Zellerbach Hall
Bancroft Way at Dana Street,
UC Berkeley campus

Angélique Kidjo

Yemandja: A Story of Africa (Bay Area Premiere, Cal Performances Co-commission)

Starring Angélique Kidjo

Conceived by Angélique Kidjo, Jean Hebrail, and Naïma Hebrail Kidjo

Book and Lyrics by Naïma Hebrail Kidjo

Music by Angélique Kidjo and Jean Hebrail

Developed with and Directed by Cheryl Lynn Bruce

Kerry James Marshall, *production designer*

Darryl Archibald, *music director*

Kathy Perkins, *lighting designer*

Rasean Davonte Johnson, *projections designer*

Mary Jane Marcasiano, *costume designer*

Beatrice Capote, *choreographer*

Program: In her first foray into musical theater, Cal Performances' 2021–22 season artist-in-residence Angélique Kidjo explores themes of love, betrayal, honor, and revenge against the backdrop of slavery in 19th-century West Africa. *Yemandja*, named for a Yoruban deity, is a panoramic work of magical realism, a parable about gods and humans that illuminates through song what happens when people are robbed of their culture. Kidjo sings backed by a live band and a chorus of dancer-singers, in a fully staged production directed by actor, director, and playwright Cheryl Lynn Bruce and featuring stage design by the revered painter Kerry James Marshall; the libretto is by Kidjo's daughter, Naïma Hebrail Kidjo. Last year, Kidjo was honored as one of the BBC's 100 most inspiring and influential women from around the world, and most recently *Time* magazine named her one of the "100 Most Influential People of 2021" for her work as a performer, mentor, and cultural ambassador.

This performance is part of Cal Performances' 2021–22 *Illuminations: "Place and Displacement"* series, which explores effects of migration and gentrification on individuals and communities through performances, public programs, and academic encounters.

Tickets: \$36–\$88 (prices subject to change)

Fall Residency Activities

Panel Discussion: “Music, Diaspora, and the World”

Thursday, October 28, 12noon–1:15pm

Social Science Matrix Conference Room

Eighth Floor, Social Sciences Building (formerly Barrows Hall)

UC Berkeley campus

A panel discussion, co-sponsored by the Townsend Center for the Humanities and the Social Science Matrix, featuring Cal Performances’ 2021–22 artist-in-residence **Angélique Kidjo** and UC Berkeley faculty members **Tianna Paschel**, associate professor in the Department of African American Studies and the Department of Sociology; **Ivy Mills**, lecturer on the Visual and Literary Cultures of Africa and the African Diaspora; and **Victoria Grubbs**, lecturer and Black Studies Collaboratory Postdoctoral Fellow. The conversation will address the history and circulation of African musical forms and musicians and their worldwide significance and social power. Panelists will explore questions about how musical innovations take place, how African music is recognized and received in different parts of the world, and the connection between music and the struggle for social justice.

Tickets: The “Music, Diaspora, and the World” panel discussion is free and open to the public. It will also be livestreamed, with a video recording made available afterwards on the *Beyond the Stage* section of the Cal Performances website. Advance registration is recommended at <https://forms.gle/bkHHupknNxKAbd3N6>.

Panel Discussion: “Place and Displacement: Bias in Our Algorithms and Society”

Thursday, October 28, 4–5:30pm

Zellerbach Hall

Bancroft Way at Dana Street, UC Berkeley campus

This panel discussion will feature **Angélique Kidjo** in conversation with **Jennifer Chayes**, Associate Provost of the Division of Computing, Data Science, and Society, and Dean of the School of Information joined by PhD candidate **Devin Guillory**, who works in the fields of computer vision and machine learning, and **Nika Haghtalab**, an assistant professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences. These UC Berkeley experts in computer science and machine learning will join Kidjo to explore how algorithms and machine learning tools reflect the biases of individuals and the data used to train them. The discussion will also touch on current research and promising interventions that aim to make algorithms more just and equitable.

Tickets: The “Place and Displacement: Bias in Our Algorithms and Society” panel discussion is free and open to the public. It will also be livestreamed, with a video recording made available afterwards on the *Beyond the Stage* section of the Cal Performances website. Advance registration **is recommended at calperformances.org/beyond-the-stage**.