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[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
STARRING IN THE BAY AREA PREMIERE
OF HER NEW MUSIC THEATER WORK
YEMANDJA
SATURDAY, APRIL 23, 2022 AT 8PM
AT ZELLERBACH HALL**

Co-commissioned by Cal Performances, *Yemandja* is part of the 2021–22 season’s *Illuminations: “Place and Displacement”* series

Berkeley, March 24, 2022 — Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents its 2021–22 artist-in-residence **Angélique Kidjo** in the Bay Area premiere of *Yemandja*, a new music theater production co-commissioned by Cal Performances, on Saturday, April 23 at 8pm at 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.

Yemandja, named for a Yoruba deity, is a panoramic work of magical realism, a parable about gods and humans that illuminates through song what can happen when people are robbed of their culture. Starring in the principal role, Kidjo sings backed by a live band and a chorus of dancer-singers. The fully staged production was developed with and directed by Cheryl Lynn Bruce and features stage design by the revered visual artist Kerry James Marshall; the libretto is by Kidjo's daughter, Naïma Hebrail Kidjo; the music, by Kidjo and her husband, Jean Hebrail.

Kidjo is a four-time Grammy winner and has earned immense recognition over the years for her musical prowess, though *Yemandja* represents the artist's first major foray into stage acting.

"This has been in me since I was a kid, I heard the word slave when I was 9-years-old, and wanted to understand more. And to find a way to build bridges, not pointing fingers at each other, [but] working together to move forward," shared Kidjo. "I've been thinking about this for so long, and what Naïma has written is exactly what was deeply imbedded in my soul. It's humbling and scary and joyful. We don't realize how we've impacted our kids, how they absorb everything we say, until it comes out."

Throughout her decades in the spotlight, Kidjo has proven a powerful force both on and off the stage. She was 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*, Kidjo joined forces with young creators of West African music, Afrobeat, Afro-pop, hip-hop, and R&B, heightening the awareness of her own musical legacy and the remarkable influence she has had on the next generation.

During her time on the UC Berkeley campus earlier this academic year, Kidjo worked closely with students, faculty, and a host of campus partners through collaborations and public programs rooted in issues close to her heart. Two panel discussions Kidjo participated in are now available for streaming on the *Beyond the Stage* section of Cal Performances' website. "**Music, Diaspora, and the World,**" was co-sponsored by the Townsend Center for the Humanities and the Social Science Matrix. For this event, Kidjo was joined by 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, African American Studies lecturer and Black Studies Collaboratory postdoctoral fellow. Their conversation addressed the history, circulation, social power, and worldwide significance of African musical forms and musicians. **“Place and Displacement: Bias in Our Algorithms and Society”** was presented in collaboration with UC Berkeley’s Division of Computing, Data Science, and Society. The event featured 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 computer vision and machine learning; and Nika Haghtalab, assistant professor in the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Sciences. These experts joined Kidjo to explore how algorithms and machine learning tools reflect the biases of individuals and the data used to train them. It also touched on current research and promising interventions that aim to make algorithms more just and equitable.

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

Book and Lyrics by Naïma Hebrail Kidjo.

Executive Producer Xtina Parks. Produced by THE OFFICE performing arts + film.

Co-commissioned by Cal Performances, ArtsEmerson, The Broad Stage at Santa Monica College, Brown Arts Institute, Ruth and Stephen Hendel, Holland Festival, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, MASS MoCA and Yale Schwarzman Center.

Ticket Information

Tickets for *Angélique Kidjo’s Yemandja* on Saturday, April 23 at 8pm at 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. Information about the most current COVID-19 safety requirements for entering Zellerbach Hall can be found at calperformances.org/safety-first.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Saturday, April 23, 8pm

Theater/Pop Music

Zellerbach Hall
Bancroft Way at Dana Street,
UC Berkeley campus

Angélique Kidjo

Yemandja (Bay Area Premiere, Cal Performances Co-commission)

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*

Mary Jane Marcasiano, *costume designer*

Kathy A. Perkins, *lighting designer*

Rasean Davonte Johnson, *projections designer*

Beatrice Capote, *choreographer*

Kumi Ishizawa, *sound designer*

John Samorian, *music director*

Iyvon E., *dramaturg*

Ann C. James, *sensitivity specialist*

Andrea Zee, *casting*

Program: In her first foray into stage acting, Cal Performances' 2021–22 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. Starring in the principal role, 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; the music, by Kidjo and her husband, Jean Hebrail. In 2020, Kidjo was honored as one of the BBC's 100 most inspiring and influential women from around the world, and *Time* magazine named her one of the "100 Most Influential People of 2021" for her work as a performer, mentor, and cultural ambassador.

Yemandja 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.

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