

For Immediate Release: January 29, 2024, **updated in red February 12, 2024**

[Cal Performances Press Room](#)



Photos of Taylor Mac & Matt Ray's *Bark of Millions* are available for download from Cal Performances' [Press Room](#). Two videos from *Bark of Millions* are available on YouTube; one showing the excerpt from an energetic [performance](#) of the song "Nzingha Mbande" featuring Steffanie Christi'an; the other is an excerpt of [Taylor Mac](#) performing "Bark of Millions," the opening ballad of the production.

## CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS

A FEATURED PERFORMANCE OF THE 2023–24 SEASON  
*ILLUMINATIONS: "INDIVIDUAL & COMMUNITY" SERIES*

### THE WEST COAST PREMIERE OF **TAYLOR MAC & MATT RAY'S *BARK OF MILLIONS*** **A ROCK OPERA MEDITATION ON QUEERNESS** FRIDAY–SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23–25, 2024 AT ZELLERBACH HALL

Berkeley, CA, January 29, 2024, **updated in red on February 12, 2024**—Cal Performances presents the centerpiece of its 2023-24 season with the West Coast premiere performances of Taylor Mac and Matt Ray's *Bark of Millions: A Parade Trance Extravaganza for the Living Library of the Deviant Theme* on Friday–Saturday, February 23–24 at 7pm and Sunday, February

25 at 3pm at Zellerbach Hall. MacArthur Fellow, Kennedy Prize winner, and Pulitzer Prize finalist Taylor Mac and Obie Award-winning composer Matt Ray collaborate on this epic four-hour spectacle, which is part rock opera, part reimaged pride parade. Intended as both a celebration and a gift to the queer canon, the production features 55 original songs, one to mark each year since the first Gay Pride parade held in 1970, making it in Taylor's own words, "54 songs plus an extra as a cherry on top." Every song in this marathon production is inspired by a different queer person in history, spanning from ancient Egypt to leaders of the drag movement in America. (A story about five of them can be found on [Cal Performances' website](#).) Through music, dance, and drag spectacle, the production subverts and deconstructs conventional narratives and joyfully, transgressively celebrates queerness in all its forms.

Co-directed by **Niegel Smith** and **Faye Driscoll** and featuring **Machine Dazzle's** signature maximalist costume design, *Bark of Millions* will be brought to life at Zellerbach Hall by an international ensemble of 22 artists, including: **Ari Folman-Cohen**, **Bernice "Boom Boom" Brooks**, **Chris Giarmo**, **Dana Lyn**, **El Beh**, **Greg Glassman**, **Jack Fuller** (Vocal Captain), **Joel E. Mateo**, **Jules Skloot**, **Le Gateau Chocolat**, **Lisa "Paz" Parrott**, **Machine Dazzle**, **Mama Alto**, **Marika Hughes**, **Matt Ray**, **Sean Donovan** (Associate Choreographer), **Steffanie Christi'an**, **Stephen Quinn**, **Taylor Mac**, **Thornetta Davis**, **Viva DeConcini**, and **Wes Olivier**. Mac and his artistic community are best known for his groundbreaking retelling of American history, *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, the subject of a [90-minute documentary](#), now streaming on Max, that captures the marathon, 24-hour immersive concert that garnered Mac significant national and international acclaim.

Taylor Mac is known for cultivating a deeply collaborative ethos in his performance works, and has described his creative process as a series of "invitations" and "offerings" between artists involved in a project—as composers, lyricists, performers, designers, accompanists—and the audience. His desire is for the individuals contributing to his spectacles to retain and nourish their identities within the group performance setting. This translates to an inclusive and generous approach towards his audience as well, as Mac expects attendees to process his works on their own terms and discover connections and revelations rooted in their personal experience.

The performances of *Bark of Millions* are part of Cal Performances' *Illuminations*: "Individual & Community" programming for the 2023–24 season. *Illuminations* connects groundbreaking UC Berkeley scholarship to themes addressed by the world-class music, dance, and theater presented by Cal Performances. The series includes performances, panel discussions, lecture demonstrations, Q&As, and more, shedding light on pressing topics that have the power to transform our understanding of the world and shape the future. This season's theme, "Individual & Community," explores the tensions that come into play while balancing the interests of the individual with those of the group.

“We didn’t know what this show would be when we invited Taylor Mac,” says Jeremy Geffen, executive and artistic director of Cal Performances. “But it seemed like the perfect opportunity to introduce the theme this season of ‘Individual and Community,’ which is very much of the moment and informs our national and international dialogue.” *Illuminations* programming in general, he adds, “was created as a way to reflect on pressing issues of our time through the performing arts, which invite us to become empathetic: you’re quite literally seeing the world through someone else’s eyes. The direct, emotive connection that comes through the performing arts is a powerful tool.”

Mac has said, “What we are trying to do with this show is explore queer sexuality without heterosexuality dictating what that is ... without any kind of cis or dominant culture leading us. And it’s all done through singing songs. I make work for queer people, and if the straight people want to come, please do!... We will make you queer by the end of the evening. And we don't really even do it. You do it. You do all the work yourself. All we do is sing songs.”

To provide context for *Bark of Millions* and other *Illuminations*: “Individual and Community” programming, Cal Performances produced [a video](#) featuring UC Berkeley faculty and scholars, and visiting artists, including Mac, exploring the concept of intersectionality as a framework for understanding how individuals’ identities result in unique combinations of discrimination and privilege. Mac explains, “We live in a culture that asks us to reduce ourselves to one thing. Usually, when we go to see work that has a community aspect to it, it asks us to root for one team—like a sporting game or one god in church. Art can break up the concept of homogeneity. It can complicate things.” Mac’s ideas are also featured in a second Cal Performances’ *Illuminations* [video](#) about individual liberties and community needs, which he says, “It all comes from a concept that my drag mother gave me, which is like, if you're not having fun at the party, go make another party.”

A list of *Illuminations* performances for the 2023–24 season can be found at [calperformances.org/illuminations](https://calperformances.org/illuminations), and more information about related community events and campus partners is available at [Beyond the Stage](#). UC Berkeley’s [Othering & Belonging Institute](#) serves as *Illuminations*’ lead partner in the 2023-24 season.

Lead support for *Illuminations* is provided by the Koret Foundation.

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CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS**

Friday, February 23, 7pm

Saturday, February 24, 7pm

Sunday, February 25, 3pm

**Zellerbach Hall**

Bancroft Way at Dana Street

UC Berkeley campus

*Theater*

**Taylor Mac & Matt Ray's**

*Bark of Millions*

**A Parade Trance Extravaganza for the Living Library of the Deviant Theme** (West Coast Premiere)

**Taylor Mac**, *writer, co-director*

**Matt Ray**, *composer, music director*

**Niegel Smith**, *co-director*

**Faye Driscoll**, *co-director, choreographer*

**Machine Dazzle**, *costume designer*

**John Torres**, *lighting designer*

**Brendan Aanes**, *sound designer*

**Oscar Escobedo**, *props designer*

**Zach Blunner**, *co-props designer*

**Ensemble:** Ari Folman-Cohen, Bernice "Boom Boom" Brooks, Chris Giarmo, Dana Lyn, El Beh, Greg Glassman, Jack Fuller (Vocal Captain), Joel E. Mateo, Jules Skloot, Le Gateau Chocolat, Lisa "Paz" Parrott, Machine Dazzle, Mama Alto, Marika Hughes, Matt Ray, Sean Donovan (Associate Choreographer), Steffanie Christi'an, Stephen Quinn, Taylor Mac, Thornetta Davis, Viva DeConcini, Wes Olivier

Produced by Pomegranate Arts and Nature's Darlings

Creative & Executive Producers: Linda Brumbach & Alisa E. Regas

Commissioned by Pomegranate Arts and BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music)

Co-commissioned by Sydney Opera House and the Berliner Festpiele with additional support by the Ron Beller & Jennifer Moses Family Foundation and Hal Philipps. Residencies at Kaatsbaan Cultural Park, MASS MoCA-North Adams, MA, Irish Arts Center-New York City, and PEAK Performances in the Alexander Kasser Theater, Montclair State University-Montclair, NJ.

**Program:**

Taylor Mac, the MacArthur Fellow and Pulitzer Prize finalist, visits with the West Coast premiere of *Bark of Millions*, a "parade trance extravaganza." *Bark of Millions* is a four-hour rock opera meditation on queerness featuring 55 original songs (one song per year since the first Gay Pride parade) inspired

by queer antecedents throughout world history and performed by a diverse cast of 13 ensemble members and a band of 9 musicians. As in his legendary retelling of American history, *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, Mac, his cast, and longtime collaborators Matt Ray (music) and Machine Dazzle (costumes) use music, dance, and drag spectacle to subvert and deconstruct conventional narratives, and joyfully, transgressively celebrate queerness in all its forms.

[An Illuminations: “Individual & Community” event.](#)

**Tickets:** \$42–\$158 (prices subject to change). UC Berkeley students can access exclusive discounts, including half-price tickets in all sections of the theater, and \$10 tickets for a limited number of prime seats for the Fri, Feb 23 performance that go on sale Fri, Feb 9 at 12noon PT as part of Cal Performances’ [Golden Bear Circle program](#). More information about student tickets and discounts is available at [calperformances.org/ucb-students](http://calperformances.org/ucb-students).

Tickets for all performances are available at [calperformances.org](http://calperformances.org), by phone at (510) 642-9988, or in person at the Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall, Tuesday–Friday, 12–5:30pm and Saturday–Sunday, 1–5pm. For information about discounts, visit [calperformances.org/discounts](http://calperformances.org/discounts).

### **Live Audio Description and Haptic Tour**

Live audio descriptions and a pre-performance **haptic tour** for blind and visually impaired audience members are available for the Fri, Feb 23 performance. **Haptic tours allow patrons to experience—through touch and their own movement— the space, performers, costumes and objects in addition to key movement elements in the performance.** Headsets and space on the tour may be reserved by contacting the Cal Performances Ticket Office at (510) 642-9988 or [tickets@calperformances.org](mailto:tickets@calperformances.org). Additional information about services available for patrons with disabilities can be found at [calperformances.org/accessibility](http://calperformances.org/accessibility).

*Bark of Millions* contains moments of strobe lighting, nudity and mature content and is intended for adult audiences.

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