

For Immediate Release: April 6, 2023

[Press Room](#)



Images of Michel van der Aa's *Blank Out* are available for download from the Cal Performances [press room](#).

CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS

A FEATURED PERFORMANCE OF THE 2022–23 SEASON

ILLUMINATIONS: "HUMAN AND MACHINE" SERIES

WEST COAST PREMIERE OF MICHEL VAN DER AA'S *BLANK OUT*

FEATURING SOPRANO MIAH PERSSON
FRIDAY–SATURDAY, APRIL 28–29
AT ZELLERBACH HALL

Audience members will don 3D glasses for this multimedia performance that explores memory, loss, and grief inspired by the life and work of South African poet Ingrid Jonker

Berkeley, CA, April 6, 2023—Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents the West Coast premiere of Michel van der Aa's acclaimed chamber opera *Blank Out* on Friday and Saturday, April 28–29, at 8pm at Zellerbach Hall. The multimedia work features soprano **Miah Persson**, who last appeared at Cal Performances in The English Concert's presentation of Handel's *Solomon* in March, with video performances by baritone **Roderick Williams** and the **Netherlands Chamber Choir**. For the performance, Persson interacts with a 3D backdrop (audience members will wear 3D

glasses), an electronic soundscape, and live video projection in an exploration of memory, loss, and grief inspired by the life and work of South African poet Ingrid Jonker.

The performances are part of Cal Performances' 2022–23 season *Illuminations*: “Human and Machine” programming, which explores the many roles technology plays in both catalyzing and challenging creative expression and human communication. In *Blank Out*, van der Aa uses recording and playback technologies to create a new realm of storytelling, where real life blurs with memories of the past, and video and electronic music techniques entwine to invoke the textured, fragmented experience of processing personal tragedy.

In *Blank Out*, Miah Persson is the sole performer onstage, and she interacts with video of her character's grown son (played by baritone Roderick Williams), layering her live singing on top of recordings of her own voice as well as the Netherlands Chamber Choir. She also films herself as she navigates a miniature set of a country house, the imagery projected in real time to create the 3D backdrop that she inhabits onstage. The past and present blur as Persson and Williams reveal and process a shared trauma.

Composer, film and stage director, and librettist Michel van der Aa is a recipient of both the Johannes Vermeer Award and a Grawemeyer Award, and is celebrated for his multidisciplinary creations that combine contemporary composition with film, narrative, theatrical staging, and electronic media. In March 2022 the Armory in New York City presented his opera *Uplaaa*, starring Roderick Williams and Julia Bullock, a work that blended live performance, technical innovation, and immersive film and, to critical acclaim. Van der Aa is currently composing a new opera using AI technology and he participates as a judge in Cal Performances' [Human & Machine Song Contest](#), with winners to be announced on April 22.

A post-performance talk with Michel van der Aa and Cal Performances Executive and Artistic Director Jeremy Geffen will take place following the Friday, April 28 performance of *Blank Out*. It is free to all ticketholders that evening.

ABOUT ILLUMINATIONS

Illuminations programming connects groundbreaking UC Berkeley scholarship to themes addressed by the world-class music, dance, and theater artists 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. More information about *Illuminations* can be found at calperformances.org/illuminations.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Friday, April 28, 8pm
Saturday, April 29, 8pm

Zellerbach Hall
Bancroft Way at Dana Street,
UC Berkeley campus

New Music, Theater/Opera

Michel van der Aa's *Blank Out* (West Coast premiere)

Miah Persson, *soprano*
Roderick Williams, *baritone* (film)
Netherlands Chamber Choir (film)
Klaas Stok, *conductor* (film)
Michel van der Aa, *composer, film, and stage director*

Sophie Motley, *dramaturg*
Floriaan Ganzevoort, *lighting designer*
Frank van der Weij, *production development*
Thom Stuart, *movement advisor*
Joost Rietdijk, *director of photography*
Melvin Kant, *film producer*
William Griffioen, *film producer*

Program:

Soprano Miah Persson performs at the center of *Blank Out*, Michel van der Aa's innovative chamber opera about tragedy, memory, and loss. Persson is the sole performer onstage, but throughout the work, she interacts with a video of her character's grown son (baritone Roderick Williams), sings with a recording of the Netherlands Chamber Choir and with layered recordings of her own voice, and films herself as she navigates a miniature set of a country house, the imagery projected in real time to create the 3D backdrop that she inhabits onstage. (Audience members will wear 3D glasses.) In van der Aa's creation, what is real and now melds with what is remembered and felt as Persson and Williams reveal a shared trauma, inspired by the life and work of South African poet Ingrid Jonker.

A post-performance artist talk with Michel van der Aa and Cal Performances Executive and Artistic Director Jeremy Geffen will take place following the Friday, April 28 performance of *Blank Out*. Free to all ticketholders.

This performance is a 2022–23 season [Illuminations: “Human and Machine”](#) event.

Tickets: \$45–\$78 (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 these performances as part of Cal Performances’ Golden Bear Circle program. More information about student tickets and discounts is available at calperformances.org/ucb-students. For information about other discounts, visit calperformances.org/discounts.

Tickets are available at 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, 1–5 pm.

COVID-19: Masking is required inside Zellerbach Hall auditorium, and is strongly recommended, though not required, for indoor lobby/waiting areas as well as outdoor spaces. Up-to-date vaccination is strongly recommended, though not required for entry. The latest information on Cal Performances’ COVID-19 safety policies is available at calperformances.org/safety.

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