

For Immediate Release: January 31, 2025, **Updated February 5, 2025**  
[Cal Performances Press Room](#)



Photos associated with William Kentridge's *The Great Yes, The Great No* are available for download from the Cal Performances [Press Room](#).

A video about the making of William Kentridge's *The Great Yes, The Great No*, can be viewed on the Cal Performances [YouTube](#) page.

The historical references in William Kentridge's *The Great Yes, The Great No* are described in [an article on Cal Performances' \*Beyond the Stage\* blog](#).

**CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS  
A FEATURED PERFORMANCE OF THIS SEASON'S  
ILLUMINATIONS: "FRACTURED HISTORY" SERIES**

**BAY AREA PREMIERE  
WILLIAM KENTRIDGE'S  
*THE GREAT YES, THE GREAT NO*  
FRIDAY–SUNDAY, MARCH 14–16  
AT ZELLERBACH HALL**

**A pre-performance panel discussion will be held in partnership with  
UC Berkeley's Center for Interdisciplinary Critical Inquiry  
Friday, March 14 at 6pm at Zellerbach Playhouse**

**Berkeley, CA, January 31, 2025, Updated February 5, 2025**—Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents the Bay Area premiere of *The Great Yes, The Great No*, South African artist **William Kentridge's** latest creation for the stage, on Friday–Saturday, March 14–15 at 8pm and Sunday, March 16 at 3pm at Zellerbach Hall. The performances mark Kentridge's eagerly anticipated return to Berkeley following the success of his production *SIBYL*—along with other related residency performances and talks—during the 2022–23 season. This new work, conceived in collaboration

with choral conductor and dancer **Nhlanhla Mahlangu** and theater maker **Phala Ookeditse Phala**, is a chamber opera set on a 1941 sea voyage from Marseille to Martinique.

Co-commissioned by Cal Performances, *The Great Yes, The Great No* is rooted in the historic wartime escape from Vichy France by, among others, the surrealist André Breton, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Cuban artist Wifredo Lam—and fictionalizes the narrative by adding a colorful cast of historical characters to the passenger list that includes Josephine Baker, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin. Kentridge assembles this menagerie of thinkers, makers, and revolutionaries to make connections between surrealism and the anticolonial Négritude movement, a cultural and political movement founded by a group of African and Caribbean students in Paris in the 1930s who sought to reclaim the value of Blackness and African culture. Kentridge’s intention in the work is to explore anti-rational approaches to language and image inspired by both movements. The presentation is part of Cal Performances’ *Illuminations: “Fractured History”* programming for the 2024–25 season.

Internationally acclaimed for his visual art, opera, and theater productions, Kentridge deploys his signature visual language in the new production, combining animated drawings, video projection, masks, shadow play, and bold sculptural costumes with spoken and projected text. Surrealist imagery merges with real-life events, South African choral music, dance, and poetry. More about what audiences can expect to experience in *The Great Yes, The Great No* is described in an in-depth article available on Cal Performances’ [Beyond the Stage](#) blog.

The cast for *The Great Yes, The Great No* includes performers Xolisile Bongwana, Hamilton Dhlamini, William Harding, Neil McCarthy, Tony Miyambo, and Nancy Nkusi with dancers Thulani Chauke and Teresa Phuti Mojela. The all-female chorus features singers Anathi Conjwa, Asanda Hanabe, Zandile Hlatshwayo, Khokho Madlala, Nokuthula Magubane, Mapule Moloji, and Nomathamsanqa Ngoma singing in eight different languages: English; French; and South African siSwati, isiZulu, isiXhosa, Setswana, Xitsonga, and Sepedi. Kentridge felt it was important that the performers sing in their native languages as a more direct means of expression and communication. English translations of the sung texts will be projected on a backdrop screen. The ensemble of musicians includes Marika Hughes on cello; Nathan Koci on accordion and banjo; Tlale Makhene on percussion; and Thandi Ntuli on piano.

*The Great Yes, The Great No* is one of eight *Illuminations* presentations this season that connect with additional public events and academic encounters. Through this “Fractured History” series, Cal Performances investigates collective memory and the complex evolution of historical narratives to consider what role the performing arts might play in restoring nuance to our understanding of the past, and how that understanding shapes our present and future. As part of *Illuminations*, a pre-performance panel entitled “Surreal Histories,” co-hosted by UC Berkeley’s [Center for Interdisciplinary Critical Inquiry](#) and moderated by the center’s director, Debarati Sanyal, is planned for Friday, March 14 from 6–7pm at Zellerbach Playhouse. Visit [calperformances.org/illuminations-2024-25](https://calperformances.org/illuminations-2024-25) to learn more.

Through Cal Performances’ Golden Bear Circle program, UC Berkeley students are eligible to purchase a limited number of \$10 tickets for the best seats in the house for the Friday, March 14 performance. These tickets go on sale starting at 12 noon on Friday, February 28. Information about student tickets and discounts is available at [calperformances.org/ucb-students](https://calperformances.org/ucb-students).

On Sunday, March 16 at 3pm, Cal Performances will offer live audio descriptions and a haptic access tour for blind and visually impaired audience members. Live audio descriptions are spoken by a professional audio describer through a wireless headset system with the intention of providing clear and engaging descriptions of the meaningful visual details of a performance. Haptic tours, taking place at 2:15pm, are a live pre-show tour, lasting 20-30 minutes, that allow patrons to experience—through touch and their own movement— the space, performers, costumes and allow objects in addition to key movement elements in the performance. Headsets and a 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](https://calperformances.org/accessibility).

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CALENDAR EDITORS PLEASE NOTE:

**CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS:**

**Friday, March 14, 8pm**

**Saturday, March 15, 8pm**

**Sunday, March 16, 3pm**

**Zellerbach Hall**, Bancroft Way at Dana Street, UC Berkeley campus

*Chamber Opera*

**William Kentridge's *The Great Yes, The Great No*** (Bay Area Premiere; Cal Performances Co-commission)

**William Kentridge**, *concept and director*

**Nhlanhla Mahlangu**, *associate director and choral composer*

**Phala O. Phala**, *associate director*

**Greta Goiris**, *costume designer*

**Sabine Theunissen**, *set designer*

**Tlale Makhene**, *music director*

**Mwenya Kabwe**, *dramaturg*

**Urs Schönebaum** and **Elena Gui**, *lighting designers*

**Žana Marović**, **Janus Fouché**, and **Joshua Trappler**, *projection editing and compositing*

**Duško Marović SASC**, *cinematographer*

**Kim Gunning**, *video control*

**Gavan Eckhart**, *sound designer*

Performers:

**Xolisile Bongwana**, **Hamilton Dhlamini**, **William Harding**, **Neil McCarthy**, **Tony Miyambo**, and **Nancy Nkusi**

Chorus:

**Anathi Conjwa**, **Asanda Hanabe**, **Zandile Hlatshwayo**, **Khokho Madlala**, **Nokuthula Magubane**, **Mapule Moloji**, and **Nomathamsanqa Ngoma**

Dancers:

**Thulani Chauke**, **Teresa Phuti Mojela**

Musicians:

**Marika Hughes**, *cello*

**Nathan Koci**, *accordion/banjo*

**Tlale Makhene**, *percussion*

**Thandi Ntuli**, *piano*

**Program:**

Internationally acclaimed for his visual art and theater productions, South African artist William Kentridge returns to UC Berkeley with his latest creation for the stage, a chamber opera set on a historic 1941 sea voyage from Marseille to Martinique. Conceived in collaboration with choral conductor and dancer Nhlanhla Mahlangu and theater maker Phala Ookeditse Phala, *The Great Yes, The Great No* is rooted in the the historic wartime escape from Vichy France by, among others, the surrealist André Breton, anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Cuban artist Wifredo Lam—and

fictionalizes the narrative by adding a colorful cast of historic characters to the passenger list that includes Josephine Baker, Leon Trotsky, and Joseph Stalin.

In Kentridge's hands, the ship becomes a fantastical menagerie of thinkers, makers, and revolutionaries in a production that merges real-life events with lush South African choral music, dance, poetry, and anti-rational approaches to language and image. Kentridge's visual inventiveness combines animated drawings, video projection, masks, shadow play, and bold sculptural costumes with spoken and projected text that explores the relationship between surrealism and the Négritude movement, an anti-colonial cultural and political movement founded by a group of African and Caribbean students in Paris in the 1930s who sought to reclaim the value of Blackness and African culture.

A pre-performance panel entitled "Surreal Histories," co-hosted by UC Berkeley's Center for Interdisciplinary Critical Inquiry and moderated by the Center's director, Debarati Sanyal, is planned for Friday, March 14 from 6–7pm at Zellerbach Playhouse. Details will be posted to [calperformances.org/illuminations-2024-25](https://calperformances.org/illuminations-2024-25).

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

Live audio descriptions and a haptic access tour for blind and visually impaired audience members are available for the Sunday, March 16, performance of *The Great Yes, The Great No*. Headsets and a 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](https://calperformances.org/accessibility).

**Tickets:** \$26–\$59 (prices subject to change). UC Berkeley students can access exclusive discounts, including half-price tickets in all sections of the theater, and are also eligible to purchase a limited number of \$10 tickets for the best seats in the house for the Friday, March 14 performance of *The Great Yes, The Great No* beginning at 12pm on Friday, February 28 through the [Golden Bear Circle](#) seating program. Information about UC Berkeley student tickets and discounts is available at [calperformances.org/ucb-students](https://calperformances.org/ucb-students); information about other discounts can be found at [calperformances.org/discounts](https://calperformances.org/discounts).

Tickets for all performances are available at [calperformances.org](https://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. There is a \$15 per order service charge on ticket purchases made by phone or online that are not part of a subscription package. There is no fee for tickets purchased in person at the Zellerbach Hall Ticket Office.

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## **PRESS CONTACT**

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