



music dance theater
Cal Performances

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY



Angélique Kidjo's
Yemandja

Doug Watson



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2021-2022

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Jeremy Geffen

As many of you already know, earlier this week, Cal Performances announced details of its upcoming 2022–23 season. Beginning in September, with the brilliant **Miami City Ballet** and its legendary production of George Balanchine’s iconic *Jewels* (1967), and continuing into June 2023, when the ever-popular **Eifman Ballet** arrives at Zellerbach Hall with its lavish, fully staged *Russian Hamlet*, it’s a schedule packed with extraordinary opportunities to experience the very best in live music, dance, and theater.

And what a schedule! More than 70 events, with highlights including the return of the legendary **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra**, under conductor **Christian Thielemann**; the beloved **Mark Morris Dance Group** in Morris’ new *The Look of Love: An Evening of Dance to the Music of Burt Bacharach*; revered South African artist **William**

Kentridge’s astonishing new *SIBYL*; a rare Berkeley performance with the **San Francisco Symphony** and conductor **Esa-Pekka Salonen**; and a special concert with chamber music superstars pianist **Emanuel Ax**, violinist **Leonidas Kavakos**, and cellist **Yo-Ma**. And these are only a few of the amazing performances that await you!

Illuminations programming next season will take advantage of Cal Performances’ unique positioning as both a renowned international performing arts presenter and a part of one of the world’s top-ranked public research universities. Each season, *Illuminations* takes up a pressing theme reflected in both the arts and scholarship, and offers the public a multifaceted understanding of the issue by connecting research on the UC Berkeley campus with exceptional performances. This third season of *Illuminations* centers on the theme of “**Human and Machine**,” investigating how technology continues to catalyze and challenge creative expression and human communication. Through programming that includes performances, public events, artist talks, and symposia, we’ll be engaging communities on and off campus to examine the evolution of musical instruments, the complex relationships between technology creators and users, technology’s impact on the creative process, and questions raised by the growing role of artificial intelligence in our society.

This concept of “Human and Machine” has never been so pertinent to so many. Particularly over the course of the pandemic, the rapid expansion of technology’s role in improving communication and in helping us emotionally process unforeseen and, at times, extraordinarily difficult events has made a permanent mark on our human history. Throughout time, our reliance on technology to communicate has—for better or worse—influenced how we understand others as well as ourselves. During this *Illuminations* season, we will investigate how technology has contributed to our capacity for self-expression, as well as the potential dangers it may pose.

Some programs this season will bring joy and delight, and others will inspire reflection and stir debate. We are committed to presenting this wide range of artistic expression on our stages because of our faith in the performing arts’ unparalleled power to promote empathy. And it is because of our audiences’ openness and curiosity that we have the privilege of bringing such thought-provoking, adventurous performances to our campus. The Cal Performances community wants the arts to engage in important conversations, and to bring us all together as we see and feel the world through the experiences of others.

Please make sure to check out our brand new 44-page season brochure and our website for complete information. We can’t wait to share all the details with you, in print and online!

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As the current season nears its conclusion, this weekend, in particular, occupies a special spot on our calendar. We are thrilled to welcome Germany’s esteemed **Tetzlaff Quartet** to Hertz Hall for a

continued on p 32



Saturday, April 23, 2022, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

YEMANDJA

A 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

Starring Angélique Kidjo

*You can keep these stellar performances accessible to all by making a gift today at calperformances.org/donate
or by contacting the Development Office at donate@calperformances.org.*



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

<i>Production Designer</i>	Kerry James Marshall
<i>Costume Designer</i>	Mary Jane Marcasiano
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	Kathy A. Perkins**
<i>Projections Designer</i>	Rasean Davonte Johnson**
<i>Choreographer</i>	Beatrice Capote
<i>Sound Designer</i>	Kumi Ishizawa
<i>Music Director</i>	John Samorian
<i>Dramaturg</i>	Iyvon E.
<i>Sensitivity Specialist</i>	Ann C. James
<i>Makeup Designer</i>	Beckie Kravetz
<i>Casting</i>	Andrea Zee
<i>Production Stage Manager</i>	Violet Tafari*

Starring Angélique Kidjo

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

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

THE OFFICE is grateful for the support of the W.L.S. Spencer Foundation.

** Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.*

*** Member of the United Scenic Artists, the union representing scenic, costume, lighting, sound, and projection designers in live performance.*

*This performance will last approximately 105 minutes
and be performed without an intermission.*



Cast

<i>Yemandja</i>	Angélique Kidjo
<i>Omolola</i>	Briana Brooks*
<i>Olajuwon</i>	Michael de Souza*
<i>Adefola/Princess Naguézé</i>	April Nixon*
<i>General Loko</i>	George L Brown*
<i>Mr. DeSalta</i>	John Carlin*
<i>Orò</i>	Frank Lawson*
<i>Babalao/Lanre/Olujimi</i>	Kendrick Marion
<i>Abeni/Oni/Abiona</i>	Hallie Chapman*
<i>Monifa/Folade</i>	Jennifer Mogbock
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Henry Pedersen

Music and Audio

<i>Music Director, Conductor, and Keyboards</i>	John Samorian
<i>Guitar</i>	Dominic James
<i>Bass</i>	Michael Olatuja
<i>Percussion</i>	Magatte Sow
<i>Assistant Music Director</i>	Jake Eisner
<i>Music Supervisor</i>	Darryl Archibald

**Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.*

SYNOPSIS

Scene 1

Human world and spirit world wait for a special baby to be born under the full moon on the night before the Egungun ceremonies. Ancestors vie for a chance to be Omolola's guiding spirit. In an unusual twist, *orishas* Orò and Yemandja throw their hats in the ring—the latter wins! Yemandja tells us about herself and that she will be our guide.

Scene 2

We meet a grown up Omolola and her fiancé Olajuwon, mixed-race son of the slaver DeSalta. Omolola's parents interrupt their flirting with an argument about the slave trade. We learn about Adefola's hatred of slavery, Loko's role as a General in the trade, the impact of the latter on Olajuwon. Omolola, on the other hand, has still to form a firm opinion. Loko, Adefola, Omolola, and Olajuwon have a family debate about the role and implications of slavery in their lives.

Scene 3

Their discussion is interrupted by a procession of slaves leaving their shores. Yemandja and Adefola sing a farewell to their people. Adefola spots Babalao and tries to free him.

Scene 4

DeSalta arrives and proclaims his honesty, but chaos ensues at his refusal to free Babalao. Omolola sings to try and fix the situation but, blown astray by Orò, her desire to hurt DeSalta corrupts her song. Enraged, DeSalta kills Adefola and Babalao.

Scene 5

Omolola and Loko mourn Adefola; Loko rallies troops to get his vengeance. Omolola and Loko weave together a lament for Adefola which transforms into an awakening. Loko fights and is joined by other enraged villagers.

Scene 6

Omolola wants to abandon her gift but Yemandja tries to reassure her.

Scene 7

Omolola and Olajuwon's relationship starts to fissure under grief and suspicion's strain.

Scene 8

DeSalta forces Naguézé to spy on Loko for him. We understand how ambitious and power-hungry DeSalta is. Omolola overhears.

Scene 9

Naguézé comes to Loko but she proclaims her loyalties are not with DeSalta. She asks him to marry her to let her prove her loyalty and to protect her from DeSalta. Naguézé recounts her plight as a princess and DeSalta's betrothed but vows to regain her power and help Loko and their people. Loko agrees to an engagement.

Scene 10

Omolola sings of the gulf between what people predicted she would become and who she has become.

Scene 11

Yemandja sings as Loko sets his plan in motion; he will let leak to DeSalta that he plans to attack the next day, but in fact will attack that night! Orò and Yemandja face off once more as Orò beats his drum, inciting violence in the humans.

SCENES SYNOPSIS (continued)

Scene 12

DeSalta plans to strike this very night. Loko and DeSalta are proclaiming their intentions and power. At the end of the song DeSalta surprises Loko and a fight ensues. Loko and DeSalta fight, Orò and Yemandja fight, Omolola is weaving in and out, at a loss. Suddenly she is the focus of the fight. She tries to sing to escape, her song fails, and Yemandja intervenes.

Scene 13

Now in the spirit world with Yemandja, the two revisit the moment right after Yemandja made the oceans. She regrets her anger, but Orò is inspired.

Scene 14

Yemandja takes Omolola to DeSalta's path where, as a 16 year old, he is being taught how to be brutal in order to gain power and prosper. Omolola is incredulous that Yemandja would want her to feel sympathy for DeSalta. Yemandja teaches that in order to build bridges we must try to understand.

Scene 15

Yemandja takes Omolola to a moment immediately after she first used her powers. Babalao recounts the moment she sang unity to the children of the village who had previously wanted to bully Olajuwon. Omolola feels the weight of her failure, but Yemandja teaches her that anger can be empowering—if one taps into the love within.

Scene 16

Yemandja takes Omolola to the moment when Olajuwon asked Loko and Adefola for Omolola's hand. He proclaims his love for Omolola and paints a picture of their life together.

Scene 17

Yemandja's last wave of vision shows Omolola that when she is gone, things fall apart. Loko and Olajuwon fight. Then, Olajuwon and DeSalta disagree; DeSalta decides to sell Olajuwon into slavery before he becomes even more dangerous to him.

Scene 18

Omolola is outraged by DeSalta's plan and, at last, is ready to intervene. She turns to ask Yemandja to send her back, but the goddess is gone. Omolola sings a short song that transports her back to her world; she finally is ready to use her power again. Omolola finds Olajuwon and warns him. Omolola sings her love for Olajuwon and of the duality in all of us that makes the world stronger.

Scene 19

Omolola and Olajuwon interrupt DeSalta trying to convince Loko to pledge allegiance to him. Omolola sings the story of the world breaking apart and weaves us back together. Yemandja closes us out.

NOTES ON CULTURAL CONTEXT

Orishas

The *orishas* are spirits that play a key role in the Yoruba religion of West Africa and several religions of the African diaspora that derive from it, such as Cuban and Puerto Rican Santería and Brazilian Candomblé. They are also venerated by the Edo of southeastern Nigeria; the Ewe of Ghana, Benin, and Togo; and the Fon of Benin (who refer to them as *voduns*). An *orisha* may be said to arise when a divine power to command and make things

happen converges with a natural force, a deified ancestor, and an object that witnesses and supports that convergence and alignment. An *orisha*, therefore, is a complex multidimensional unity linking people, objects, and powers. The story of *Yemandja* explores the relationship between two *orishas*: Yemandja and Orò.

Yemandja

Yemandja is the goddess of water and healing, and is honored throughout West Africa and the Caribbean as the mother of the sea and the moon. She is the keeper of the female mysteries

SONGS

(in order of appearance)

“A Story”	<i>Yemandja and Company</i>
“Prelude to a Claiming”	<i>Monifa, Abeni, Babalao</i>
“Claiming Song”	<i>Monifa, Abeni, Babalao, Yemandja, Orò, and Chorus</i>
“A Story” (Reprise)	<i>Yemandja</i>
“Smart and Beautiful”	<i>Omolola</i>
“Special”	<i>Omolola, Olajuwon, and Chorus</i>
“So Far, Too Far”	<i>Yemandja</i>
“Farewell”	<i>Adefola and Chorus</i>
“Business”	<i>DeSalta and Chorus</i>
“Magic and Then”	<i>Omolola</i>
“Lament”	<i>Omolola, Loko, and Chorus</i>
“Awakening”	<i>Loko and Chorus</i>
“A Woman is Human”	<i>Princess Naguézé</i>
“Song of Bitterness”	<i>Omolola, Yemandja</i>
“A Story” (Reprise)	<i>Yemandja</i>
“Two Rams, One Watering Hole”	<i>Loko, DeSalta, and Chorus</i>
“A Story” (Reprise)	<i>Yemandja</i>
“So Far, Too Far” (Reprise)	<i>Yemandja, Oro</i>
“Be a Man”	<i>DeSalta and Chorus</i>
“Olajuwon’s Heart”	<i>Olajuwon, Loko, Adefola</i>
“Omolola’s Return”	<i>Omolola</i>
“Two Hands to Lift the Calabash”	<i>Omolola, Olajuwon</i>
“Today, Yesterday, Tomorrow”	<i>Omolola, Yemandja, and Company</i>

and a guardian of women. She aids in the conception of children and their birth, protecting and blessing infants until they reach puberty. She is a healing goddess, showing compassion and kindness to those in need.

Orò

The word “orò” means “fierceness,” “tempest,” or “provocation,” and Orò himself appears to be a personified executive power whose approach is always preceded by a roaring wind and whirring sound. In precolonial times, the Orò cult performed legislative, executive, and judicial functions in Yoruban society. Orò is known as the Yoruba deity of bullroarers and justice. Orò executed criminals, could exile people (or sell them into slavery), and cleansed the community of witchcraft.

Depending on the region and country, the spelling of Yemandja's name differs between Yemandja, Yemoja, Yemaya, and other slight variations.

A NOTE FROM NAÏMA HEBRAIL KIDJO

A river does not flow and forget its source.

Yemandja was born from a deeply personal place: hearing my mother's stories of her childhood in Benin. There, the mythical and the mystical were intertwined with the modern. Her youth in Africa always struck me as bright: filled with life, community, tradition, and music. This was a contrast to my upbringing between France and America, where mysticism was “primitive” and the individual was paramount.

This piece is my attempt to reconcile all the worlds I grew up between, and all of the worlds within—to build my own bridge in order to help you build yours. Because no matter your background, you also contain dualities—even simply by virtue of being the child of two different people. So, through words and song, we hope to take you on a journey both outside of and within yourself. The destination? Healing and a more open heart.

What are the ramifications of fostering fear, of responding to hatred with even more hatred? What does it mean that our modern thriving economies are built on the slave trade and slave labor—both historically and in terms of new forms of modern slavery? Who does war, pain, and division really benefit? What is the impact when we think only of short-term gains when long-term harm is inevitable? These are all big questions posed by this piece.

My aim is not to rewrite history, minimize the importance of accountability, or simplify the complexities of the human experience but, instead, to remind us that individuality placed above community is not a sustainable solution. We may be separated by miles of beliefs, mountains of appearances, oceans of hurt, but since the dawn of the human race we have all been intertwined genetically, historically, and spiritually. All the divisions have been of our own making. So when the world feels too big, *Yemandja* is a reminder that we are all linked and that we have the power to change the world with empathy, be it through small everyday kindnesses, or grand heroic acts of humanity.

*A river does not flow and forget its source.
Actions have consequences.*

CREATIVE TEAM

**Angélique Kidjo (she/her),
concept, music, and principal**

Global pop star and five-time Grammy winner Angélique Kidjo is an international creative force. Her striking voice, illuminating stage presence, and fluency in multiple cultures and languages have expanded her following across national borders. Kidjo has cross-pollinated the West African traditions of her childhood in Benin with elements of American R&B, funk, and jazz, as well as influences from Europe and Latin America. She has received the prestigious Crystal Award from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland (2015) and the Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award (2016). Kidjo has appeared in several films, and she was named Best Actress

in a Supporting Role at the African Movie Academy Awards for her performance in Nigerian director Kunle Afolayan's *The CEO*. It's no surprise that acting is also in her blood. Kidjo's mother founded a theater company in Benin, and Kidjo made her stage debut at age six.

Yemandja represents Kidjo's first foray into musical theater.

Cheryl Lynn Bruce (she/her), director

Veteran director, writer, and performer Cheryl Lynn Bruce has staged productions for Victory Gardens Theatre, Teatro Vista Theatre Company, Illinois Humanities, the Chicago Sym-

phony Orchestra, Columbia College, the University of Illinois, Indiana University, DePaul University, and the Creative Arts Foundation. She developed and directed Sandra Delgado's *La Havana Madrid* and *Para, Graciela* and Misty DeBerry's *Milkweed*, and directed *Before the Pop, Pop, Pop* for Collaboraction's inaugural citywide Peacebook Festival (2016). Bruce also developed and directed Kerry James Marshall's *bunraku*-influenced urban comedy *Rythm Mastr* for the Wexner Center for the Arts (2008). She won both the African American Arts and Black Theatre Alliance Best Direction Awards for *From the Mississippi Delta*, and

YORUBA PROVERBS (selected)

Ogbón ju agbára.

Wisdom is much greater than strength.

Adùn ní ñgbèhìn ewúro.

The aftertaste of the bitterleaf is sweet.

Odò kì í şan kó gbàgbé isun

A river does not flow and forget its source.

A ki í nàró ká oḍún.

You cannot stand upright all year.

Àjèjé owo kan ò gbégbá karí.

One hand alone cannot lift the calabash to its head.

Nì palaba, ní wonko, èrèké á şèkan.

The cheek must be either sunken or swollen, but not both.

Bí ó bá bá ojú, á bá imú pèlú.

Any disaster that befalls the eye, is a disaster that will befall the nose.

Ìgbé letu mbá erin gbé.

The forest is home to the antelope and elephant both.

Okòòkan là ñyo ešè lábàtá.

One foot at a time is how to extricate oneself from a mire.

QUOTES BY YEMANDJA (selected)

"Will you journey through the past that can tomorrow forecast?"

"Each of us alone is a single feather, but bring us all together and we make a mighty wing."

"Every person has two things in common: imperfection and the desire to be seen."

"But how can you build a solid bridge without looking at the other side of the river? Perhaps one day you will see, like I did, that the opposite of violence is the desire to understand."

earned a Joseph Jefferson Award nomination for her direction of *Jitney*, both Congo Square Theatre productions. Other recognitions include the Illinois Public Humanities Award (2019); a Robert Rauschenberg Residency (2015); a Yale Art Gallery residency (2013); and the Jane Addams Hull House Woman of Valor Award (2010).

Jean Hebrail (he/him), concept and music

Grammy Award-winning producer and composer Jean Hebrail has been Angélique Kidjo's life partner and composer since her breakthrough album *Logozo*. After earning his a master's degree in philosophy at the Sorbonne University in France, Hebrail met Kidjo at CIM (Centre D'informations Musicales), a jazz school in Paris, where he was studying bass. He served as Kidjo's musical director and bass player for many years before focusing on arranging and composing most of her albums. Hebrail has also written many songs used in motion pictures, commercials, and video games. Since 2002, he has been coordinating Kidjo's charitable work with UNICEF, OXFAM, and other organizations.

**Kerry James Marshall (he/him),
production designer**

Kerry James Marshall uses painting, sculptural installations, collage, video, and photography to comment on the history of Black identity both in the United States and in Western art. He is well known for paintings that focus on Black subjects historically excluded from the artistic canon, and he has explored issues of race and history through imagery ranging from abstraction to comics. Marshall was born in Alabama in 1955 and grew up in Watts, Los Angeles. He is a 1978 graduate of the Otis College of Art and Design and currently lives and works in Chicago. A major survey, Kerry James Marshall: MASTRY, was on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Met Breuer; and the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago. Other solo exhibitions have been seen at the National Gallery of Art (Washington, DC); the Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (Antwerp, Belgium); Antoni Tapies

Foundation (Barcelona, Spain); and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia (Madrid, Spain).

**Naïma Hebrail Kidjo (she/her),
book and lyrics**

Naïma Hebrail Kidjo is a Franco-Beninese actress and writer who grew up between Brooklyn and Paris. She has inhabited a wide range of roles on stages across the country, working at iconic organizations such as the Williamstown Theatre Festival and Steppenwolf Theatre Company. Favorite credits include *Iseult et Tristan* (IAMA Theatre Company and LaMama Experimental Theatre Club), *Square Circle Plays* (Murmurs, Los Angeles and the Geffen Gallery at MOCA), *Rachels (The Pussy Grabber Plays*, Los Angeles), *The Crucible* (Steppenwolf Theatre), *Rutherford's Travels* (Pegasus Theatre), and *Dracula* (Williamstown Theatre Festival). On-screen, she has been seen as a paramedic on *Chicago Med* and *Chicago P.D.*, throughout seven combined seasons, and has acted in short films shot in Los Angeles and Paris. Kidjo is a graduate of the School at Steppenwolf and of Yale University, where her play *Pixel Souls*, an exploration of the intersection between photography and theater, won the Berkeley College Arts Prize.

**Mary Jane Marcasiano (she/her),
costume designer**

Mary Jane Marcasiano is the president of her eponymous design company in New York City. Since 1978, she has designed clothing and accessories under her brand and for other prestigious fashion companies. She is the recipient of the Cartier, DuPont, Cutty Sark, and Wool Knit Fashion Awards and a member of the Council of Fashion Designers of America. Marcasiano has designed costumes for DanceBrazil, the New York City Ballet, RythMEK at Jacob's Pillow, Cleo Parker Robinson Dance, and Michael Thomas Lab. Since 2010, she has designed the costumes for Grammy Award-winning singer Angélique Kidjo, including for her PBS special *Angélique Kidjo and Friends: Spirit Rising*. Marcasiano's costume work includes the short film *Ate*

Quando, the award-winning feature film by Bruno Barreto *Reaching for the Moon*, and Barreto's period HBO miniseries *The American Guest*. Marcasiano designed the costumes for the theater piece *Collaboration Warhol and Basquiat*. She has produced several films in Brazil (*Ginga*, *Reaching for the Moon*, *Alair Gomes*) and in the United States has produced a documentary film on Jack Lenor Larsen (2016). She is the programmer for Cinema Tropical's Music+Film series and the founder of their Brazilian film initiative Janeiro in New York and Veredas in conjunction with Film Lincoln Center. In 2007, Marcasiano created the Made With Love Project, a global nonprofit initiative dedicated to raising funds and awareness for NGOs aiding women and children in need in Brazil, Africa, and Haiti. She is a graduate of Parsons School of Design and The New School, and in 2019 received a master's degree from New York University Gallatin focusing on the intersection of art, nonprofits, and social change.

Kathy A. Perkins (she/her), lighting designer

Kathy A. Perkins has designed productions throughout the United States and internationally at such venues as Berkeley Rep, Arena Stage, St. Louis Black Repertory, Baltimore Center Stage, Yale Repertory, Goodman Theatre, Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Manhattan Theatre Club, and the Grahamstown Festival in South Africa. She has also designed for various dance festivals, including Dance Africa at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). As a practicing scholar, she has traveled throughout Africa, the Caribbean, and Asia. Perkins is a recipient of several research and design awards, including a Fulbright Research Award, a National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowship, and an NAACP Image Award. She is editor/co-editor of seven theater publications focusing on women from Africa and the Diaspora. Perkins is Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a member of USA829.

Rasean Davonte Johnson (he/him), projection designer

Rasean Davonte Johnson is a video artist and designer of projections for theater, film, and installations. Theater work includes collaborations with institutions including Steppenwolf Theatre Company, Manual Cinema, Chicago Opera Theatre, Long Wharf Theatre, Arts-Emerson, the McCarter Theatre Center, Yale Repertory Theatre, the Studio Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, Alliance Theatre, Berkshire Theatre Group, Everyman Theatre, the Ningbo Song and Dance Company, Yale Opera, Teatro Vista, B-Floor Theatre, The Hypocrites, and many others. In addition to design for theater, he has also worked on several installations, including personal works such as *Living Sculpture* as part of *LUX: Ideas through Light* at the Beinecke Rare Books Library, and *Juniper Ascending* at Yale University, and collaborative works including *The Ballad of Lula Del Ray 2.0* with Manual Cinema at the Logan Arts Center, *Convergence: A mad tea pARTy* at the Yale Art Gallery, and *Passenger* featured at the University of Chicago and the Bridgeport Film Festival. He received his MFA in design from the Yale School of Drama as a student in the projection program, and has lectured at Yale University, Columbia College, and DePaul University.

Beatrice Capote (she/her), choreographer

Beatrice Capote is a Cuban American professional contemporary dancer/choreographer/teacher. She trained at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater and has performed for prestigious choreographers and companies including Matthew Rushing; Darrell Moultrie; Antonio Brown Dance; INSPIRIT, a dance company; the Wells Performance Project; Areytos Performance Works; and A.I.M by Kyle Abraham. She received her AA degree from the University of North Carolina School of the Arts and her BA and MFA from Montclair State University, focusing on Afro-Cuban dance forms. Her choreography uses contemporary and Afro-Cuban folklore dance mediums to define her movement while highlighting *orisha* narratives. She has developed the solo choreographic works *Reyita*, *The Life of a Black Cuban Woman*

in *the Twentieth Century* and her most recent *Yemaya: Rebirthing to Existence*. She is an associate professor at Indiana University and is in her seventh season with Tony-nominated choreographer Camille A. Brown & Dancers. Capote has served as the choreographer for *Citrus*, a “choreopoem play” at Northern Stages and *The Wedding Band Musical* at Montclair State University. She is thrilled to be a part of the creative team as the choreographer for *Yemandja!* Website: Beatricecapote.com, Instagram: @b_capote.

Iyvon E. (she/her), dramaturg

Iyvon E. is an award-winning Nigerian-American creative producer, dramaturg, and company manager hailing from Brooklyn. She is the artistic director of *The Parsnip Ship*, a radio-play series and platform amplifying underproduced playwrights via audio theater. In addition, she is Director of Artistic Programs at Signature Theatre (New York). Iyvon is a recipient of a Fulbright International Scholarship and Gilman International Scholarship (both for work in Italy) as well as the 2019 Mark O'Donnell Prize. Iyvon is a Women's Project 2020–22 Producers Lab member and an Affiliate Dramaturg with Beehive Dramaturgy Studio. She received a BA from Brandeis University and her master's degree in arts administration from Baruch College, City University of New York. She is very thankful to the wonderful *Yemandja* team for this experience. @iamiyvon @theparshipshipNY.

Kumi Ishizawa (she/her), sound designer

Kumi Ishizawa is delighted to join *Yemandja* as sound designer and engineer. Her portfolio includes works such as *The Devil You Know*, *Angels of Swedenborg*, and *Undesirable Element Festival* by Ping Chong and Company. Other projects include *Pass the Blutwurst*, *Bitte* by John Kelly, *Stopped Bridge of Dreams* by John Jesurun, *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*, *Sweeney Todd*, and *Psycho Beach Party* by Piper Theater Production. She was the tour sound engineer of *Sell/Buy Date* by Sarah Jones and the video system designer of *Bitch! Faghag! Whore!* by Penny Arcade.

John Samorian (he/him),

music director, conductor, and keyboards

John Samorian has been a professional musician for 35 years. (He's older than he looks!) He has performed with over 20 Broadway productions and international tours, including *A Bronx Tale*; the Broadway revivals of *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Sweet Charity* with Christina Applegate, and *Grease*; and was the music director of the first national tours of *Jersey Boys* and *The Book of Mormon* in Chicago. He has worked with Blood, Sweat, and Tears, as well as with his own groups throughout Europe, Asia, South America, Canada, and across the United States. Samorian has also earned both a BA and a master's degree in jazz education and performance. He has released a CD of original jazz vocals entitled *Out On a Limb*, available on iTunes. More information can be found at www.johnsamorian.com.

Ann C. James (she/they), sensitivity specialist

Ann C. James has an extensive career in international stage direction and theater education spanning over three decades. She recently made her debut as the first Black Intimacy Coordinator on Broadway for Antoinette Nwandu's *Pass Over*. James is an expert in the burgeoning industry of intimacy direction and institutional consent culture for national arts organizations. In addition to her Broadway credit, she served as Intimacy Director and Sensitivity Specialist for the provocative Off-Broadway productions of Moises Kaufman's *Seven Deadly Sins* by Tectonic Theatre Project and *Seize the King* produced by Classical Theatre of Harlem. On the West Coast, James provides consultation and intimacy coordination for the television and film industry, most recently working with Rashida Jones, Mark Wahlberg, Issa Rae, Will Ferrell, and Cynthia Erivo. Her intimacy work has featured James as an expert voice for Theatre Communications Group, HowlRound, the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers Foundation, and Lincoln Center's Directors Lab West. Her company, Intimacy Coordinators of Color, has partnerships with ArtsEquity, Times-Up, and A.R.T./New York. James is in the second year of her studies as America's first

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MFA in performance pedagogy with an emphasis in Afrocentric intimacy pedagogy at Loyola Marymount University.

Beckie Kravetz (she/her), makeup designer

Beckie Kravetz was a principal makeup artist, assistant wig master, and resident mask maker with Los Angeles Opera for over 20 years. She has transformed the faces of Plácido Domingo, Sir Thomas Allen, Carol Vaness, Gerald Finley, and many others. Kravetz left Los Angeles to focus on visual art, creating masks and figurative sculpture. Her work is exhibited in galleries and museums across the country, and she was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship to study in Spain. From her home in Cummington, Massachusetts, Kravetz also continues to design wigs and makeup for regional opera and theater companies including Berkshire Opera Festival, Opera Orlando, Opera Roanoke, and Opera Fairbanks. Her full portfolio of sculpture, masks, and makeup designs can be seen at www.bksculpturestudio.com and www.themaskstudio.com.

Andrea Zee (she/her), casting

Upcoming projects: *Where the Wild Things Are* (Off-Broadway), *A Delicate Balance* (Off-Broadway), *Rent* (Portland Center Stage). Off-Broadway and New York City: *Golden Shield* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *Neurosis*, *Syncing Ink*, *Elf* (Madison Square Garden), New York Stage and Film, American Civil Liberties Union and the New York Civil Liberties Union, Dramatists Guild Foundation. National tours: *Yemandja*, *The Sound of Music*, *Bullets Over Broadway*, *Elf*, and *Finding Neverland*. Regional: Portland Center Stage, 5th Avenue Theatre, Florida Studio Theatre, Arrow Rock Lyceum, Alley Theater, and Theatre Under the Stars. Credits as casting associate include Broadway: *Chicago*, *The Great Comet of 1812*, *On the Town*, and *Pippin*. National tours: *Anastasia*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder*. Film/TV: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* (Netflix), *Y: The Last Man* (FX), and *Blue's Clues & You!* (Nickelodeon). Commercials: Comcast, and Grammarly. Thank you for supporting live theater. Website: www.zee-casting.com.

CAST

Briana Brooks (she/her), Omolola

Theater credits: Andrea and understudy for Ti Moune in the first national tour of the Tony Award-winning revival of *Once on this Island*, Nettie in *The Color Purple*, Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, Martha in *Spring Awakening*, Joanne in *RENT*. She has also performed in several workshops of new musicals and attended Loyola Marymount University, where she earned a BA in history. Brooks is a native of Los Angeles, where her love for music, singing, and theater began. She is thrilled to be a part of *Yemandja*.

Michael de Souza (he/him), Olajuwon

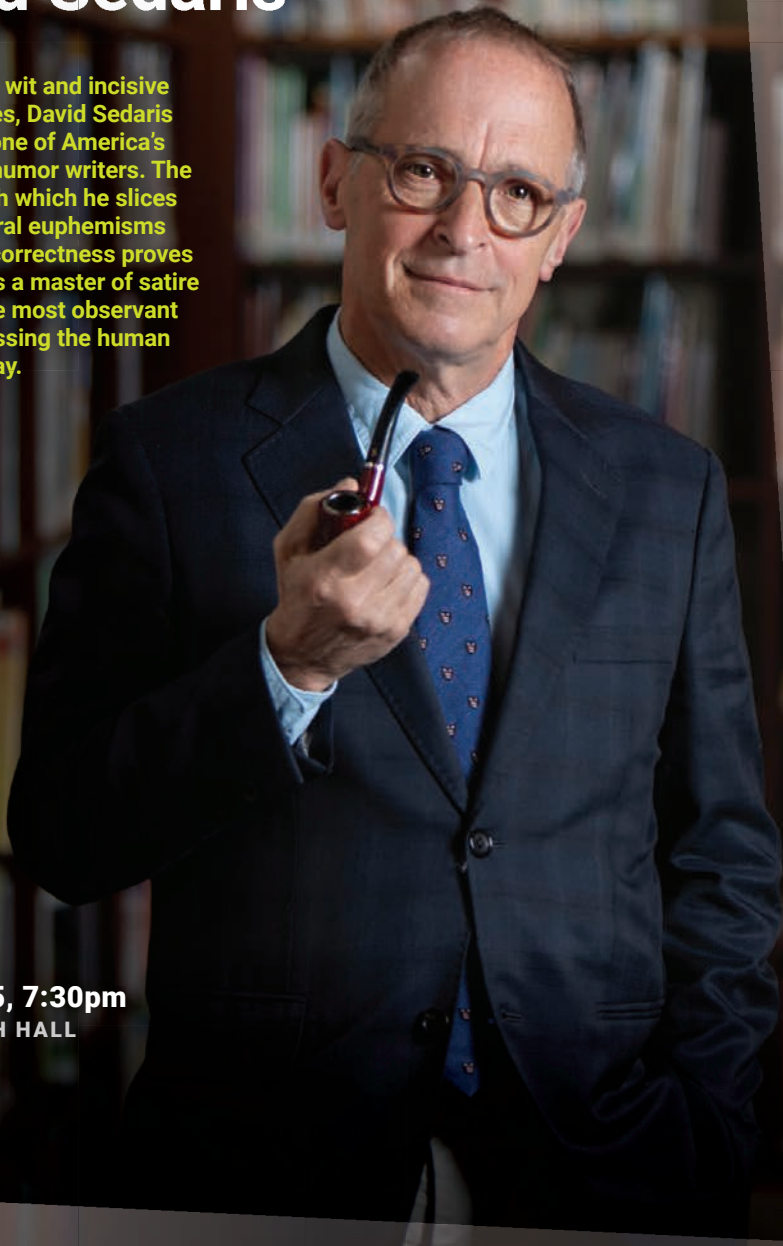
Theater credits: New York credits include the Off-Broadway revival of *Once Upon a Mattress* (Transport Group Theatre Company) and *The Motherf**ker with the Hat*. Regional credits: *Camelot* (Westport Country Playhouse), *Lysistrata Jones* (Meadowbrook Theatre), and the world premiere of *A Little Princess* (Sacramento Theatre Company). De Souza is also a sometimes-improviser with his team Uncle Taft. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan with a double major in music and political science. De Souza is honored to be working with this team of esteemed artists. Thanks to Take 3 Talent and the *Yemandja* team. Beijos! Instagram: @daswizle.

**April Nixon (she/her),
Adefola/Princess Naguézé**

Theater credits: *Damn Yankees* (Lola opposite Jerry Lewis), *The Dancer's Life* (opposite Chita Rivera), *Smokey Joe's Cafe*, *9 to 5*, *Fosse*, *The Wiz*, *Cats*, *Tommy*, *Mamma Mia*, *Sistas*, *Purlie*, *Crowns*, *Sweet Charity*, *Caroline Or Change*, and *Dreamgirls*, to name a few. TV credits: *Law & Order*, *SVU*, *CI*, *The Dave Chappelle Show*, *The Wire*, *Malcolm X*, *Man On the Moon*, and the Netflix films *The Perfect Find* (opposite Gabrielle Union) and *Two Degrees* (opposite Carl Gilliard, Vanessa A. Williams, Miguel Nunez, and Tico Wells). Nixon has also had the pleasure of working with directors Anna Deveare Smith, Spike Lee, Regina Taylor, Gwen

David Sedaris

With sardonic wit and incisive social critiques, David Sedaris has become one of America's pre-eminent humor writers. The great skill with which he slices through cultural euphemisms and political correctness proves that Sedaris is a master of satire and one of the most observant writers addressing the human condition today.



Thu, May 5, 7:30pm
ZELLERBACH HALL

Verdon, Randy Skinner, Mitzi Hamilton, Nick Corley, John Miller-Stephany, Walter Bobbie, Sheldon Epps, Jack O' Brien, Jerry Zaks, Des McAnuff, Jeff Calhoun, Graciela Daniel, Ann Reinking, George Faison, Michael Peters, and many others. Awards: Olivier, Adelco, and Ovation Award nominee. Nixon was also the producer of *Two Lost Worlds The Musical* starring Nicole Scherzinger. Stay tuned for Nixon's new web series *BlackStageStories* and *FindingMyLola's!* Proud member of Actors Equity and SAG-AFTRA! Love to my daughter, Samaria Pagge! Honored to be a part of *Yemandja!* Instagram: @maggiehunter51, Facebook: April L Nixon, Twitter: @aprilnixon45, YouTube: april nixon, BlackStageStories and FindingMyLola's.

George L. Brown (he/him), *General Loko*

Theater credits, national tours: *Once on this Island* (Armand), *Elf: The Musical* (Mr. Greenway). Regional: *Rent* (Tom Collins), *Ragtime* (Booker T. Washington), *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Ken and Andre), *Sight and Sound Theatres, Gospel at Colonus* (Preacher and Balladeer), *Pageant: The Musical* (Miss Deep South). Brown is also the founder and director of God's Purchase gospel choir (national recording artist out of Buffalo, New York). He is honored to join the *Yemandja* family. Brown is from Buffalo, New York, where he was born and raised. He is truly thankful for the support from family and friends and gives all glory and honor to God! Thank you to my agents at Avalon Artists Group. Instagram: @Downtowngebrown.

John Carlin (he/him), *Mr. DeSalta*

Theater credits, Off-Broadway: *Turn Me Loose* with Joe Morton (Westside Theatre), *America is Hard to See* (HERE Arts Center), *Uncle Vanya* (Pearl Theater Company). Regional credits include: *America is Hard to See* (Edinburgh Fringe Festival), *Oklahoma!* (Bard Summer-scape), *Turn Me Loose* (Los Angeles and Washington, DC), *Dead Accounts, Time Stands Still* (Hampton Theatre Company). TV credits: *FBI: Most Wanted, The Food That Built America, A Crime To Remember, and The System.*

Film credits: *Disaster Chasers, The Way to Heaven, Roddy And Doddy, and See You Around.* A former RCA Records recording artist ("one of NYC's better-kept secrets," *TimeOutNY*), Carlin began acting professionally in 2014. He is a proud member of Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir, a radical performance community that has toured the United States, Europe, and Australia, and opened for Neil Young and Pussy Riot!. He also attended Angélique Kidjo's first United States concert in New York City in 1992. Website: www.johncarlinactor.com.

Frank Lawson (he/him), *Orò*

Theater credits: Charlie in *Marilyn! The New Musical* at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas and Boney M's frontman Bobby Farian in *Boney Manilli* in Lagos, Nigeria. His favorite credits include Sportin' Life in *Porgy and Bess*, Berger in *Hair*, Hawker in *The Who's Tommy*, and Ben Vereen in *Until...Until*, which won the highest honor at Performa 15 in New York City. He starred in the award-winning James Brown musical *Down Around Brown Town*, crooned in the one-man musical *Songs From an Unmade Bed*, sang with Jennifer Nettles in *Mamma Mia* at the Hollywood Bowl, and toured Asia in *Rent*. TV credits: He plays the voice of eight-year-old wrestler *R Truth* in Seth Green's animated television series *Camp WWE*. Awards: recipient of Los Angeles Ovation and NAACP Awards for his portrayal of Billy Strayhorn in *When Jazz Had the Blues*. Lawson teamed with producer Dan Whittemore to record his inspirational pop/rock EP *Goldie*. Most recently in Las Vegas, Lawson and vocalist Patrice Compton produced and starred in their new duets show *It Takes Two* with plans to tour in 2022. He graduated from Meadows School of the Arts at Southern Methodist University. Lawson has shared the stage with legends Debbie Allen, Ben Vereen, Michelle Lee, Bernadette Peters, and Stephen Sondheim, to name a few, and he is beyond honored to add the incomparable Angélique Kidjo to this list. @thefranklawson @lawsonandtriece.

Kendrick Marion (he/him),

Babalao/Lanre/Olujimi

Theater credits: *A Soulful Christmas* at the Zeiders American Dream Theater in Virginia Beach (VA), *Ain't Misbehavin'* (Broadway World South Carolina Best Actor in a Musical) at Trustus Theatre, and *Choir Boy* (David Heard) at the Dock Street Theatre. Marion is a native of Charleston, South Carolina, and a graduate of the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York City. He is represented by MMV Talent, Inc., and would like to thank his mom and wonderful family for their continued support! Website: www.kendrickmarion.com. Instagram: @marionkj.

Hallie Chapman (she/her), *Abeni/Oni/Abiona*

A proud BFA graduate from the University of Central Florida, Chapman is very excited to spread her theater wings! Website: www.halliedchapman.com.

Jennifer Mogbock (she/her), *Monifa/Folade*

TV credits: *Designated Survivor* (2016), *Conviction* (2016). Theater credits: Stratford Festival: *Love's Labour's Lost* (2017) and *Merry Wives* at Shakespeare in the Park. Born in Lagos, Nigeria, Mogbock is a proud immigrant raised in Argentina, Houston (TX), and Canada. She is a bilingual (English and Spanish) actor, writer, and producer. Mogbock has a BFA from SUNY Purchase Conservatory, and is a recent graduate from NYU's graduate acting program. When she isn't working, she spends her free time baking, Facetiming her family, and traveling the world. Visit www.jennifermogbock.com.

Dominic James (he/him), *guitar*

Guitarist and songwriter Dominic James has been active on the New York and international scene for over 30 years. He has performed and recorded with a wide variety of artists including Paul Simon, Harry Belafonte, Chris Botti, and Bill Laswell. James recorded all the guitars and the bass on Shakira's biggest international hit, "Waka Waka." He has won four Grammy Awards with Angélique Kidjo and continues to tour the world with her.

Michael Olatuja (he/him), *bass*

The London-born, Lagos, Nigeria-raised, New York-based electric and acoustic bassist/composer/bandleader Michael Olatuja has been one of the most inventive and in-demand bassists since the early part of this century. He has worked and recorded with more than 100 artists, including Dianna Ross, Spike Lee, Phil Collins, Rod Stewart, Stevie Wonder, Shakira, Terence Blanchard, Chris Botti, Kurt Elling, Bebe Winans, Hugh Masekela, Kylie Minogue, Lisa Stansfield, Joe Lovano, Lionel Loueke, and Laura Mvula. Broadway musical credits: *Frozen*, *Moulin Rouge*, *Motown*, and *The Color Purple*. Current projects include Diana Ross' first album in 15 years, *Thank You* (2021); and Lin-Manuel Miranda's movie directorial debut *tick, tick...BOOM!* on Netflix (2021). Olatuja has recorded three CD's as a leader: *Speak* (2009), which won an Independent Music Awards award; *The Promise* by the Olatuja Project (2011); and *Lagos Pepper Soup* (2020). Nearly five years in the making, Olatuja's new, 12-track CD, *Lagos Pepper Soup*—named after a zesty, West African meal—with lyrics mostly in Yoruba and English, and recorded in London and New York, is his most comprehensive and compelling album to date.

Magatte Sow (he/him), *percussion*

Magatte Sow—or as many people know him, Magatte Fall—is a three-time Grammy Award winner. Coming from a long line of musicians, he began performing at the youthful age of two for his parents' West African drum and dance company. His *djembe* teachers include his father Malik Sow and Kissima Diabate. For *sabar*, he studied with Omar Mboup and Chiekh Tirou Mbaye; and, for *tama*, he studied with the late great Ndongo Mbaye. He was cast in the movie *Amistad* and has recorded on albums for Ashley Maher, Angélique Kidjo, Rob Thomas, and many others. Sow has performed on numerous televised award shows as a percussionist, including at the Nobel Peace Prize Awards, and has appeared with artists from many different styles of music, including Stevie Wonder, Earth Wind and Fire, The Very Best, Andre Manga,

Munyungo Jackson, Leon Mobley, Youssou N'Dour, Baba Maal, Salif Keita, John Legend, Jill Scott, Janelle Monae, Dianne Reeves, Raja Kasis, Paulo Stagaró, and Pedrito Martínez. Sow has toured with Debbie Allen as both a percussionist and cast member in her musical *Oman Oman*, and for the past 12 years has been the percussionist for Angélique Kidjo (winning his first Grammy Award for playing on her Best World Music Album *Eve*). Sow holds the distinction of being a credited soloist on the *Black Panther* movie score.

**Violet Tafari (she/they),
production stage manager**

Violet Asmara Tafari is a West Indian production and stage manager and manifestor. Using love as her medium, Tafari guides and supports the exploration of art and the dualities of storytelling, ritual, and the creative process. Blending the gap between technician and artist and utilizing her ritual and healing background, Tafari creates fluid ways of pushing the boundaries of art and supports the communities that embrace it. Tafari's work with companies such as AFRIKIN, Delirious Dance, New York Stage and Film, and many others has allowed her to play various roles within the worlds of theater, music festivals, gallery exhibitions, and more. Select production manager credits include: *AFRIKIN: Fire Next Time* (Art Basel), *Whale Fall Opera*, *Young World* (Abrons Arts Center), *Circle Jerk Live* (Fake Friends), *Disclaimer* (Under the Radar Festival/The Public). Select stage manager credits include: *Syncing Ink Mixtape*, *The Space Between the Letters* (Here Arts), *IKE*, *Lucky* (New York Stage and Film Virtual Series), *Memory Motel Radio Play* (Two River Theater), *Female Role Model Project* (Transforma Theatre). Website: www.freequencyconnects.com.

Darryl Archibald (he/him), music supervisor
Theater credits: *Passion* (Boston Court Pasadena), *Little Shop Of Horrors* with M.J. Rodriguez (Pasadena Playhouse), *The Color Purple* (2015 revival) Broadway tour, *Motown the Musical* on Broadway 2016 and national tour,

Memphis Broadway tour, *Dreamgirls* national tour (associate conductor), *Disney's The Lion King* Broadway tour (vocal coach and assistant conductor), *Wicked* at the Pantages Theater (substitute conductor), *Beauty and the Beast* (McCoy Rigby Conservatory of the Arts), *Ragtime* (Pasadena Playhouse); *The Wiz* (The Muny), *Dear World* with Tyne Daly (Vilar Performing Arts Center Beaver Creek), *Jonathan Dove's Innocence* (Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity and Manhattan Theatre Club), *Nightmare Alley* workshop (Geffen Playhouse), *In the Heights* (Theatre Under the Stars), *Swing!* (Sacramento Music Circus), *Smokey Joe's Café*, *Serrano*, *Funny Girl*, *Gypsy*, *A Chorus Line* directed by Kay Cole, *The King and I* with Deborah Gibson (Cabrillo Music Theatre), *Carousel* with M. Emmet Walsh, *The Fantasticks* with Eric McCormack, *Once On This Island* with Ledisi, *L'il Abner* with Cathy Rigby and Fred Willard, *Merrily We Roll Along* with Teri Hatcher, *I Do! I Do!* with Diana Canova and Harry Groener (Reprise), *Great Expectations*, *My Fair Lady*, *1776*, *Little Shop Of Horrors*, *Camelot*, and *Forever Plaid* (Utah Shakespeare Festival), *Loving Repeating*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *Raisin* with Nell Carter (International City Theatre). TV credits: *Encore!* (Disney+), the prime-time television special *A Hollywood Holiday Celebration* (ABC).

Jake Eisner (he/him), assistant music director
Jake Eisner is a musician, sound designer, and theater artist based in New York City. He has written musical arrangements for En Garde Arts (*A Dozen Dreams*) and sound designed for Braving the Bard (*Love's Labour's Lost*), acted at Herbert Berghof Studio (*Our Son*), and worked as a production assistant for the New York Musical Festival (*Buried*). As a pianist, he plays regularly with classical and jazz singers and has an extensive background in chamber music. He recently graduated with a BA in music from Williams College, where his production credits include conducting *La Bohème*, *A Little Night Music*, and *Die Fledermaus*; sound designing for *буря—The Tempest* and *Mr. Burns*; and acting in *Pygmalion* and *Noises Off*.

**Jared Gooding (he/him),
assistant lighting designer**

Jared Gooding is a Chicago-based lighting designer. His design credits include designs for Writers Theater, Bristol Riverside Theater, Indiana Repertory Theater, First Stage Theater, Depaul University, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Victory Gardens Theater, Timeline Theater, Madison Children's Theater, University of Illinois Chicago Theatre, University of Indiana Northwest, Remy Bumpo Theater, Strawdog Theater, The Hypocrites, Definition Theater, Windy City Playhouse, Sideshow Theatre, Jackalope Theatre, First Floor Theater, About Face Theatre, MPAACT, Pegasus Theatre, and serving as the lighting assistant for *The Wiz Live* on NBC, along with associate designing for Lookingglass Theater Company's touring production of *Lookingglass Alice* in Miami and Denver. He spends weekends as a professional DJ and his design work is featured at www.goodingdesigns.com.

**Indigo Sparks (she/her),
assistant choreographer**

Indigo Sparks is a performance artist, choreographer, writer, and arts administrator based in Brooklyn, NY. Her deep curiosity for the facilitation of community and the transcendent possibilities of live performance continues to be reflected in her creative work and processes. Sparks trained in dance and vocal performance at the University of the Arts and has performed for choreographers like Bobbi Jene Smith, Staycee Pearl Dance, Helen Simoneau, Gerard and Kelly, and Netta Yerualshalmy. Her arts administration experience includes works with organizations like the Vail Dance Festival, the Shed, the Public Theater, and the reopening of *Girl From the North Country* on Broadway. In 2021, Sparks became a Sundance Interdisciplinary Arts grantee with her short documentary dance film *It's a matter of the soul*. She is currently working as a creative producer for the NY-based choreographer Will Rawls.

Sarah Gardner (she/her), wardrobe supervisor
Sarah Gardner is a North Adams (MA) native with a specialty in costume design, wardrobe,

stitching, dressing, and hair and make-up artistry. She served as makeup artist for *Ugly Lies the Bone* by Lindsey Ferrentino at Shakespeare and Company in Lenox (MA), and has worked at the Berkshire Theater Group in Stockbridge (MA), where she served as Phillipa Soo's personal dresser for the musical *A Little Night Music*. Gardner is a graduate of the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, where she designed costumes, hair, and makeup for more than 10 productions including *Hedda Gabler*, *Scenes from an Execution*, *Angels in America*, *Spring Awakening*, and *Agamemnon*.

**Henry Pedersen (he/him),
stage manager**

Henry Pedersen is proud to have graduated with a BFA in theater design and production from the University of Michigan. University credits include production stage manager for *Sonnets*, *Soliloquies*, & *Soul*. Scenic design for *Godspell*, and executive producer for *MUSKET* (2019–21). Pedersen thanks Mego and Violet, the great leaders of *Yemandja's* SM team, and his parents. Thank you for coming to the show!

**Michael Commendatore (he/him),
projections associate**

Michael Commendatore is originally from Rhode Island but currently resides in Chicago, with his amazing wife, Katie, and sassy-but-sweet cat, Sebastian. Commendatore travels around the country designing and assisting projection designs for theater, opera, dance, installations, and more. He blends his love for film and theater by designing projections at places like the Public Theatre, Music Theatre Wichita, Yale Repertory Theatre, DePaul University, Colgate University, Williams College, SUNY Stonybrook, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Emerald City Theatre, Vancouver Fringe Festival, and more. He also has had the opportunity to work on shows at Juilliard, Carnegie Hall, Steppenwolf Theatre, Goodman Theatre, and the Lincoln Center Theater. Michael holds an MFA in design from Yale School of Drama. To see some of his work, visit his website at www.michaelcommendatore.com.

Jonin Fehlmann, sound engineer

Jonah Fehlmann graduated from Berklee College of Music with a degree in music production and engineering. Currently based in Europe, he has extensive experience mixing music, theater, and corporate shows, mainly in Switzerland and Germany, where he most recently worked as a mixing engineer for Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*. Other experience from around the world includes work for Angélique Kidjo, Straight No Chaser, the Manhattan Transfer, Take 6, Dianne Reeves, Ina Müller, Patti Austin, the New York Voices, Ivan Lins, The Bad Plus, Michael Brecker, Jazzanova, Randy Brecker, Rebekka Bakken, Steve Gadd, Joshua Redman, Ron Carter, Billy Cobham, Voxit, Mike Stern, Steps Ahead, Bo Katzman Gospel Choir, *Carmina Burana*/St. Gallen Symphony Orchestra, and the Mahavishnu Tribute/Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. Website: www.jonin.ch.

PRODUCTION**BoydDesign,*****production management and technical direction***

Founded in 2009 by Brendon Boyd, BoydDesign Inc is a design, production, and consultancy firm that specializes in technical design and implementation for concerts, theater, festivals, trade shows, and corporate and special events. Boyd and the BoydDesign team have been working with THE OFFICE for over a decade and most recently have collaborated on events and shows such as BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival (Prospect Park, New York City), The Reach Opening Festival at the Kennedy Center (Washington, DC), *The Mile-Long Opera* (The Highline, New York City), William Kentridge's *The Head & the Load* (Tate Modern, London; Ruhr Festival, Ruhr, Germany; New York City), the *For Freedoms Congress* (Los Angeles), and *Bangsokol: A Requiem for Cambodia* (Melbourne, Australia; New York City; Boston; Paris, France; Phnom Penh, Cambodia). Brendon Boyd (he/him) is the owner and principal of BoydDesign. Boyd thanks his wife Melissa for her continued support. Max

Helburn (he/him) is the assistant technical director at BoydDesign.

Xtina Parks, executive producer

Xtina Parks is an African wildlife photographer, filmmaker, African art gallery owner, and a conservationist who lives in the United States and Botswana. Through Parks' shared journey of working with African artisans, her gallery located at MASS MoCA, ROAM a Xtina Parks Gallery, strives to promote and support both established and new contemporary and traditional artists. Parks' work as a photographer has expanded towards on-the-ground conservation, working with biologists and researchers to protect endangered species in Africa, to heal the environment, and to promote sustainable economic advantages for people while honoring cultural traditions.

Xtina Studios is a documentary film production company whose debut film, *This is Ethiopia*, follows Parks and her team of researchers as they work alongside the local people to protect their home in the rainforest, as well as the animals, plants, trees, and all others under the massive canopy of the rainforest in the Bale Mountain National Park. At this critical moment in our time on earth, Parks hopes to inspire thoughtful actions and appreciation of our natural world. By reminding us that the land, the sky, the animals—as well as the resources of not only Africa but of our entire world—can be renewed, protected, and treasured.

THE OFFICE performing arts + film, producers

Visionary creative producer; dynamic programming team; incubator for social impact projects: THE OFFICE performing arts + film develops, produces, and presents art that makes a difference. Based in New York and London, THE OFFICE works in ongoing partnerships with festivals, venues, and institutions to create cultural programming that is unique and mission specific. We do this to provide platforms for artists across all disciplines, who strive in their practice to illuminate and advance causes that move them, and to bring their work to the

public. As producers we help artists we love to realize their vision by taking projects through all stages of creation: from concept, creative development, fundraising, and commissioning to tour planning, company management, and performance. We are honored to have produced work around the world with William Kentridge, Carrie Mae Weems, Angélique Kidjo, Theater of War, Rithy Pahn, and many others. Our mission in all this is to create spaces for art to do the things it's so good at doing, in our individual lives and our collective life in society as a whole: to uplift and inspire, to explain and reveal, to entertain, to challenge, and hold to account, and to act as a catalyst for change.

Producing Team

THE OFFICE performing arts + film

Rachel Chanoff, *founder and director*

Erica Zielinski, *managing producer*

Gabrielle Davenport, *lead producer*

Bruna D'Avila, *producer, assistant director*

Zion Jackson, *associate producer, company manager*

Jose Alvarado, *producing assistant*

THE OFFICE performing arts + film

Laurie Cearley, Olli Chanoff, Nadine Goellner,

Lynn Koek, Noah Bashevkin, Catherine

DeGennaro, Chloe Golding, Kyla Gardner,

Scout Eisenberg, Tess Peppis, Huiqiu Sun

Production Team

Brendon Boyd, *production manager and technical director*

Max Helburn, *assistant technical director*

Indigo Sparks, *assistant choreographer*

Jared Gooding, *assistant lighting designer*

Jonin Fehlmann, *sound engineer*

Michael Commendatore, *projections associate*

Henry Pedersen, *stage manager*

Beckie Kravetz, *makeup designer*

Sarah Gardner, *wardrobe supervisor*

Linda Simpkins, *assistant costume designer*

and costume builder

Hiywet Mimi Girma/Yesayet, *assistant costume designer and costume builder*

Jason Styres, *casting associate*

Richard Glover, *casting assistant*

Special Thanks:

Showman Fabricators (Bob Usdin, owner and principal); Upstate Scenic; Erich Bechtel and ADI: Audible Difference Inc.; Miodrag Guberinic, Mio Design NYC, for the design and fabrication of headpieces for Yemandja and Orò; Daniel Lawler B&J Fabrics; Pauliina Metsa – Vlisco, NanacraftsKE, Wandizi, and Afribead; Authentic Wax Print Fabrics by Vlisco; Kevin Morris and Nate Erwin, Redlight Management; Sarah Douglas, SLD Associates; Judy Boals, Boals, Winnett & Associates; Shanti Pillai; Eightinfinity Studio; Beatrice Capote and Mike Commendatore for contribution to projections in Scene 1 and Scene 4.

Executive Office

Jeremy Geffen, *Executive and Artistic Director*
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Proof of vaccination status, including booster, is required for entrance and masking is mandatory throughout the event. COVID-19 information is updated as necessary; please see Cal Performances' website for the most up-to-date policies and information.

program of music by Haydn, Berg and Brahms. And we couldn't be more excited about the Bay Area premiere of *Yemandja*, the first work of music theater by **Angélique Kidjo**, our wonderful 2021–22 artist-in-residence. Over the course of the entire season, Kidjo has repeatedly shared her genius as an artist and effervescent performer through a variety of performances and activities. In particular, I want to single out her tireless involvement in a host of related, non-performance events held throughout the season that brought this world-class talent into close contact with UC Berkeley students. [I also offer special thanks to our on-campus partners for Kidjo's fall and spring campus residencies: the Haas School of Business; Social Science Matrix; Black Studies Collaboratory; Center for African Studies; Theater, Dance and Performance Studies; and Computing, Data Science and Society. Together, these valued colleagues provide a splendid example of creative cross-campus cooperation and collaboration.] Providing these opportunities is central to our mission, and no other artist I can think of could have so brilliantly (and enthusiastically!) met the challenges inherent in being a true "artist in residence." Thank you, Angélique!

Jeremy Geffen

Executive and Artistic Director, Cal Performances

Lila Downs

Mexican American singer and activist Lila Downs is adored by her many fans for staying true to her roots even while she is always moving forward. Through a long career that has earned her multiple Grammy and Latin Grammy Awards, she now ranks as one of the most recognizable singers in Latin alternative music.

Sat, May 7, 8pm
ZELLERBACH HALL