

Friday, March 6, 2026, 8pm
Zellerbach Playhouse

Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band

Rogan Tinsley, *alto saxophone*
Asa Peters, *alto saxophone*
Adam Lamoureux, *tenor saxophone*
Michael Gutierrez, *tenor saxophone*
Orion White, *baritone saxophone*
Quinn Carson, *trombone*
Christopher Gonzales, *trombone*
Wade Demmert, *trombone*
Kali Rodriguez, *trumpet*
Giovanni Martinez, *trumpet*
Delbert Anderson, *trumpet*
Jenny Bement, *trumpet*
Marcos Varela, *bass*
Ed Littlefield, *drums*
Grant Richards, *keyboards*
Julia Keefe, *vocals*

This evening's performance will be performed without intermission.

*Cal Performances is committed to fostering a welcoming, inclusive, and safe environment for all—
one that honors our venues as places of respite, openness, and respect.
Please see the Community Agreements section on our Policies page for more information.*



Photos by Cody J. Bennett.



Indigenous jazz musicians, ensembles, and big bands have their place in the contemporary jazz world and jazz history. Following 19th-century federal policies to remove Indian children from their homes and indoctrinate them into European culture (Indian boarding schools), small ensembles and big bands began to flourish on reservations across the US and Canada during the first half of the 20th century. Indigenous musicians including Russell “Big Chief” Moore, Mildred Bailey, Oscar Pettiford, and Jim Pepper began to achieve celebrity with jazz as their medium, but they were never duly credited as Indigenous visionaries in the genre.

From time immemorial, songs have been the vessels of stories and lessons for the Indigenous people of the Americas. The goals of the Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band (JKIBB) are to celebrate and continue that tradition, to compose and perform new music inspired by traditional backgrounds, and to create a community of like-minded peoples from all backgrounds to uplift the next generation of Indigenous jazz musicians.

Indigenous cultures are not monolithic; many cultures carry traditions and songs as old and sacred as the next. The Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band reflects a wide range of Indigenous identities, from South America

to Canada, the Northeast to the Southwest. Together, the artists represent a long-silenced, long-forgotten chapter of jazz history: the participation, contribution, innovation, and legacy of Indigenous jazz musicians. And it is this legacy that composers and arrangers Julia Keefe and co-founder Delbert Anderson (Diné) carry forward through original works inspired by songs and rhythms of their Native heritage reimagined through the language and stylings of jazz.

It is a rarity to see a single Indigenous jazz musician nowadays—let alone 16 at one time!—on stage. The Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band celebrates the diversity and vitality of Indigenous peoples in jazz: past, present, and future. It is a bridge for people everywhere to see themselves on the bandstand regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender, or socioeconomic status.

The JKIBB debuted at the Washington Center for the Performing Arts in May 2022. The first performance was made possible with the support of Jazz Road, a national initiative of South Arts, funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation with additional support from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

“Himacus Qeci’Yew’Yew” (“thank you so much”) for your support of Indigenous artists.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

The **Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band** is an ensemble of Native and Indigenous jazz musicians from across Indian Country. Performing pieces from their under-appreciated predecessors in jazz—performers like Mildred Bailey (Coeur d’Alene) and Jim Pepper (Kaw/Mvskoke)—alongside works by contemporary Indigenous composers, the band spotlights a vibrant, longstanding tradition of Indigenous improvised music.

Led by the celebrated vocalist and luminary Julia Keefe (Nez Perce), the ensemble

brings charisma, passion, and purpose to the stage, leaving audiences both inspired and educated. Premiering at Washington Center for the Performing Arts in 2022, the band quickly gained a reputation for deepening and challenging the understanding of the “uniquely American” art form known as jazz. The band features a “Who’s Who” of Indigenous bandleaders and has headlined marquee events including the Mary Lou Williams Jazz Festival at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC during spring 2024.