



Brandley Gutierrez

Saturday, August 30, 2025, 8pm
William Randolph Hearst Greek Theatre, UC Berkeley

Sarabande Africaine
Angélique Kidjo & Yo-Yo Ma
with Thierry Vaton and David Donatien
and special guest Sinkane

*This evening's program will be announced from the stage
and performed without intermission.*

Leadership support for this performance is provided by Nadine Tang.

Angélique Kidjo and Yo-Yo Ma first met under the Arc de Triomphe, gathered with dozens of world leaders to mark the centenary of the end of the first world war. Yo-Yo played a Bach sarabande; Angélique sang “Blewu,” an Ewe dirge, in memory of the many and often-forgotten African soldiers killed in the war. It was a fitting beginning to a conversation between Angélique and Yo-Yo about the ways in which African culture is so frequently erased—in historical memory as in music—despite its enduring, essential presence in what we think of as the western tradition.

In the years since, Angélique and Yo-Yo have explored the intersections of their voices, their stories, and their musical sensibilities, developing new, collaborative arrangements of iconic music from each of their traditions, music that surfaces the many centuries of interaction between

African musical idioms and what has come to be defined as western classical music.

For example, the sarabande—the dance at the heart of J.S. Bach’s suites for solo cello—traveled from Africa to the Americas, then back to Spain, where it made its way into European courts. Dvořák’s *New World* symphony was inspired in part by Black American spirituals; Gershwin re-imagined Gullah Geechee songs. Meanwhile, Miriam Makeba grew up listening to western classical music; Angélique’s “Aisha” re-interprets Bach’s Keyboard Concerto No. 5, with lyrics in the Yoruba language.

Two endlessly curious musicians come together to search beyond the edges of their musical backgrounds, exposing the ways we have all been connected for a very long time; it’s a collaboration that asks us to joyfully question the tenets of genre and tradition that underpin our cultural thinking.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Five-time Grammy Award winner **Angélique Kidjo** is one of the greatest artists in international music today, a creative force with 16 albums to her name. *TIME* magazine has called her “Africa’s premier diva” and named her one of the most influential people in the world for 2021; the BBC, *Forbes* magazine, and *The Guardian* have all highlighted her importance to the people of the African continent. She is the recipient of the 2015 Crystal Award given by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland; the 2016 Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award; the 2018 German Sustainability Award; the 2023 Vilcek Prize in Music; and the 2023 Polar Music Prize.

As a performer, her striking voice, stage presence, and fluency in multiple cultures and languages have won respect from her peers and expanded her following across national borders. Kidjo has cross-pollinated the West African traditions of her child-

hood in Benin with elements of American R&B, funk, and jazz, as well as influences from Europe and Latin America.

Angélique also advocates on behalf of children as a UNICEF and OXFAM Ambassador. She created her own charitable foundation, Batonga, dedicated to support the education of young girls in Africa.

Yo-Yo Ma’s multifaceted career is testament to his belief in culture’s power to generate trust and understanding. Whether performing new or familiar works for cello, bringing communities together to explore culture’s role in society, or engaging unexpected musical forms, he strives to foster connections that stimulate the imagination and reinforce our humanity.

Most recently, Yo-Yo began *Our Common Nature*, a cultural journey to celebrate the ways that nature can reunite us in pursuit of a shared future. *Our Common Nature*

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follows the Bach Project, a 36-community, six-continent tour of J. S. Bach's cello suites paired with local cultural programming. Both endeavors reflect Yo-Yo's lifelong commitment to stretching the boundaries of genre and tradition to understand how music helps us to imagine and build a stronger society.

Yo-Yo Ma was born in 1955 to Chinese parents living in Paris, where he began studying the cello with his father at age four. When he was seven, he moved with his family to New York City, where he continued his cello studies before pursuing a liberal arts education.

Yo-Yo has recorded more than 120 albums, is the winner of 19 Grammy Awards, and has performed for nine American presidents, most recently on the occasion of President Biden's inauguration. He has received numerous awards, including the National Medal of the Arts, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Birgit Nilsson Prize. He has been a UN Messenger of Peace since 2006, and was recognized as one of *TIME* magazine's 100 most influential people of 2020.

Encore

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