

CREATING more HOPE

UCSB ARTS & LECTURES RETURNS TO LIVE PERFORMANCES

by Charles Donelan



Arturo O'Farrill



David Sedaris



Amythyst Kiah



ANDREW ECCLES

Alvin Ailey
American Dance
Theater's Jacque-
line Green and
Solomon Dumas

WE'VE had our fill of uncertainty, yet what we know is that there's more unknown to come. Wishing that things would stop changing, wanting to go back to however we imagine things were before? This approach has proved fruitless — a failed strategy at best, and at worst an excuse for thoughtless antagonism and mutual destruction.

Yet the world's great artists, scholars, and leaders still inspire. They help us believe that deep change moves in a positive direction and that meeting painful challenges prepares us to discover better ways to live.

The twin themes of the 2021-22 season of UCSB Arts & Lectures are "Creating Hope" and "Justice for All." Both of these threads address our collective ambivalence directly, and the resulting calendar of extraordinary programming offers an array of intellectual and emotional journeys crafted to deliver exactly what we need right now: a comprehensive experience of the potential for renewal in our community and for our planet.

On Thursday, September 23, thousands of UCSB students returned to campus for the first time since March 2020. Apart from the anticipated excitement of seeing one another and their professors in the many beautiful spaces expressly designed for this purpose, they encountered something unexpected in the grand plaza between the University Center and Storke Tower: La Santa Cecilia, a Grammy-winning Latin rock ensemble, booked by Arts & Lectures as a free outdoor concert to celebrate the first day of classes. As the music filtered out among the students entering and leaving the UCen, a circle of smiling, laughing, and dancing students formed around the group, moving to the music. La Marisoul, Santa Cecilia's lead singer, wandered into the crowd, blending with the students, her voice echoing across the campus.

This was the first in-person concert presented by UCSB Arts & Lectures since 2020: a free show for students, in the center of campus and in the middle of the school day. Here's what one student wrote in response, addressing the band members of La Santa Cecilia:

You create connection between two worlds that can be so divided, especially the past four years. I just want to thank you. Today was so beautiful. It was an honor to have you. Thank you for what you guys do and thank you for bringing HOPE to our community — to know there are true artists like you who are creating a momentum of change.

WHAT'S A SEASON FOR?

The past 20 months have given all of us ample opportunity to reevaluate our objectives and priorities. While UCSB Arts & Lectures is no exception to this, its longstanding commitment to providing Santa Barbara with

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—*Susannah Scott,*
Divisional Chair of the UCSB Academic Senate

sophisticated ideas and grounded pleasures has meant that, for them, this process has been one of refinement rather than wholesale reinvention.

Looking over the organization's 2021-2022 season brochure at the ambitious calendar of live performances they



Roxane Gay



have scheduled between October 10 and May 16, one can't help but admire the prescience of the formula that Arts & Lectures was already following prior to the disruptions caused by COVID-19.

OPENING WEEK, OCTOBER 10-15

At Arts & Lectures, opening week always makes a statement. After a year without the opportunity to stage one of these whirlwinds of consecutive performances, the concept is back in full effect. From Sunday to Friday, October 10-15, there's something big happening every other night. There's Julián Castro at Campbell Hall on Sunday, the Wood Brothers at The Granada Theatre on Tuesday, the Danish String Quartet at Rockwood on Thursday, and Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra at Campbell Hall on Friday. Each of these four events serves to initiate a specific theme that will be carried throughout the season.

On Sunday, October 10, Julián Castro will inaugurate the Justice for All series with a lecture at Campbell Hall titled *Waking Up from My American Dream*. Given the recent developments in American politics, it's hard to think of a better choice, or a better topic. Castro's dream of the presidency was clearly thwarted by the electorate in the Democratic primaries of 2020, but he wants to talk about waking up, so let's hear what he has to say. The talk is the first event in the new Justice for All series.

A&L's 2020-21 series Race to Justice understandably focused on African-American politics, culture, and history in response to the Black Lives Matter movement and the tragic conditions and events that made it necessary. Justice for All, a more inclusive program, remains rooted in an awareness of systemic racism that's shared among the UCSB faculty and student body. The new Justice for All series takes center stage early in the year, establishing the program's commitment to amplifying all voices.

Following Julián Castro's talk, Justice for All will present important programs by Madonna Thunder Hawk and Marcella Gilbert (Wed., Nov. 3), Annette Gordon-Reed

(Wed., Nov. 10), and Cathy Park Hong (Thu., Nov. 18). When the series reaches its culmination with Jennifer Koh and Davóne Tines's *Everything Rises* on April 12, the ground will have been prepared for the audience to experience this A&L-commissioned musical meditation on exile and slavery as part of an ongoing conversation about the past and the future.

Which brings us back to Julián Castro. His appearance is clearly a major platform for someone whose career at the highest levels of government is likely still in an early stage. Will this night in Campbell Hall be one of those "I was there" moments that people reference when a figure rises to a more prominent position? Or, perhaps more importantly, will it be the inspiration for one or more of the UCSB students in the audience to embrace the responsibility and the potential of public life and follow Castro into politics? Let's play it safe and bet on both.

FULL CIRCLE WITH THE WOOD BROTHERS

Two nights later, we will make what I expect to be an emotional return to Santa Barbara's Carnegie Hall, The Granada Theatre. The concert scheduled for that evening with the Wood Brothers takes up in a very real and specific way where the Arts & Lectures season of 2020 left off.

La Santa Cecilia





Ballet Hispánico

PAULA LOBO

The Wood Brothers raised the roof when they played Campbell Hall on March 6, 2020; a week later, all shows for the rest of the season were canceled. They return on Tuesday, October 12, with a new record, a strong sense of purpose, and vivid memories of that incredible night.

When I spoke to Oliver Wood by phone last week, he expressed his gratitude for the opportunity to come back to one of the last places where he and his group were able to perform before the quarantine hiatus. Speaking of that experience in the context of A&L's

season theme of Creating Hope, Wood said that "connecting people is the most hopeful thing we can do."

The Wood Brothers represent the pure joy of 21st-century American music in an elemental form. It's highly worth taking a moment to consider who they are, how they got together, and the range of the music they create. Growing up together in Boulder, the Woods knew that they were destined to become career musicians, but they started out on different tracks. While Chris Wood thrived on the New York new music/jazz scene as the bassist in Medeski, Martin, & Wood, his older brother Oliver traveled the world playing horn-drenched rhythm and blues with King Johnson. It was only when, due to a family health crisis, they reunited in their forties that the brothers realized there was a kind of musical chemistry between them that could not be ignored.

**FOR ALL THE LISTINGS, AND TO
MONITOR ADDITIONAL EVENTS
AS THEY ARE ANNOUNCED, VISIT
*ARTSANDLECTURES.UCSB.EDU.***



BEOWULF SHEEHAN

Julián Castro



Béla Fleck

ALAN MESSER



Isata and Sheku Kanneh-Mason

MATT GENDERS

Two decades later, and with the help of multi-instrumentalist Jano Rix, they have stepped into the spotlight as one of the leading forces in the new Americana movement, standing right alongside the Avett Brothers, Wilco, and Jason Isbell and the 400 Unit (who will be at the Arlington with Lucinda Williams for Arts & Lectures on February 26).

Now might be a good time to reassure those who are still uncertain about their comfort level with indoor venues that A&L has made a commitment to access for all this season that includes streaming options for many of its live events. Anyone with a ticket who is for any reason reluctant to participate in person can arrange to watch the show at home. This is just one way in which the organization intends to ensure the safety of everyone involved this year. At every performance, attendees will be asked to produce proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test, and all performers, staff members, and stage crew will be required to be vaccinated as well.

COMMISSIONS AND VISION

Arts & Lectures Councilmember Sara Miller McCune identified one of the program's key strengths recently when she wrote that "A&L always manages to bring us the kind of material that appeals to thousands: from students to their parents, grandparents, AND those who will follow in coming decades," adding that she doesn't "know how they do it. Is there a crystal ball in their office?"

While there is, as far as I know, no crystal ball, what A&L does have that allows them to consistently identify the artists who will define the future of their disciplines is an international network of loyal friends who share their insights and benefit from collaborations and commissions. Nowhere is this spirit of collective adventure more evident than in the classical music and dance communities.

On Thursday, October 14, the Danish String Quartet will play a concert featuring *Doppelgänger*, a new work by Danish composer Bent Sørensen.

The piece will be paired with two works by Franz Schubert that inspired it, including one also titled "Der Doppelgänger." The concert is the first in a series of commissions called *The Doppelgänger Project*, involving four contemporary composers and cosponsored by Arts & Lectures along with Cal Performances, Carnegie Hall, the Vancouver Recital Society, Flagey (Brussels), and Muziekgebouw (Amsterdam).

Its international collaborations such as this one that make the ongoing development of contemporary classical music possible, and Arts & Lectures has been in the forefront of this movement from the beginning. Commissioning new work plays a vital role not only in supporting the advancement of an art form but also in creating a network of performers who interact with and inform one another's practice.

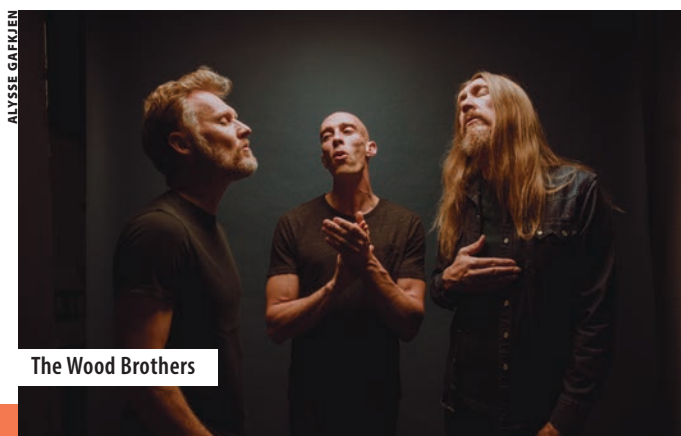
Savvy fans of A&L's programming have come to understand that what they are seeing and hearing today will become part of history in the future. That's why two of the people we polled about what they were looking forward to this year both cited the Jennifer Koh/Davóne Tines A&L commission of *Everything Rises*. UCSB Associate Professor of Musicology Derek Katz praised the organization for its impact on his students through classroom visits and masterclasses, and Janet Garufis, the president and CEO of Montecito Bank and Trust, recognizes the value of commissioning new work.

GREAT AMERICAN MUSIC AT THE BORDER AND BEYOND

The concert taking place on Friday, October 15, in Campbell Hall with Arturo O'Farrill and the Afro Latin Jazz Orchestra represents a transformative model for what this greatest of American art forms can be. It's called *Fandango at the Wall*, and it will include the Villalobos Brothers, a

group whose interpretation of Mexican folk music employs elements of jazz and classical.

This international collaboration was born in 2018, when the bands came together for *Fandango Fronterizo*, a festival at the Tijuana-San Diego border. If you are familiar with the son



The Wood Brothers

ALYSSE GAFKJEN

COVER STORY



COURTESY UCSB ARTS & LECTURES

Lil Buck

jarochos style of song; and if you appreciate the legacy of Afro Cuban musicians like Arturo's father, Chico O'Farrill; or even if all you know is that Latin jazz makes you want to dance, this concert is for you.

As part of the Soul of America series, *Fandango at the Wall* opens the way for bluegrass in December and January with Béla Fleck and Jerry Douglas (Fri., Dec. 15) and Punch Brothers (Tue., Jan. 18), followed by another absolutely essential big band, the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis on Friday, February 4. Anyone who was lucky enough to hear Marsalis in conversation with UCSB professor Jeffrey Stewart as part of last season's House Calls series knows that Arts & Lectures not only holds a special place in the trumpeter's heart, but it also gets him going. As for that crystal-ball effect, those who wish to look into the future of music need look no further than Amythyst Kiah, who will be here on Cinco de Mayo.

THE RETURN OF DANCE

Of all the many deprivations inflicted by the pandemic, the one felt most sharply by followers of Arts & Lectures may well have been the absence of dance from last season's virtual programming. Beginning in January, with Ballet Hispánico on Friday, January 21, the calendar will more than make up for that loss. Kyle Abraham arrives with A.I.M. on Sunday, February 13, in a program featuring the music of D'Angelo. Lil Buck returns for more Memphis jook on Tuesday, March 8, and in April and May, we will be blessed with truly extraordinary mini-residencies by two of the greatest dance companies in the world. On April 13 and 14, the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater will arrive for two nights at the Granada, with entirely different programs each night. Then, on May 11 and 12, the Joffrey Ballet returns to Santa Barbara for the same type of engagement: consecutive nights of superlative dance.

That would be enough on its own to satisfy even the most ardent dance fanatic, but with so much to be thankful for with the return to live performance, A&L couldn't resist adding one more super spectacle to the season as a grand finale. From Friday to Sunday, May 13-15, Montreal-based choreographer Sylvain Émard will be in town to produce and direct *Le Grand Continental*, a free public dance extravaganza starring you, the people of Santa Barbara.

More details will be provided as we get closer to the date, but for now, know this: Approximately 100 local dance enthusiasts of all ages, backgrounds, and experience levels will be performing together in this reimagining of line dancing and traditional village festivals. If you cannot wait to see what this might be like, check out the video of *Le Grand Continental* at PuSh Festival in 2015 (tinyurl.com/legrandcontinental).

There's so much more to describe and discuss in this year's Arts & Lectures season that it would take another article at least this long to do it all justice. For example, the great Pico Iyer is back for another round of Speaking with Pico, including some incredible guests like author Elizabeth Strout (Fri., May 13), and what Arts & Lectures season would be complete without a visit from special friend David Sedaris (Fri., May 6)? And did I mention the Very She & Him Christmas Party on Thursday, December 2, with Zooey Deschanel (from the movie *Elf*) and M. Ward? See you there! ■