

PHOTO BY AUGUST UDOH



SOMI

Friday, February 14, 2020, at 7:30pm
Colwell Playhouse

PROGRAM

SOMI

with

Otis Brown III, drums

Toru Dodo, piano

Liberty Ellman, guitar

Marika Hughes, cello

Juliette Jones, violin I

Dana Lyn, violin II

Ina Paris, viola

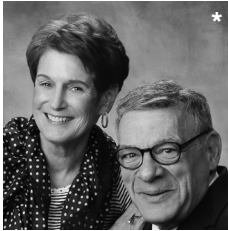
Keith Witty, bass

This evening's selections will be announced from the stage and will not include an intermission.

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PROGRAM NOTES

“There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground;
There are a thousand ways to go home again.”

—*Rumi*

What does it mean to arrive in or return to a place, call it home, and then offer that very place your heart? It is an honor to return to the place of my birth to share songs that mostly tell stories inspired by immigrant experiences.

As a first-generation American and the proud daughter of immigrants, I often feel deeply affronted by a political climate that casually heralds xenophobic rhetoric. I wanted this homecoming performance, therefore, to be one that challenges all of us to consider how we define “ome” and, perhaps more importantly, if our doors are as wide as our hearts claim to be. So, on this Valentine’s night, may we let the truest version our hearts lead us back to the center of our humanity, to the center of unconditional love, to the center of Home.

Thank you to Krannert Center for a literal lifetime of inspiration and for your continued support. Tonight’s performance is dedicated to the memory of my beloved father, Dr. Ibulaimu Kakoma, and in thanksgiving for the many sacrifices that he and my extraordinary mother, Elizabeth Kakoma, made so that I might live my dreams out loud in this country and anywhere else in the world. You both give me courage. Ninkugonza Abwoli. Ndabakunda cyane.

—*Somi*

www.somimusic.com

PROFILES

SOMI

Born in Champaign, Illinois, as Laura Kabasomi Kakoma to immigrants from Uganda and Rwanda, acclaimed vocalist and songwriter Somi has built a career of transatlantic sonicism and storytelling. Her latest album *Petite Afrique* (Sony Music) is a daring, relevant, refashioning of what “jazz” and “African music” mean—both singularly and to each other. The album, which tells the story of African immigrants in the midst of a gentrified Harlem in New York City, won the 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album. *Petite Afrique* is the highly anticipated follow-up to Somi’s major label debut *The Lagos Music Salon* (Sony Music), which was inspired by an 18-month creative sabbatical in Lagos, Nigeria, and features special guests Angélique Kidjo and Common, landing at #1 on US jazz charts. Both albums straddle the worlds of African jazz, soul, and pop with a newfound ease and a voice that *Vogue* magazine simply calls “Superb!”

Closely mentored by the legendary trumpet player Hugh Masekela, Somi’s live performance was described by *JazzTimes* magazine as “the earthy gutsiness of Nina Simone blended with the vocal beauty of Dianne Reeves,” while *Billboard* exclaims that she’s “all elegance and awe . . . utterly captivating.”

Recently named a 2019 Sundance Theater Fellow, Somi has written an original play called *Dreaming Zenzile* about legendary South African singer and activist Miriam Makeba that will premiere at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis in March 2020 before eventually landing back in New York City as the inaugural production of the legendary Apollo Theater’s new Off-Broadway theater in 2021. Her new album, also about Makeba, will be released in 2020.

She is a Soros Equality Fellow, a USA Doris Duke Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, an inaugural Association of Performing Arts Presenters Fellow, a former Artist-in-Residence at Park Avenue Armory, UCLA’s Center for the Art of Performance, The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, and Baryshnikov Arts Center. She is also the founder of Salon Africana, a boutique art and production house that celebrates the very best of African artists working in the performance and literary arts. Also celebrated for her activism, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon recently asked Somi to perform at the United Nations’ General Assembly in commemoration of the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. She was also invited to perform at Carnegie Hall alongside Hugh Masekela, Dave Matthews, and Vusi Mahlesela in celebration of South African democracy. She will return to Carnegie Hall with her own band in spring 2021 as part of its inaugural Voices of Hope Festival that features a program of artists who use their music to raise awareness around social issues.

Somi holds undergraduate degrees from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a master’s degree from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. In her heart of hearts, she is an East African Midwestern girl who loves family, poetry, and freedom.

OTIS BROWN III (drums) wears his heart on his sleeve, and if you let the musical community that he is an integral part of tell it, the world is better off for it. After 15 years of sideman work with the likes of Terence Blanchard, Oliver Lake, Eric Lewis, Kurt Elling, Somi, and Gretchen Parlato—and most consistently with Joe Lovano and Esperanza Spalding—Brown steps out with *The Thought of You*, a bold debut on Revive Music/Blue Note Records that harks back like a musical memoir through an ingeniously vitalizing lens. The son of musicians and music educators, New Jersey native Brown grew up to the sounds of jazz, gospel, funk, and rhythm and blues. After studying at Delaware State University, The New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music and Thelonious Monk Institute, Brown caught the attention of Joe Lovano. Initially subbing for Lewis Nash and Idris Muhammad in Lovano's bands, Brown became a founding member of Lovano's Us Five quintet, recording three albums, including the GRAMMY-nominated *Bird Songs*.

TORU DODO (piano) was born in Tokyo and began playing classical piano at the age of four. Dodo discovered jazz music while studying economics at Meiji University and soon began gigging in the Tokyo area. Dodo continued his musical studies at Berklee College of Music in Boston where he graduated *summa cum laude* in 1998. One of New York's most in-demand sidemen, Dodo has worked with jazz luminaries such as Kenny Garrett, Benny Golson, and Curtis Fuller. In addition to being one of the regular pianists for the Off-Broadway show *Sleep No More* since 2011, he often works with other notable singers such as Nicole Henry, Alicia Olatuja, and Laurin Talese. Dodo has been recognized by the International Association for

Jazz Education and the Bronx Council on the Arts for his outstanding contributions to jazz education and performance. To date, Dodo has released five solo albums; his most recent being *JAfro* in 2013, which he self-produced through his own record label (Do&do). Dodo has been collaborating and touring with Somi since 2004. He has lived in New York City since 1998.

LIBERTY ELLMAN (guitar) is known for his improvisational and interpretive flexibility, along with his unique rhythmic touch. All of which has allowed him to contribute to the creative ensembles of Wadada Leo Smith, Myra Melford, Greg Osby, Butch Morris, Vijay Iyer, Joe Lovano and vocalist Somi. Ellman is perhaps best known for his work with Henry Threadgill's groundbreaking ensemble Zooid. Their most recent recording *In For a Penny, In For a Pound* was awarded a Pulitzer prize in 2016.

As a composer and bandleader, Ellman has produced four critically acclaimed CDs: *Orthodoxy* (Red Giant Records), *Tactiles*, *Ophiuchus Butterfly*, and most recently, *Radiate* (the latter three on Pi Recordings). Writing about *Radiate* in *All About Jazz*, Dan Bilawsky says, "Radiate is a joy to behold, as it's incredibly impressive in its complexity of vision and clarity. This one is certainly in the running for album of the year." Voted #1 Rising Star Guitarist in the 2016 *Downbeat* Critics Poll, he was also honored in the 2015 *JazzTimes* Expanded Critics Poll, as one of the four guitarists of the year alongside Bill Frisell, John Scofield, and Julian Lage..

MARIKA HUGHES (cello) is a native New Yorker, a cellist, singer, and a storyteller on *The Moth*. She grew up in a musical family—Hughes’ grandfather was the great cellist Emanuel Feuermann, and her parents owned a jazz club, Burgundy, on the Upper West Side. As children, she and her younger brother were both regulars on *Sesame Street* and went to the beloved Manhattan Country School. Hughes continued her education in the double degree program at Barnard College and The Juilliard School, graduating with BAs in political science and cello performance, respectively.

Hughes has worked with Whitney Houston, Lou Reed, Anthony Braxton, David Byrne, Adele, Henry Threadgill, D’Angelo, Anaïs Mitchell, Stew, Idina Menzel, and Taylor Mac, among many others. She was a founding member of the Bay Area-based bands 2 Foot Yard (*Two Foot Yard*, *Tzadik*, 2003, and *Borrowed Arms*, *Yard Work*, 2008) and Red Pocket (*Thick*, *Tzadik*, 2004). She is a master teacher and director for Young Arts. Hughes has self-released three albums: *The Simplest Thing* (2011), *Afterlife Music Radio* (2011), and *New York Nostalgia* (2016). She happily leads her bands Bottom Heavy and The New String Quartet on extended tours of New York City. Hughes lives in the countryside of Kings County.

JULIETTE JONES (violin) is a multi-genre live and studio recording violinist. A BMI composer, Jones has scored, recorded, and contracted for a number of live, television, and multimedia events, including the Oscar-nominated film *Mudbound* (Dee Rees), the 60th Annual GRAMMY Awards *Elton John Tribute*, NBC’s broadcast of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the world premiere of the Geva Theater-commissioned play, *The Agitators* (Mat Smart/Logan Vaughn), and Solange Knowles’ Hollywood Bowl and Radio City Music Hall performances of *A Seat at the Table*.

As a performer, Jones has worked with a veritable list of “who’s who” in the music industry including Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Justin Timberlake, Janelle Monáe, Hans Zimmer, John Legend, Toshi Reagon, Pharrell, Common, Coldplay, One Republic, Frank Ocean, Miley Cyrus, Hit-Boy, Florence + The Machine, Nicki Minaj, J. Cole, Ryan Leslie, Kid Cudi, Richard Smallwood, and Sheila E.

She is the founder of *Rootstock Republic*, a boutique, broad-based string production company that specializes in consulting, contracting, music preparation, live performance, and studio recording.

DANA LYN (violin) is a violinist, pianist, and composer based in Brooklyn, New York. She has released eight albums under her name, all of which she produced or co-produced. She has created album art for four of her albums and stop-motion animations in support of her music. Currently, her own projects include a sextet, *Mother Octopus*, a collaboration with actor Vincent D’Onofrio called *Slim Bone Head Volt*, and a duo with guitarist Kyle Sanna. She performs with Taylor Mac’s *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* and *Holiday Sauce*, with *Notes of a Native Song* by Stew and the Negro Problem, and the Hank Roberts Sextet. Lyn was an Artist-in-Residence at the Baryshnikov Arts Center in spring 2017; most recently, she was a member of the Joe’s Pub Working Group and an awardee of the American Composers Forum Create Commission in 2018.

INA PARIS (viola) creates music that features the rhythms and sounds of Latin and jazz. She performs with Glamor Tango, Quartetto Tomassini, Quartette Indigo, Astoria Tango Orchestra, New York Tango Sextet, and Leading Ladies of Tango. Paris appears in recordings with jazz greats Wynton Marsalis, Regina Carter, and John Blake. She has collaborated with a wide range of accomplished artists, such as Harry Connick Jr., Alice Cooper, Mark Anthony, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Nicole King Cole, Chucho Valdes, La Orquesta Aragon, Pablo Milanés, Gilberto Santa Rosa, Daniel Phillips, Marcy Rosen, Gerard Schwarz, Michael Stern, Thalia, Ray Chew, Willy Colon, and Steven Van Zandt in the Netflix series *Lillyhammer*. Her classical collaborations include the New York Camerata, Brandenburg Ensemble, Brooklyn Metro Chamber Orchestra, Washington Heights Camerata, Soulful Symphony, Queens Baroque Orchestra, and the Queens College Orchestra. On Broadway, Paris performs in *Dear Evan Hansen* and *Pretty Woman*. Paris has toured Europe, North and South America, Africa, and recently China with Glamor Tango. She has appeared on television with Soundtrack '63 at the Apollo Theater, *Jesus Christ Superstar* live concert on NBC with John Legend and *Elton John's GRAMMY Tribute with Chris Martin* on CBS.

An award-winning musician, Paris recorded *La Bella Cubana* as part of La Camerata Romeu, which received Cuba's equivalent to a GRAMMY (Premio de la Critica Especializada).

KEITH WITTY (bass) is a New York City native bassist and composer who straddles the worlds of hip-hop, popular music forms, and jazz's avante garde. He has performed with David S. Ware Quartet, The Anthony Braxton Quartet, Burnt Sugar, Matana Roberts, and is a long-time member of singer/songwriter Amel Larrieux's band since 2007. Witty began collaborating with acclaimed East African vocalist Somi in 2010 and has toured with her in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. In addition to appearing on her *Live at Jazz Standard* recording, Witty served as co-producer of Somi's award-winning major label releases, *Lagos Music Salon* (2014) and *Petite Afrique* (2017), and her forthcoming 2020 release.

A leader in his own right, Witty formed the electro-acoustic jazz trio, THIEFS, with French saxophonist Christophe Panzani and American drummer/vocalist Guillermo E. Brown. Their eponymous debut album was received with much excitement in the United States and France, where the band continues to tour extensively. A dedicated educator as well, Witty was Composer-in-Residence for the New York City Opera's education program for a decade and has taught as a visiting artist at community arts programs and schools around the world. He has studied with master bassists Michael Moore, Mark Dresser, and John Patitucci. Witty holds a BA from Wesleyan University and an MA in music from the City College of New York.