



Somi

Thursday
September 17, 2026
7:30pm

Colwell Playhouse



THE ACT OF GIVING

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ANONYMOUS

PROGRAM

Somi

SOMI KAKOMA, vocalist-composer

LIBERTY ELLMAN, guitar

TORU DODO, piano

BEN WILLIAMS, acoustic & electric bass

SHELDON THWAITES, drums

This performance will be presented without an intermission.

"A virtuosic performer in full command of her instrument and powers."

(The New York Times)

"An elegant amalgam of the music she loves and the bi-continental experiences that have shaped her life."

(NPR)

"Somi's songs gracefully fuse African-tinged grooves, supple jazz singing and compassionate social consciousness; they're both serious and seductive!"

(The New York Times)

Somi discography includes:

What Does It Take to Bloom? (2026)

Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba (2022)

Holy Room: Live at Alte Oper with Frankfurt Radio Big Band (2020)

Petite Afrique (2017)

The Lagos Music Salon (2014)

Live at Jazz Standard (2012)

If The Rains Come First (2008)

Red Soil in My Eyes (2006)

Eternal Motive (2004)

PROFILES

SOMI

Vocalist, composer, actor, and playwright Somi Kakoma is the Midwestern daughter of immigrants from Uganda and Rwanda. Hailed by *The New York Times* as “a virtuosic performer in full command of her instrument and powers,” she is known in the international jazz world simply as ‘Somi’.

Her 2021 Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Vocal Album made her the first African woman ever nominated in any of the Grammy jazz categories. The album also won an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Vocal Album. Her previous studio album *Petite Afrique*, which also won an NAACP Image Award, tells the story of the vibrant African immigrant community in midst of a rapidly gentrifying Harlem in New York City and was the highly anticipated follow up to Somi’s major label debut, *The Lagos Music Salon*. Her last album, *Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba*, that honors the great South African singer-activist and features special guests Gregory Porter, Seun Kuti, Angelique Kidjo, Nduduzo Makhathini, Ladysmith Black Mambazo, and Thandiswa Mazwai, won an inaugural Jazz Music Award for Best Vocal Performance. As a companion project to that album, Somi also penned and starred in the critically acclaimed original musical about Makeba called *Dreaming Zenzile* that toured nationally and Off-Broadway. Her highly anticipated new album, *What Does It Take to Bloom?*, was released in August 2026. Somi recently made her Broadway acting debut in the title role of *Jaja’s African Hair Braiding* by Joceyn Bioh.

Closely mentored by the legendary trumpet player Hugh Masekela, Somi has carved out her own path

as an artist, scholar, and activist. A recipient of the 2023 Doris Duke Artist Award, Somi is also a Soros Equality Fellow, a United States Artist Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, a Sundance Theatre Fellow, and a former artist-in-residence at Park Avenue Armory, Captiva at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Baryshnikov Arts Center, and UCLA’s Center for the Art of Performance. She is also the founder of Salon Africana, a boutique cultural agency and record label dedicated to challenging homogenized ideas of African cultural production today.

Often celebrated for the socio-political messages inherent to her original songwriting, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon 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*. Somi holds undergraduate degrees in Cultural Anthropology and African Studies from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a Master’s degree in Performance Studies from Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, and a PhD in Creative Practice & Critical Inquiry from Harvard University’s Department of Music. In her heart of hearts, she is an East African Midwestern girl who loves family, poetry, and freedom.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Illinois System carries out its mission in its namesake state, which includes the traditional territory of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Menominee, Ho-Chunk, and Chickasaw Nations. These lands continue to carry the stories of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity.

As a land-grant institution, the University of Illinois has a particular responsibility to acknowledge the peoples of these lands, as well as the histories of dispossession that have allowed for the growth of this institution. We are also obligated to reflect on and actively address these histories and the role that this university has played in shaping them. This acknowledgement and the centering of Native peoples is a start as we move forward.

Krannert Center affirms the commitment by the university to move beyond these statements, toward building deeper relationships and taking actions that uphold and preserve Indigenous rights and cultural equity.

As we gather to experience this performance, we have an opportunity to reflect on the ways that systems of oppression have shaped our society. We can work together to create systems that support human dignity, establish equity, strengthen cross-cultural relationships, and draw upon the creative capacity of all people that make up this community, state, nation, and world.



Come together through the arts.



Krannert Center is a place of connection—a space where the performing arts bring people together, spark dialogue, and create shared experiences that resonate far beyond the stage. Through music, movement, and storytelling, we find common ground, deepen understanding, and celebrate the richness of human expression.

The generosity of our donors and friends makes this connection possible. Your support sustains the Center's commitment to inspiring audiences, supporting artists, and ensuring that all who enter our doors can engage with the transformative power of the arts.

Please consider making a gift to Krannert Center today. Your contribution is essential to maintaining the high standards of excellence that define us while strengthening the Center's impact for seasons to come.



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Phyllis Robeson & Family

"An awe-inspiring environment for amazing performances."



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"Krannert Center is a great asset to the community!"

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The Youth Series features daytime performances, online media created by performing artists, and educational activities designed especially for pre-K through high school-aged students. Children who participate learn to appreciate the performing arts, gain knowledge, build social skills, and integrate live performance experiences into classroom work.

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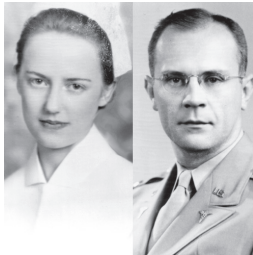
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(1914-1997) March 2000



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ANONYMOUS
July 2025

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Members of the Foellinger Society show their enduring commitment to the arts through a single donation, pledge, or estate gift of \$500,000 to \$999,999. Because of their generosity, everyone in this community can unite in joyful and engaging experiences. These magnanimous arts lovers celebrate the spirit of Helene Foellinger, whose memorial gift honored her sister, Loretta Foellinger Teeple, and established the Marquee Performance Endowment.



AVIS HILFINGER
(1915-2004)
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(1912-2006) April 2000



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Dr. John B. Colwell, Pauline Groves Colwell, and R. Forrest Colwell provided critical funding for the Marquee Performance Endowment, and the Colwell Society gratefully acknowledges their invaluable assistance. Members of this society may make a single donation, pledge, or estate gift of \$100,000 to \$249,999 for celebrating, preserving, and exploring the arts right here and around the globe.



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(1918-1997)
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November 2006



ANONYMOUS
November 2006



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March 2023



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 krannert center

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The Illinois Arts Council Agency provides general programming support to ensure that audiences of all ages have direct access to world-class theatre, dance, and music.



The Augustine Foundation

The Augustine Foundation provides continued major support for ELLNORA | The Guitar Festival.



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The Poiesis Quartet is the recipient of Chamber Music America's 2026 Cleveland Quartet Award. The quartet's performance has been made possible by the Cleveland Quartet Award Endowment Fund.



The Student Sustainability Committee

The Student Sustainability Committee provided funding for the Krannert Center Audiences Lighting Retrofit Project, which continues to increase energy efficiency, decrease labor requirements, and improve safety conditions.



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We work to create the best possible setting for the experiences you seek and find here.

Necessaries

Restrooms are located in the foyers of Foellinger Great Hall, Tryon Festival Theatre, and Colwell Playhouse; the east entrances on the Lobby level; and gender-neutral restrooms can be found in each elevator lobby on Level 1 and Level 3. Lobby restrooms and one restroom in each elevator lobby are fully accessible and contain baby-changing stations.

Ushers will be happy to provide you cough drops or disposable foam earplugs if the place starts rockin'.

If you or a companion needs medical assistance, contact an usher or other staff member. Please call 911 in case of an emergency.

Please take a moment before the performance to note the exits nearest to you. If it becomes necessary to evacuate the theatre, please remain calm, follow the instructions of the house staff, and exit in an orderly fashion to the appropriate safe meeting location which will be announced to you.

Large bags and backpacks, or any other item deemed to be dangerous or to pose an obstruction will not be able to enter the theatres. Please approach the Patron Services counter for assistance with these items.

Please note that food and drink are not allowed in the theatres, except bottled water.

Phones and Devices

The use of cell phones, cameras, and recording devices during performances is prohibited unless otherwise announced from the stage.

Late Arrivals

As a courtesy to performers and audience members, latecomers will be seated only at times selected in advance by the artist. Should you find that you've arrived late to a performance, our Patron Services staff will keep you informed about the earliest seating opportunity.

Lost Items

If you are in need of Lost and Found, please visit the Patron Services counter. We will do our best to reunite object and owner!

Ticket Returns

If you find you can't attend a performance, please contact the Ticket Office in advance, preferably by 6pm the day before the performance (kran-tix@illinois.edu or 217.333.6280). We never charge a handling fee on ticket transactions.

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Krannert Center for the Performing Arts is committed to making experiences accessible for all patrons, and we are delighted to provide a number of services to assist you. Krannert Center is equipped with an assisted listening system, wheelchair-accessible and no-step/few-step seating, and large-print programs, Braille programs, and American Sign Language interpreters are available with three weeks' advance notice.

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ONE PIECE

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