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[Press Room](#)



Images of *Letter to a Man* are available for download from the Cal Performances [press room](#).

**CAL PERFORMANCES AT UC BERKELEY PRESENTS
MIKHAIL BARYSHNIKOV IN *LETTER TO A MAN*,
DESIGNED AND DIRECTED BY ROBERT WILSON
THURSDAY–SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 10–13, 2016**

**West Coast premiere of the acclaimed theatrical work
is part of Berkeley *RADICAL Innovation* season-long thematic strand**

Berkeley, October 3, 2016 —Cal Performances at UC Berkeley presents the West Coast premiere of *Letter to a Man*, a Cal Performances co-commission and the second acclaimed theatrical collaboration between iconic director **Robert Wilson** and legendary performer **Mikhail Baryshnikov**, Thursday–Saturday, November 10–12 at 8pm, and Sunday, November 13 at 3pm in Zellerbach Hall. In this solo performance, Baryshnikov, widely considered the greatest male dancer of the last half of the 20th

century, portrays the iconic Ballets Russes dancer and choreographer Vaslav Nijinsky, arguably the most influential male dancer of the first part of the century. Wilson's production explores the tumultuous, terrifying six-week period in 1919 when Nijinsky began his descent into schizophrenia; a period the dancer chronicled vividly in his diary.

In his haunting journal, Nijinsky grapples with demons real and imagined—he rants and ruminates about God and man, war and peace, life and death, sex and shame—but in an interview with the *Guardian* as the work was being developed, Baryshnikov explained that it is the moments of lucidity in the midst of Nijinsky's tirades that drew him to the text. Wilson had also been fascinated by the humanity of these writings, and the two began discussing a collaboration in 2013, while already at work on another production. Having previously collaborated on *The Old Woman*, which made its Bay Area premiere at Cal Performances in November 2014, Wilson and Baryshnikov created *Letter to a Man* with a variety of eminent collaborators, and includes collaboration on movement and spoken text with **Lucinda Childs**, dramaturgy by **Darryl Pinckney**, and music by **Hal Willner**.

The drama follows Nijinsky's troubled and fragile existence in Switzerland near the end of WWII, in those final weeks before his institutionalization. Inhabiting Wilson's intricate lighting and bold set design, Baryshnikov plays his tragicomic role in a tuxedo and elaborate whiteface, as the *New Yorker* described, "the face of Pierrot, of Petrushka, of Joel Grey in 'Cabaret'—all those figures in whom the smile meets the horror." Baryshnikov portrays Nijinsky's psychological frailty, rather than his life in dance: "We have avoided recreating anything. There is not one gesture... It is a strange parallel story about the voice of this person, not his physicality." Wilson and Baryshnikov have described developing the movement for the work through an extremely collaborative process of improvisation and revision. Simple props, brash and colorful cut-out figures, and evocative video projection re-create Nijinsky's shifting perceptions of reality.

Letter to a Man is presented as part of Cal Performances' Berkeley RADICAL *Innovation* thematic strand of the 2016/17 season, which places the focus on a selection of contemporary artists who have created major new ideas for the interdisciplinary performance stage. Part retrospective, part celebration of trailblazing artistic discovery, *Innovation* tracks and joins a group of established innovators by exploring their ideas and gaining insights into novel directions in contemporary performance. More information on Berkeley RADICAL *Innovation* can be found at calperformances.org/berkeley-radical-innovation.

[Mikhail Baryshnikov](#) is considered one of the greatest dancers of our time. He began his career with the Kirov Ballet in Leningrad, and came to New York in 1974. Baryshnikov was a principal dancer with American Ballet Theatre (ABT), where he later served as artistic director for a decade. At New York City Ballet, he worked with George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins. Baryshnikov co-founded the White Oak Dance Project with choreographer Mark Morris in 1990, with the goal of expanding the repertoire and visibility of American modern dance. As an actor he has performed widely on- and off-Broadway, as well as in television and film. In 2005, he launched the Baryshnikov Arts Center (BAC), a creative space in New York for presenting and nurturing multidisciplinary artists. Baryshnikov is the recipient of the Kennedy Center Honors, the National Medal of Honor, the Commonwealth Award, the Jerome Robbins Award, and the 2012 Vilcek Award, among many others.

[Robert Wilson](#) is among the world's foremost theater and visual artists. His works for the stage unconventionally integrate a wide variety of artistic media, including dance, movement, lighting, sculpture, music, and text. Wilson's artistic collaborators include many writers and musicians, including Heiner Müller, Tom Waits, Susan Sontag, Laurie Anderson, William Burroughs, Lou Reed, and Jessye Norman. With Philip Glass, he wrote the seminal opera *Einstein on the Beach* (1976). He has also re-imagined masterworks by Beckett, Puccini, Debussy, Brecht/Weill, and Goethe. Wilson has been honored with numerous awards, including a Pulitzer Prize nomination, two Premio Ubu awards, the Golden Lion of the Venice Biennale, and an Olivier Award. He is the founder and artistic director of the Watermill Center, a laboratory for the Arts in Water Mill, New York.

About Cal Performances

Cal Performances is the performing arts presenter and producer of the University of California, Berkeley, fulfilling its mission by presenting, producing, and commissioning renowned and emerging artists in music, dance, and theater. Cal Performances reaches more than 150,000 people annually through concerts and campus and community events, including talks, symposia, lecture demonstrations, and academic courses based on Cal Performances' season. Under the leadership of Matías Tarnopolsky, the organization launched Berkeley RADICAL (**R**esearch and **D**evelopment **I**nitiative in **C**reativity, **A**rts, and **L**earning) to cultivate the artistic literacy of future audiences and connect some of the most innovative artists in the world with the intellectual capital of UC Berkeley. The 2016/17 season is the second season for Berkeley RADICAL, and embraces three strands of artistic exploration: *Inclusion*,

Innovation, and *Immersion*. More information on Berkeley RADICAL can be found at calperformances.org/berkeley-radical.

Ticket Information

Tickets for *Letter to a Man* from Thursday–Saturday, November 10–12 at 8pm, and Sunday, November 13 at 3pm in Zellerbach Hall range from \$50–\$225 (prices subject to change). Half-price tickets are available for UC Berkeley students. Tickets are available through the Ticket Office at Zellerbach Hall, at (510) 642-9988, at calperformances.org, and at the door. For more information about discounts, go to calperformances.org/discounts.

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CALENDAR EDITORS, PLEASE NOTE:

CAL PERFORMANCES PRESENTS

Thursday, November 10 at 8pm

Friday, November 11 at 8pm

Saturday, November 12 at 8pm

Sunday, November 13 at 3pm

Zellerbach Hall

Bancroft Way at Dana Street

UC Berkeley campus

***Special Event:* Berkeley RADICAL**

Letter to a Man (Cal Performances co-commission, West Coast Premiere)

Robert Wilson, director

Mikhail Baryshnikov

Program: In *Letter to a Man*, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Robert Wilson bring the haunting diaries of ballet icon Vaslav Nijinsky to life in an inspired collaboration that continues following their acclaimed 2014 production of *The Old Woman*. Baryshnikov, who until now has resisted portraying the larger-than-life Nijinsky, explained his artistic motivations: “This is not about Nijinsky, per se... It is about a troubled man and his relationship with his art, with God, with family, with moral issues.” The performance is in English and Russian with English subtitles.

Berkeley RADICAL: This performance is part of Cal Performances’ Berkeley RADICAL *Innovation* thematic strand, which follows a group of artistic trailblazers, some celebrating key milestones, who continually ask us to perceive, think, and understand in new ways. More information at calperformances.org/berkeley-radical-innovation.

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