

# Taylor Mac

*A 24-Decade History of Popular Music (Abridged)*

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**WHEN:**  
WEDNESDAY,  
SEPTEMBER 27, 2017  
7:30 PM

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**VENUE**  
BING  
CONCERT HALL



Photo: Teddy Wolff

# TAYLOR MAC

## *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music (Abridged)*

Conceived, written, and performed by

TAYLOR MAC

Music Director / Arranger

MATT RAY

Costume Designer

MACHINE DAZZLE

Executive Producer

Linda Brumbach

Associate Producer

Alisa E. Regas

Co-Produced by

Pomegranate Arts and Nature's Darlings

**This program is generously supported by Roberta and Steven Denning,  
Scott and Molly Forstall, the Hornik family, and the Koret Foundation.**

**Stanford student participation through the Arts Intensive program is supported by  
the Office of the Vice President for the Arts at Stanford University.**

*A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* is commissioned in part by Stanford Live at Stanford University; ASU Gammage at Arizona State University; Belfast International Arts Festival and 14–18 NOW WW1 Centenary Art Commissions; Carole Shorenstein Hays, The Curran SF; Carolina Performing Arts, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Center for the Art of Performance at UCLA; Hancher Auditorium at the University of Iowa; Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts; Melbourne Festival; Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago; International Festival of Arts & Ideas (New Haven); New York Live Arts; OZ Arts Nashville; University Musical Society of the University of Michigan.

This work was developed with the support of the Park Avenue Armory residency program, MASS MoCa (Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art), New York Stage and Film & Vassar's Powerhouse Theater, and the 2015 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab at the Sundance Resort with continuing post-lab dramaturgical support through its initiative with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

*A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* was made possible with funding by the New England Foundation for the Arts' National Theater Project, with lead funding from The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

## Credits

Taylor Mac, *vocals*

Matt Ray, *piano, vocals, music director*

Machine Dazzle, *performer, costume designer*

Danton Boller, *bass*

Bernice "Boom Boom" Brooks, *drums*

Viva DeConcini, *guitar*

Greg Glassman, *trumpet*

### Production Team

Jason Kaiser, *stage manager*

Michelle Stern, *company manager*

Will Neal, *audio supervisor*

### Stanford Arts Intensive Students

Lily Lamboy, Jackie Guber Langelier,

Ailyn Rivera, Samuel Sagan,

Aline Thiengmany, Emily Uresti,

Ines Gerard-Ursin

### Special Thanks

Erik Flatmo, Mike Kinney, Gina Hernandez,  
and Taylor Litchfield from the Stanford Arts  
Intensive

We encourage you to document your  
experience online (so long as it doesn't  
distract from your participation.) Please  
use #TaylorMacStanford and tag us,  
@stanfordlive, in your posts on Facebook,  
Twitter, and Instagram. But talking or  
texting during the show is discouraged.



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### PROGRAM SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Please be considerate of others and silence all phones,  
pagers, and watch alarms. Thank you.

# From the Campus To the Curran

Students in Stanford's Arts Intensive are immersed in Taylor Mac's spectacular performance art

By Marcie Bianco

There is something so enchanting about watching Taylor Mac sing "Amazing Grace." My eyes cannot widen enough. My body responds with goosebumps. This is not my typical reaction to the Christian hymn written in the late eighteenth century by John Newton, an English slave-ship captain turned Anglican clergyman. Barack Obama renditions aside, my usual response is some combination of a sigh and an eye roll—a glimpse, maybe, of what Liz Lemon would look like as a character in a Jane Austen novel.

But just as they did in the hands of our former president, the lyrics take on new meaning when sung by a glammed-up queen in 2017 America: "I once was lost, but now am found, / Was blind, but now I see." Ecstasy is born from the performance of the sacred—and here, in the church of Taylor Mac's "Radical Faerie realness ritual," the ecstasy attained is both spiritual and very, very queer.

In one short clip available on the Curran's website, we see Taylor singing Newton's hymn on the Curran's stage, intercut with images of our performer leading an impromptu parade through the streets of San Francisco. I watched this rendition from my desk at Stanford's Clayman Institute for Gender Studies, where I serve as managing editor and work to translate and disseminate our innovative gender research, as well as to train and mentor budding feminist journalists.

When I moved to the Bay Area eight months ago for this position, I had no



Stanford students channel their inner divas with costume designer Machine Dazzle. Photo: Little Fang

expectations of Silicon Valley—because, frankly, à la Bogie, *I didn't give a damn*. I never thought about the Valley because I was living in New York City, home to the bright lights of Broadway (and off-Broadway, and off-off-Broadway...) and the subway dancers' all-day answer to their cries of *What time is it? SHOWTIME!* There is nothing like being trapped in a fast-moving metal can, inches away from teenagers nearly kicking you in the face with their haphazard moves, to remind you of the vital life force that underpins the production of all art and culture. Walking across my new campus, behind

bespectacled twenty-something men conversing in code—literally—I find myself needing to dig a little deeper to discover that energy.

In Silicon Valley, the revered Eden of the Digital Age, art, not surprisingly, tends to take a back seat to technology. Technology, the mantra goes, can solve everything. All our problems will soon be behind us. What can a show like *24-Decade* offer, in the face of that kind of triumphalism?

At the time of this writing, Stanford is about to find out.

It would be easy for the university to uncritically embrace the Valley's prevailing narrative. Instead, happily, there has been a renewed commitment to the arts here in recent years, highlighted by the inauguration of the school's new president, Marc Tessier-Lavigne, who has made advancing the arts one of his major priorities.

To that end, earlier this year, Stanford began to formulate a three-week workshop in partnership with Taylor Mac's creative team, in order to offer students a rare in-depth engagement with a project of *24-Decade's* scope. The collaboration was dreamed up by Stanford Live Executive Director Chris Lorway, the Curran's Carole Shorenstein Hays, and Stanford Arts Intensive Director Gina Hernandez. By the time you read this, a select group of students will have worked with Mac's collaborators to create new elements specifically for the Bay Area run of *A 24-Decade History*. They will also have the opportunity to perform onstage as part of the production. (One of them may be singing to you right now.) Stanford students will play in the orchestra; they will work with Machine Dazzle on the construction of new costumes; others will appear in the show as Dandy Minions, the choric-like players who serve to break down the formal barriers between each evening's performers and audience.

Lorway attended a performance of Mac's *Lily's Revenge* six years ago; since then, he has identified himself as a lifelong fan. "I watched [*A 24-Decade*] as Taylor slowly pieced it together over the past five years, at a variety of spaces," Lorway explained. He came to the Stanford Live job last year, brought in, he told me, "to shake things up." For him, the way forward was clear: "I knew I wanted to do something with Taylor."

Stanford graduate student Lily Lamboy is participating in the Arts Intensive, and is slated to play a Dandy Minion during the show's run at the Curran. Lamboy attended Mac's "1776–1836" show when it was at the Curran last year; she told me it was "the best thing [she's] ever seen." In our interview, she joked about her acceptance into the Arts Intensive, saying that "the last time I felt so excited getting into anything was when I was accepted into Stanford."

For Lamboy, who is also one of the founding members of the Stanford Women in Theater Company, the university's collaboration with Mac's team bespeaks what she calls a kind of "arts renaissance" at the school, as well as the university's commitment to "making arts careers viable for students." She commended the university for "building a bridge between student work and professional work" in the arts, and for opening its doors to a show like Mac's—one that challenges history by putting a spotlight on "oppression in America, and the power structures that have marginalized the majority of people in American history."

Harry Elam, vice president for the arts at Stanford, echoed Lamboy's sentiments. "For audiences, Taylor Mac's decade-by-decade insightful, humorous, and innovative commentary on American history speaks profoundly to the presence and power of the past," he told me. "And for our students, who are fortunate enough to participate in the project, this represents an extraordinary opportunity to work with one of the most significant and compelling artists in American theater on a show that will have a lasting impact. We hope that this is the first in a series of such events."

The collaboration serves as a timely reminder that our corner of California has many stories to tell. Tech may be the defining industry of the 21st century, but what has come to be known as Silicon Valley has a rich history of revolutionary ideas and ethics. American counterculture is deeply rooted in the Bay Area, from the liberation efforts of the Black Panthers, founded in Oakland, to gay activism in San Francisco and the Free Speech Movement of 1960s Berkeley. Regional experimental theater took off around then, too, especially thanks to the founding of the San Francisco Actor's Workshop. Producers, playwrights, and directors moved west. While the heartland of mid-twentieth-century America bred a culture of conservatism, isolationism, and conformity, the Bay Area cultivated cutting-edge, radical cultures.

And, in fact, the origin story of *A 24-Decade History* begins in the Bay Area. Taylor Mac, raised in Stockton, California, traveled to San Francisco as a teenager to participate in an AIDS action in 1987. The event changed his life. "The action was a profound experience for me," he wrote later. "A fairly isolated suburban queer kid who had never met an out-of-the-closet homosexual, I was suddenly exposed to thousands of queers." The experience shaped Taylor's political conscience: "What has stuck with me from that day," he wrote, "was experiencing a community coming together—in the face of such tragedy and injustice—and expressing their rage (and joy at being together) via music, dancing, chanting, and agency. Not only was the community using itself to destroy an epidemic, but the activists were also using a disease, their deterioration and human imperfection, as a way to aid their community. In many ways my entire career

has been about reenacting this experience on stage, in one form or another."

Twenty years after that demonstration, we have the chance to see what Taylor saw. A *24-Decade History of Popular Music* satirizes history in order to expose how we as a people move on, yet fail to progress as a society. Time carries us forward, but Americans are still plagued by the same societal ills, the same bigotry, the same misogyny, and the same racism that have been with us from the beginning.

In the face of that adversity, Mac asks us, "How do we build a community while being torn apart?" This question ignites the performance, and binds *24-Decade's* 246 songs together.

We're not just looking backward; Mac enables his audience to imagine a new future through this queer interrogation of the past. This imagining of the new is critical to the social catharsis of a nation built on slavery and systemic oppression. Hour by hour, Mac confronts historical traumas that have been suppressed by the whitewashing and streamlining of American history. Out of sophomoric and hostile discomfort, we have refused to redress those traumas; here in America in 2017, there is much in this show that will hit home.

Mac makes us see things we have not seen before. To look at just one other song, slated for the third night of the Curran run: what can we find in Taylor's remaking of the 1920s ditty "Happy Days are Here Again"? If we remember it at all today, the song is understood to describe the sheer joy felt after hard times. (Franklin Delano



*Arts Intensive participants backstage at the Curran with Machine Dazzle. Photo: Little Fang*

Roosevelt used it for his 1932 presidential campaign.) It symbolizes collective psychological release. But in another video available online, Mac is quick to provide context to interrupt this knowledge. The song, he tells us, was written after 16.5 million people died in the Great War, a magnitude of atrocity no one had ever seen before. Mac explains that this song represents a collective decision Americans were forced to make: They could either allow themselves to acknowledge their trauma, or they could deny it, and suppress any inkling of depression. With "Happy Days," Americans chose the latter. Mac's performance of it conveys a very American state of mind: our frantic anxiety vaguely cloaking our collective trauma.

Moments like this force the audience, especially an actively participatory audience like Mac's, to wake up. To see what lies beneath the glittery surface of American nostalgia. To "see"—to return us to the curtain raiser—that to which we were previ-

ously "blind." That is the amazing grace of this performance.

In the Curran's "Amazing Grace" video, Mac isn't just rehearsing Newton's words. He strategically begins his rendition with a verse ("When we've been here ten thousand years...") first inserted by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which borrowed the lines from another hymn popular in the African American spiritual tradition. Mac's queering of the song is thus further informed by this reordering of verses, and the evocation of black spiritual folksong. His rendition manifests the vision of America we want to believe in; a land meant for everyone, with all voices woven into the fabric of our nation. Reckoning with our history through this profound trans-historical juxtaposition brings a new hope for a more civilized, peaceful society—and a better America, flourishing for many years to come.

*—Reprinted with permission from the Curran*

## Artist Biographies

**TAYLOR MAC** (creator/performer) (who uses "judy," lowercase *sic*, not as a name but as a gender pronoun) is a playwright, actor, singer-songwriter, performance artist, director, and producer. "A critical darling of the New York scene" (*New York Magazine*), judy's work has been performed at New York City's Lincoln Center, The Public Theatre and Playwrights Horizons, London's Hackney Empire, Los Angeles's Royce Hall, Minneapolis's Guthrie Theater, Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre, the Sydney Opera House, Boston's American Repertory Theatre, Stockholm's Södra Teatern, the Spoleto Festival, San Francisco's Curran Theater and SFMOMA, and literally hundreds of other theaters, museums, music halls, opera houses, cabarets, and festivals around the globe. Judy is the author of 17 full-length plays and performance pieces including *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music* (2017 Pulitzer Prize Finalist for Drama, Kennedy Prize in Drama), *Hir* (placed on the top ten theater of 2015 lists of *The New York Times*, *New York Magazine*, and *Time Out NY*; published by North Western University Press and in *American Theater Magazine*), *The Lily's Revenge* (Obie Award), *The Walk Across America for Mother Earth* (named One of the Best Plays of 2011 by *The New York Times*), *The Young Ladies Of* (Chicago's Jeff Award nomination for best solo), *Red Tide Blooming* (Ethyl Eichelberger Award), and *The Be(a)st of Taylor Mac* (Edinburgh Festival's Herald Angel Award). Recent acting roles include Shen Teh/Shui Ta in The Foundry Theater's production of *Good Person of Szechwan* at La Mama and the Public Theater (for which judy received Lucille Lortel and Drama League Award

nominations), Puck/Egeus in the Classic Stage Company's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, the title role in various productions of judy's play *The Lily's Revenge*, and opposite Mandy Patinkin in the two-man vaudeville *The Last Two People On Earth*, directed by Susan Stroman. Mac is currently creating a Dionysia Festival of four original plays (to be premiered separately and eventually performed in repertory), which deal in some way with our cultural polarization and that include: an all-ages play called *The Fre* (commissioned by the Children's Theater Company in Minneapolis); a kitchen-sink tragedy named *Hir* (which received its world premiere at the Magic Theatre in Feb 2014); a dance-theater play, *The Bourgeois Oligarch*, and a music theatre debate regarding small and large government, set inside an Ezra Pound poem, in the subconscious of Clarence Thomas, during a Supreme Court hearing. Mac is the recipient of multiple awards including the Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama Inspired by American History, Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, a Guggenheim Award, the Herb Alpert Award in Theater, the Peter Zeisler Memorial Award, the Helen Merrill Playwriting Award, and an Obie. An alumnus of New Dramatists judy is currently a New York Theater Workshop Usual Suspect and the Resident playwright at the Here Arts Center.

**MATT RAY** (piano/vocals/music director/arranger) can be seen in some of New York's best venues where he performs regularly either fronting his own band, or accompanying some of the city's most dynamic performers. Recent work includes

performing at Carnegie Hall with Kat Edmonson, touring with Reggae legend Burning Spear, music directing *The Billie Holiday Project* at the Apollo Theater in Harlem, string and piano arrangements for the fifth season finale of Showtime's *Nurse Jackie*, performing at Lincoln Center with Joey Arias, shows in Paris and the UK with Mx. Justin Vivian Bond, and monthly gigs at Joe's Pub with Bridget Everett and the Tender Moments. Other recent work includes performing at the Edinburgh Fringe with Lady Rizo, and touring the world with Taylor Mac's show *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*. In addition, Matt music directed and played piano in Taylor Mac's Obie award winning play *The Lily's Revenge* at the HERE Arts Center in New York. Matt has released two jazz albums as a leader: *We Got It!* (2001) and *Lost In New York* (2006); and one album of original pop/folk material called *Songs For the Anonymous* (2013). Ray is a co-recipient (with Taylor Mac) of an Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama Inspired by American History for *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*.

**MACHINE DAZZLE** (performer/costume design) Machine Dazzle (né Matthew Flower) moved to New York City in 1994 after attending The University of Colorado Boulder. Mixing odd jobs by day with art and dance clubs by night erupted in a unique lifestyle grounded in costume and performance art. Machine's DIY and transgressive nature comes face to face with his conceptualist-as-artist identity; the results can be seen on stages all over the world. Machine has worked with Taylor Mac, Justin Vivian Bond, Joey Arias, Julie Atlas



Taylor Mac at the Curran. Photo: Little Fang

Muz, Big Art Group, The Crystal Ark, The Dazzle Dancers, Pig Iron Theater, Stanley Love Performance Group, and The Pixie Harlots, to name a few.

**DANTON BOLLER** (bass) Danton Boller has been on the New York music scene for 17 years. His passion for all styles of music has landed him on stage with the likes of Roy Hargrove, Jon Fishman, Elysian Fields, Joey Arias, *Fela!* on Broadway, Nomoto, Justin Vivian Bond, Norah Jones, Matt Ray, Q Tip, and Taylor Mac. Danton leads the NYC band "The Sides"—a progressive instrumental soundscape illuminating electro, avant-jazz, dub, afro-beat, and rock. In addition to his active performance schedule, Danton records and produces in his NYC studio. He co-produced the highly successful Kat Edmonson release *Way Down Low* on Sony Records.

**BERNICE "BOOM BOOM" BROOKS** (drums) Bernice Brooks is a drummer, producer, teaching artist who has performed and shared the stage with such greats as Tito Puente, Gregory Hines, Patti Labelle, and many Jazz and R&B greats. She was a part of JALC "The History of Blues" with Marion Cowings and has a national commercial airing, "Five Fine Fillies," for Bank of America.

**VIVA DECONCINI** (electric guitar) Viva DeConcini plays guitar like a flaming sword, a screaming train, a ringing bell, and a scratching chicken. She sings like if Freddy Mercury had been a woman. She's played everywhere from Bonnaroo to Monterey Jazz Fest, and been featured in Guitar Player Magazine. Her last two records "Rock & Roll Lover" and "Rhinestones & Rust" charted on CMJ.

**GREG GLASSMAN** (trumpet) Trumpeter Greg Glassman has shared the stage and recording studio with some of the greatest voices in jazz, including Clark Terry, Marcus Belgrave, Roswell Rudd, Sheila Jordan, Oliver Lake, Sherman Irby, and John Esposito. He has performed around the world with a diverse array of artists including The Skatalites, Oscar Perez's Nuevo Comienzo, and Burning Spear. Mr. Glassman's current focus is his quintet, co-led with Stacy Dillard, which holds a residency of eight years at Fat Cat in Greenwich Village.

**POMEGRANATE ARTS** is an independent production company dedicated to the development of international contemporary performing arts projects. Since its inception, Pomegranate Arts has conceived, produced, or represented



projects by Philip Glass, Laurie Anderson, Lucinda Childs, Batsheva Dance Company, London's Improbable Theatre, Sankai Juku, Taylor Mac, Dan Zanes, Bassem Youssef, and Goran Bregovic. Special projects include the revival of Robert Wilson, Philip Glass, and Lucinda Childs' Olivier award-winning production of *Einstein on the Beach*; *Dracula: The Music And Film* with Philip Glass and the Kronos Quartet; the music theater work *Shockheaded Peter*; Brazilian vocalist Virginia Rodrigues; Drama Desk Award-winning Charlie Victor Romeo; *Healing The Divide*, *A Concert for Peace and Reconciliation*, presented by Philip Glass and Richard Gere; and Hal Willner's *Came So Far For Beauty, An Evening Of Leonard Cohen Songs*. Current and upcoming projects include the international tour of *Available Light* by John Adams, Lucinda Childs, and Frank Gehry; Taylor Mac's *A 24-Decade History of Popular Music*, a new work in development by Lucinda Childs, Philip Glass, and Robert Wilson on the occasion of Philip's 80th birthday; Bassem Youssef's *The Joke Is Mightier than the Sword*; and the North American tours of Batsheva Dance Company's *Last Work* and Sankai Juku's *Meguri*.

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#### POMEGRANATE ARTS

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Taylor Mac at the Curran. Photo: Little Fang