

# A Note From *Bill's Desk*

McCarter

*Get a behind-the-scenes glimpse via Bill Lockwood, Director of Special Programming at McCarter, about how and why he brings phenomenal artists to our McCarter stages. This week, he spotlights upcoming performances at McCarter.*

January 19, 2022

## **Keb' Mo' *and Band***

When I chase an artist and try but repeatedly fail to bring them to McCarter, I feel like Captain Ahab chasing the proverbial white whale – and one of these “white whales” in recent seasons has been Keb' Mo', all of which is why it is especially gratifying to finally welcome him and his band back to our stage on February 7<sup>th</sup>. Although his roots stem from his seminal mastery of Delta blues, his musical horizons have long since expanded to include folk, rock, soul and R&B, earning five Grammys since his 1994 self-titled debut album and the 13 others that have followed – including 2019's *Oklahoma* (Best Americana Grammy). We all have a favorite – mine is *Just Like You* from 1996 - and Keb' Mo' describes his latest, *Good to Be* (just released this month) as “a collection of music about appreciating what you've got, where you come from, and who you get to share it with,” which reflects in a nutshell his storytelling ethic. It also explains why his songs are like catnip to other singer/songwriters, and why his collaborators or cover-artists over the years comprise a virtual who's who of the contemporary music industry. Keb' Mo' may have been officially born Kevin Moore, but when you've become a legend, you can call yourself whatever you want.

---

## **Anaïs Mitchell *and* Bonny Light Horseman**

When Anais Mitchell first came to the Berland Theatre a few years ago, she defined the category “emerging artist” as a singer/songwriter waiting to be discovered. Talk about an understatement! She has more than “emerged”, as the creator of the smash Broadway hit *Hadestown* which earned eight – count 'em, eight – Tony Awards in 2019, including Best Musical. In addition to writing the book, music and lyrics, it didn't hurt that she herself also originally starred in it! But Anaïs also wears another hat which we will be lucky enough to see on February 12<sup>th</sup> when she returns (this time to the Matthews) as part of the folk super-group trio Bonny Light Horseman, which includes her colleagues Eric Johnson (an alum of Fruit Bats and The Shins) and Josh Kaufman (veteran producer for Bob Weir and The National). Kaufman started the trio, which has earned a pair of Grammy nominations for what can best be described as reimagining – or reinventing - traditional old songs, ballads, and melodies that as he puts it, “have timeless humanity, having existed so long you can rest in them.” You will probably recognize many of them and will be tempted to sing along, but please wait until asked. And there is an additional bonus: as a special treat, Anaïs will treat us to songs from her just released new solo album, her first in over a decade. Can another *Hadestown* be in her future? Stay tuned . . .

---

## Jeremy Dutcher

When was the last time McCarter presented an Indigenous artist? If you can't remember, it's not surprising, and we are overdue in acknowledging those who were here long before us (in our case, the Leni Lenape). Which makes the Berlind concert by the vocalist/pianist/activist/composer Jeremy Dutcher on March 1 even more significant. And if you've never heard of him, that isn't so surprising either. Dutcher is a Canadian representing the heritage of Canada's Wolastoqiyik Nation and is himself a member of its Tobique First Nation in the province of New Brunswick; in Canada he is a veritable superstar, one of that nation's cultural heroes, but he rarely ventures south of the border. For starters, he is a classically trained tenor, and could just as easily have had an operatic career. But his songs and piano compositions are true collaborations with the voices of his ancestors, incorporating not only classical influences but also his reverence for the traditional songs and language of his homeland and its tribes ("There are only about 100 Wolastoqey speakers left," he says). Dutcher's audience transcends all categories – woke, world music, BIPOC, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S. He is ubiquitous on social media (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) and his videos are mesmerizing; they are unlike anything else you have ever heard or seen and there is no better way to describe them. Just watch, listen, and be amazed.

---

## *My Discovery of the Season:* Joe Henry

Before you say "I've never heard of him," be careful because plenty of people have – including Bonnie Raitt, Elvis Costello, Jackson Browne, Joan Baez, Rhiannon Giddens, Rosanne Cash, even Gloria Steinem and Barack Obama. They are all fans, have recorded his songs, or put them on their Ten Best Lists, including me, since I regard Joe Henry (March 4) as one of the great undiscovered and underappreciated singer/songwriters of our time - another Nick Drake. His latest and 15<sup>th</sup> CD, *The Gospel According to Water*, is a masterpiece from start to finish – and one of its tracks, *Orson Welles*, would be my candidate for Song of the Year. Henry has been writing songs for 30 years (he is 60), and his saga of surviving stage 4 cancer is a story in itself, one which he has transformed into a kind of song cycle, covering the gamut -- time, silence, music, faith, love, death and remembrance. Had he been born a decade earlier, he would have joined the company of Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits and Randy Newman, all of whom are wordsmiths as well as composers. Yes, he has won Grammys, written a hit for Madonna (*Don't Tell Me*), and has produced albums for several of his contemporaries mentioned above. But mostly, Joe has won followers who, like me, have joined in celebrating a gifted artist whose songs defy easy description -- at once mysterious and idiosyncratic, cryptic and non-linear, steeped in folk, blues and Tin Pan Alley. I invite you to discover him for yourself; you will not regret it .

—William L. Lockwood, Jr.  
Director of Special Programming

