TAYLOR MAC
A 24-DECADE HISTORY OF POPULAR MUSIC: 1776-1806

Conceived, written, performed and co-directed by TAYLOR MAC

MATT RAY music director/arranger
NIEGEL SMITH ’02 co-director

MACHINE DAZZLE costume designer
Co-produced by Pomegranate arts and Nature’s darlings

Post-Performance Discussion
You are invited to remain in the theater immediately following the performance for an informal discussion with director Niegel Smith ’02.

Funded in part by the Expeditions program of the New England Foundation for the Arts, made possible with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts, with additional support from the six New England state arts agencies and APAP Emerging Markets funding.

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Thursday, September 17, 2015 • 7 pm
The Moore Theater • Dartmouth College
A 24-DECADE HISTORY OF POPULAR MUSIC

featuring
Taylor Mac vocals

with
Danton Boller bass
Bernice Boom Boom Brooks drums
Eli Brueggemmann associate music director, piano

Machine Dazzle costume design

CREDITS

Concept, writer, performer and co-directer ................................................................. Taylor Mac
Music director/arranger ................................................................................................ Matt Ray
Co-director ...................................................................................................................... Niegel Smith ’02
Costume designer ......................................................................................................... Machine Dazzle
Executive producer ..................................................................................................... Linda Brumbach
Associate producer .................................................................................................... Kaleb Kilkenny
Associate producer .................................................................................................... Alisa E. Regas
Associate general manager ......................................................................................... Lindsey Bostwick
Company management associate ............................................................................. Katie Ichtertz
Co-producer ................................................................................................................. Pomegranate Arts and Nature’s Darlings

A 24-Decade History of Popular Music is commissioned by 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; New Haven Festival of Arts & Ideas; New York Live Arts; OZ Arts Nashville; Museum of Contemporary Arts Chicago; and commissioned in part by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and developed with the support of the Park Avenue Armory residency program and the 2015 Sundance Institute Theatre Lab at the Sundance Resort. 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.

Special thanks to tonight’s guest knitting brigade:
Marylou Bradley, Karen Caple, Laura Cousineau, Molly Drummond, Jayne Hall,
Barbara Mellert, Kim ”Zoe” Potter, Marga Rahmann, Matt Senger and Geri Williams.

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Revolution, Barbara Rhoad, Sarah Smith, Kim Souza and Morgan Swan.
A 24-DECADE HISTORY OF POPULAR MUSIC
By Taylor Mac

I suppose I’ve been subconsciously kicking around the idea for A 24-Decade History of Popular Music for many years. I can pinpoint the catalyst to an AIDS action I attended in 1987. The action was a profound experience for me, a fairly isolated suburban queer kid who had never met an out-of-the-closet homosexual, as I was suddenly exposed to thousands of queers. What has stuck with me from that day 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 the stage, in one form or another, but a couple years ago I decided to consciously go at it. The result is a durational work that explores the various ways imperfection can foster community.

Most of my work uses the technique of content dictating the form (thank you Mr. Sondheim). So when figuring out what form would best represent the content/theme of “imperfection fostering community,” I was drawn to popular music. One could argue that a classical song’s goal is to touch the hem of God (to strive for perfection), whereas a popular song is written and performed to touch the people. Popular songs use their simplicity, imperfection and humanity to rally people towards a cause (whether that cause is to love, fight, celebrate or mourn). They are egalitarian songs, ones we have easy access to and can all join in on. As a result, I decided the popular song was the form I wanted for a show about imperfection fostering community. But one song or one concert wouldn’t do. A community is built over a number of years and experiences and is multifaceted. I needed variety and a form that would not only represent the thing but actual do the thing I was interested in exploring. So I’m making a durational concert that spans multiple years and locations, and contains an onslaught of popular songs. It goes like this:

For a number of years (at least five but perhaps ten) I’ll be performing, in New York, the US and abroad, over 240 popular songs from the last 240 years of the United States (1776-2016). The songs aren’t necessarily American songs but songs that were popular in the US and the set list is broken down into themed concerts, decade concerts (made up of songs originated in the particular decade), and other “shorter” durational concerts: a 24-song concert, a 10-hour 19th Century concert, a 10-hour 20th Century Concert and in 2016 in New York City, the mother of them all, a 24-hour concert that includes all 240 songs and during which I’ll be performing almost non-stop (a few bathroom breaks) with a 24-piece-orchestra (bring your bedding and toiletries).

The goal is that with each performance we build the community that is participating in this durational work. To date we’ve performed fourteen of the decades at least once and more and more audience members are becoming a part of the A 24-Decade History of Popular Music community (we call them The Guild of Lilies). They’re starting to get to know each other and are using the ritual of a shared experience as the impetus for further involvement (businesses have been started, lovers have been made, weddings are even being planned). Our next phase is to start shooting live video feed of the concerts so that audience members who have seen various concerts in New York or Chicago can watch what happens in London and stay connected with the progression of the work.
It’s a dream come true to share this work here and if this is your first time joining us, welcome.

THE FABULOUS TRUTH
By Deborah A. Brothers
[Posted June 8, 2015 on artidea.org prior to Taylor Mac’s June 12 premiere of “The 1990s” at the International Festival of Arts & Ideas.]

Artist and theater-maker Taylor Mac talks to Deborah A. Brothers about performance, costumes and revealing the truth to audiences.

“(The Revolution) will be feathered, jeweled, sequin, glitter, long leg, high heel, patent pumps and...won’t be masculinized.”—from an original song by Taylor Mac.

Be prepared to be amazed. In his award-winning performance works, Taylor Mac takes us on a fantastical journey, telling us truths that we have forgotten. He comes to the theater, Mac said in a recent conversation, to “remind the audience of the dismissed or the buried within them,” of ideas that have been forgotten.

To do this, Mac has readapted an ancient role: he has become the modern version of a court jester, a fool. “Everyone laughs and has a good time and the king doesn’t go to war,” Mac says, because a fool must “say what everyone knows is true.” His performance is an entry into burlesque, drag costume, art, politics and social change.

Designer and artist Machine Dazzle is Taylor Mac’s frequent and fabulous costume collaborator. There is a glitter-proof room at the armory where Machine Dazzle creates the costumes for Mac. In the early part of their collaborations, Mac gave him guidelines about what the emotional goal of his performance and design might be. Now, there are no guidelines. The modern fool, according to Mac, has to be “the oddest person in the room.”

In A 24-Decade History of Popular Music, Machine creates a costume for each decade, to illustrate a particular theme, or to allow Mac to accomplish what he needs. One of Machine’s creations frames Mac in a flotilla of small helium-filled balloons, while his headdress is tied in sparkling blue ribbons, a cross between women’s hairstyles and a fabulous birthday present. Mac’s face is painted in white with multiple lines of sequins, beginning a magical concoction of performer and costume. Sometimes, their collaboration is about small details: Mac and Machine Dazzle find a train on a skirt may be too long, or that a different color would be better for the next incarnation of a costume. Or even that a costume has to be larger in scale and silhouette because of the decade (and costume) that is before it. Each piece contains “something to wow the audience, and to have heart and to tell the story.”

But nothing is arbitrary. Everything is carefully researched, combining parody and joy and acid directness. For example, on the costume for The 1920’s, there are PEZ candy dispensers as decorations. These dispensers were an invention in that particular decade: so while they seem out of place, these are an actual historic detail.

Mac mostly performs in drag—as a man in woman’s clothing. This is both funny and aggressive: it allows Mac to speak and act in ways that are not permitted in ordinary male dress. Taylor Mac performs a transgressive freedom that permits us to laugh and then to question our laughter.

There will be feathers, glitter and sequins. There will be debris and art left for us when Mac leaves.
ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Taylor Mac vocals is a theater artist (who uses the gender pronoun, judy) which means judy’s a playwright, actor, singer-songwriter, cabaret performer, performance artist, director and producer. TimeOut New York has called Mac “one of the most exciting theater artists of our time” (naming judy the best cabaret performer in New York in 2012, and a future theater legend). American Theater Magazine wrote, “Mac is one of this country’s most heroic and disarmingly funny playwrights.” The New Yorker called Mac’s acting in the title role of Brecht’s Good Person of Szechwan “one of contemporary theater’s more unforgettable performances.” The Village Voice named judy the best theater actor in New York (2013); The New York Times says of Mac in general, “Fabulousness can come in many forms, and Taylor Mac seems intent on assuming every one of them.” Judy’s work has been performed at New York City’s Lincoln Center and The Public Theater, the Sydney Opera House, American Repertory Theater, Stockholm’s Sodra Theatern, the Spoleto Festival, Dublin’s Project Arts Centre, London’s Soho Theatre and literally hundreds of other theaters, museums, music halls, cabarets and festivals around the globe. Judy is the author of sixteen full-length plays and performance pieces including Hir (recently premiered at San Francisco’s Magic Theater), 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), The Be(a)st of Taylor Mac” (Edinburgh Festival’s Herald Angel Award) and in collaboration with Mandy Patinkin, Susan Stroman and Paul Ford, Mac created The Last Two People On Earth: An Apocalyptic Vaudeville, which judy is currently performing/touring with Mr. Patinkin. Mac is also currently creating and performing sections from a durational concert called A 24-Decade History of Popular Music (sections of which have been performed for Lincoln Center, The Under The Radar Festival at the Public Theater (as well as Joe’s Pub) and Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art, among many others. Playscripts, Vintage Press, New York Theatre Review and New York Theatre Experience have published judy’s plays and judy is the recipient of a Helen Merrill Playwriting Award, two Sundance Theater Lab residencies, three Map Grants, The Creative Capital Grant, The James Hammerstein Award for playwriting, three GLAAD Media Award Nomination, two New York State Council on the Arts Grants, a Massachusetts Council of the Arts Grant, an Edward Albee Foundation Residency, The Franklin Furnace Grant, a Peter S. Reed Grant, and The Ensemble Studio Theatre’s New Voices Fellowship in playwriting. Mac is a proud alum of the HERE Arts Center Resident Artists program and is currently a New Dramatists fellow and a New York Theater Workshop Usual Suspect.

Deborah A. Brothers is Costume Director and Lecturer in Theatre at Williams College in Williamstown, MA.

Editor’s note: while this essay is published as written, the artist prefers the pronoun “judy” rather than a gender-specific one.
Taylor Mac has performed twice at the Hopkins Center, as part of Dartmouth’s annual New York Theatre Workshop residency; most recently in August, 2014.

Machine Dazzle (né Matthew Flower) costume designer 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 Muz, Big Art Group, The Crystal Ark, The Dazzle Dancers, Stanley Love Performance Group and The Pixie Harlots, to name a few.

Matt Ray music director 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, creating string and piano arrangements for the fifth-season finale of Showtime’s Nurse Jackie, and performing at Lincoln Center with Joey Arias in shows in Paris and the UK with Justin Vivian Bond and in monthly gigs at Joe’s Pub with Bridget Everett and the Tender Moments. Other recent endeavors include 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, Ray 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.

Ray 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). www.mattraymusic.com

Niegel Smith co-director is a performance artist and theater director. His theater work has been produced by The Public Theater, Classical Theatre of Harlem, Magic Theatre, Mixed Blood, HERE Arts Center, Hip Hop Theatre Festival, Summer Play Festival, New York Fringe Festival and the Phoenix Theatre Ensemble, and his walks have been produced by Elastic City, American Realness, the Prelude Festival, Abrons Arts Center, Visual AIDS, the Van Alen Institute and PS 122. He often collaborates with artist Todd Shalom. Together, they conceive and stage interactive performances in public and private environments. Smith was the associate director of the Tony Award-winning musical Fela!, restaging that production in London, Lagos and its world tour; and assistant-directed the off-Broadway production of The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee and both the Broadway and off-Broadway productions of Tony Kushner’s Caroline, or Change. He has worked on the artistic staffs of The Public Theater, Trinity Repertory Company and Providence Black Rep. He is the Artistic Director of The Flea Theater. www.niegelsmith.com

Bernice Boom Boom Brooks drums is a drummer, producer and 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 Jazz at Lincoln Center’s The History of Blues with Marion Cowings and has a national commercial airing, Five Fine Fillies, for Bank of America.

Danton Boller bass 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
ABOUT THE ARTISTS CONTINUED

Roy Hargrove, Jon Fishman, Elysian Fields, Joey Arias, _Fela!_ on Broadway, Nomoto, Justin Vivian Bond, Norah Jones, Matt Ray, Q Tip and Taylor Mac. Boller leads the New York City band The Sides—a progressive instrumental soundscape illuminating electro, avant-jazz, dub, afrobeat and rock. In addition to his active performance schedule, Boller records and produces in his New York studio. He co-produced the highly successful Kat Edmonson release _Way Down Low_ on Sony Records.

Eli Brueggemann associate music director and piano is an Emmy-nominated keyboardist/singer/producer living in New York. He is currently the musical director and composer for _Saturday Night Live._

Originally from Los Angeles, he honed his versatility living in Silverlake, recording and touring with a variety of artists spanning the musical universe, such as Carlos Santana, Men at Work frontman Colin Hay, the legendary latin-funk band Mandrill, Glee star Mathew Morrison, arranger Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, guitarist Mark Whitfield and many others.

He has been the musical director at _Saturday Night Live_ since 2011, collaborating at 30 Rock with the writers and actors on music videos, jingles and live performances with the SNL band. His list of credits is a who’s who of the entertainment industry, such as The Lonely Island, Steve Martin, Martin Short, Bruno Mars, the Muppets, Jimmy Fallon and, of course, Justin Timberlake. He’s been nominated for three Emmys for both Musical Direction (2014) and Best Original Song (2012, 2014).

Brueggemann has composed and arranged music for TV shows, films and advertisements including _30 Rock, American Idol, the History Channel_ and Nike. In 2008, he co-wrote the orchestral/theatrical accompaniment to Langston Hughes’ _Ask Your Mamma: 12 Moods for Jazz_ and played piano at the premiere with the Indianapolis Symphony. He’s produced three records of his own: _Launchpad, LA Stories_ and _Gringolandia_ (featuring Shawn Pelton, James Genus and Lenny Pickett) temporarily streaming free on YouTube.

He has a bachelor’s degree from UC Berkeley, and a masters of music from the University of Southern California. He currently resides in Brooklyn with his wife and two kids.

Pomegranate Arts executive producer is an independent production company dedicated to the development of international contemporary performing arts projects. Pomegranate Arts is the exclusive producer and management for the revival of Robert Wilson, Philip Glass and Lucinda Childs’ Olivier Award-winning production of _Einstein on the Beach._ Since its inception, Pomegranate Arts has conceived, produced or represented projects by Glass, Laurie Anderson, London’s Improbable Theatre, Sankai Juku, Dan Zanes, Childs and Goran Bregovic. Special projects include _Dracula: The Music And Film_ with 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 Glass and Richard Gere; and Hal Willner’s _Came So Far For Beauty, An Evening Of Leonard Cohen Songs._ Upcoming projects include the remount of _Available Light_ by John Adams, Childs and Frank Gehry; the North American tour of Sankai Juku’s newest work _Umusuna;_ Taylor Mac’s _A 24-Hour History of Popular Music,_ and a new work in development by Childs, Glass and James Turrell. www.pomegranatearts.com.
CONNECTING ARTISTS TO THE COMMUNITY

While at Dartmouth, Taylor Mac & director Niegel Smith ’02 participated in a “Nerd Night” event at the Main Street Museum in White River Junction, VT; met with theater students; and will participate in a post-performance discussion. The Baker Library Book Arts Workshop hosted a drop-in letter press workshop, printing broadsheets of “Yankee Doodle Dandy,” and the Hop and the Center for Gender and Student Engagement organized a student Flair Swap. For more information on Hop Outreach & Arts Education, call 603.646.2010 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach.

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