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MUSE/IQUE 2026 season
WHERE THE HEART IS
250 Years of American Music and Innovation

BACK TO OZ
From the Wonderful Wizard to The Wiz, to Wicked
An American Fairy Tale

Led by Artistic & Music Director Rachael Worby
with Carmen Cusack, LaVance Colley, Nathan Granner,
DC6 Singers Collective, and the MUSE/IQUE Orchestra

April 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, and 26, 2026
Mark Taper Forum
Presented in partnership with Center Theatre Group

Admissions available now at muse-ique.com

March 23, 2026 | Los Angeles, CA – MUSE/IQUE presents **BACK TO OZ: From the Wonderful Wizard to The Wiz, to Wicked -- An American Fairy Tale**, led by Artistic & Music Director Rachael Worby with Carmen Cusack, LaVance Colley, Nathan Granner, the DC6 Singers Collective and the MUSE/IQUE Orchestra. There are seven performances presented in partnership with Center Theatre Group between April 18 and 26, 2026 at the Mark Taper Forum. Admissions available now at muse-ique.com

When L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was published in 1900, Dorothy's adventures in Oz with her band of misfit companions became the defining American fairytale, one that has been musically reimagined time and time again – from the Golden Age of Hollywood to the heyday of Motown to the heights of Broadway -- representing the underdog and radical hope in the face of fear, and always interrogating the question: what do we mean when we say “home”?

Songs like “We’re Off to See the Wizard,” “Home,” and “For Good” are an unforgettable exploration of the self and our shared humanity paying tribute to the hope in us all. The land and stories of Oz are from the books by L. Frank Baum. The now iconic songs and stories are generated by all three of the musical versions by some of the greatest talents of the century of Oz: E.Y. Harburg, Harold Arlen, and the credited screenwriters Noel Langley, Florence Ryerson, and Edgar Allan Woolf of the original MGM film; composer-lyricist Stephen Schwartz and librettist Winnie Holzman of *Wicked*; and playwright William F. Brown and composer-lyricist Charlie Smalls -- who in his short life wrote his only musical, *The Wiz*.”

On April 23, 700+ local middle and high school students will experience the stories and heart behind *The Wizard of Oz* tales, through MUSE/IQUE’s growing Student Matinee program. Thank you to our MUSE/IQUE members for supporting our nonprofit’s mission to provide immersive live music experiences to more and more people in our community.

More about *BACK TO OZ*

Why has this story so thoroughly captivated everyone from novelist Salman Rushdie to filmmakers John Waters and David Lynch to singer/songwriters like Elton John -- not to mention children and adults across multiple generations -- for the past 126 years?

For many of them, it all started with the 1939 MGM musical starring Judy Garland. Rushdie argued that the driving force of *The Wizard of Oz* was “the inadequacy of adults, even of good adults. And how the weakness of the grown-ups forces children to take control of their own destinies, and so, ironically, grow up themselves.”

Waters, who saw *The Wizard of Oz* countless times as a child, admitted that “I always rooted for the witch.” He elaborated: “I was the only kid in the audience who couldn’t understand why Dorothy would want to go home. It was a mystery to me. To that awful black-and-white farm, with that aunt who was dressed badly, with smelly farm animals around, when she could live with winged monkeys and magic shoes and gay lions. I didn’t get it.”

The Judy Garland classic became a favorite of millions in both its original release and in reruns and home video across subsequent decades -- a sacred text for so many queer artists (“friends of Dorothy”) and other “misfits” who identified with Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. “Over the Rainbow” was the perfect escapist ballad of the Depression era that turned into a timeless torch song, covered by hundreds. The “rainbow” represented not just the Technicolor wonderland that Dorothy enters but the many-colored stripes of so many groups and individuals who longed to escape the black-and-white confines of their particular context.

There was another group who saw themselves in the story -- Black Americans -- who in the 1970s were thrilled to see, and *hear*, it told in a profoundly relatable way.

The Wiz, a new musical that premiered in 1974, translated Dorothy’s adventures into the streets of Harlem in the style of gospel, soul, and contemporary R&B (composed by a team including

Charlie Smalls and Luther Vandross). Continuously mounted ever since, it would become “a vibrant cornerstone of Black culture,” as Naveen Kumar wrote in *The New York Times*. “The show blends Afrofuturism with classic Americana to enact a sort of creative reparation, reframing an allegory about perseverance and self-determination to feature Black characters who, in the ’70s, had rarely appeared in popular children’s stories.”

A 1978 film version starred Diana Ross and Michael Jackson, produced by Motown Productions and musically supervised by Quincy Jones – which, despite failing to connect with audiences and critics in the moment, went on to be “a trippy favorite of family living rooms for multiple generations,” wrote Kumar.

American writer Gregory Maguire, much like John Waters, found himself drawn to the Wicked Witch – and his 1995 hit novel *Wicked* imagined the story from *her* perspective, interrogating how societies define and punish what they deem “wicked.” Stephen Schwartz’s 2003 musical adaptation became a Tony-winning phenomenon – making \$1.8 billion on Broadway and \$6.2 billion globally, and seen by an estimated 50 million people around the world.

Twenty years later it became a pop culture colossus once again with the back-to-back blockbuster films *Wicked* and *Wicked: For Good*, directed by Jon Chu and starring Cynthia Erivo and Ariana Grande. Together, the *Wicked* films grossed more than \$1 billion worldwide and earned ten Oscar nominations.

Erivo felt an immediate connection to Elphaba, the titular witch who is bullied for being green. “I think everyone who’s played Elphaba has an understanding of what it means to be an outsider,” she said. “But I think there’s an even more direct line when part of her outsideness is the color of her skin. I know what it feels like to walk into a room and be the only one, much like most Black women know in big spaces where they’re the only one.”

Wicked expanded the power and lessons of Oz to speak to even more “outcasts” and folks who feel othered, and its pop-Broadway musical language resonated with new generations, yielding empowering ballads like “Gravity.”

BACK TO OZ speaks powerfully to this season’s “Where the Heart Is” theme at MUSE/IQUE. Leaving home, missing home, returning home – L. Frank Baum’s evergreen odyssey is a distinctly American fable, a story about homespun dreamers and pioneers but also about immigrants venturing through a new land and alienated outsiders who create found families that provide love and community as they overcome fear together. Perhaps that’s why it has inspired such brilliant music from so many different corners of America -- from the Tin Pan Alley children of Jewish émigrés to a Black prodigy from Queens to queer legends of modern musical theater.

For more than a century, the mirror of Oz has reflected just about everybody – whether we’re simple country folk wishing to be somewhere more exciting, or frightened visitors to a strange new world, whether we’re naïvely popular insiders or marked as misfits or maybe just a little bit cowardly. Maybe we identify most with Dorothy or with the Wicked Witch -- or maybe the

character who dreams of having a brain -- the wonderful thing about the story of Oz is that it sings for us all.

About the artists

Carmen Cusack (vocals) starred on Broadway in *Flying Over Sunset*, earning a second Tony Award nomination in as many Broadway shows. She was previously nominated for her acclaimed lead performance in *Bright Star*. Off-Broadway/Tour: *Pen Pals* (DR2 Theatre), *Call Me Madam* (Encores!), *Carrie* (MCC), *South Pacific* (Tour), *Wicked* (Tour). West End/UK: *Les Misérables*, *The Secret Garden*, *Personals*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *Over The Rainbow*. Regional: *Bull Durham* (Paper Mill Playhouse, Theatre Raleigh), *3 Summers of Lincoln* (La Jolla Playhouse), *Sweeney Todd* (Muny), *Designing Women* (TheatreSquared), *First Wives Club* (Chicago), *Sunday in the Park with George* (Chicago Shakespeare). @cusackcarmen on social platforms.

LaVance Colley (vocals) is a dynamic vocalist blending gospel power, jazz sophistication, and R&B soul into a signature sound. He has worked with icons including Beyoncé, John Legend, and Brittany Howard. A featured singer on the award-winning film "Sinners," he has performed on the Oscars®, SAG Awards, and tours globally with Postmodern Jukebox as lead vocalist and emcee. @lavancecolley on social platforms.

Nathan Granner (vocals), a renowned American tenor, has captivated audiences worldwide with his sinewy, ringing tone and exceptional vocal flexibility. Acclaimed by critics from the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *San Francisco Classical Voice* for his powerful top notes, honeyed tone, and nuanced dynamic choices, Granner's performances have left an indelible mark on the opera world. @nathangranner on social platforms.

DC6 Singers Collective (vocals) are a Los Angeles-based ensemble with roots in a cappella, gospel, doo wop, and R&B, but they fuse styles to transcend boundaries. They have collaborated with global music legends such as CeCe Winans, Lady Gaga, John Legend, Michael Bolton, and institutions like the San Francisco Symphony and LA Opera. @dc6singers on social platforms.

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Mark Taper Forum, 135 N. Grand Ave., Los Angeles CA 90012

Saturday, April 18 and Sunday, April 19 at 5:00pm

Thursday, April 23 and Friday April 24 at 7:30pm

Saturday, April 25 at 2:30pm and 7:30pm

Sunday, April 26 at 2:30pm

Admissions available now at [muse-ique.com](http://www.muse-ique.com)

To learn more, please visit <http://www.muse-ique.com/membership>.

MUSE/IQUE membership begins at \$350 and MUSE/IQUE members receive complimentary admission to all MUSE/IQUE events.

Admission for non-members starts at \$75 for a single admission or \$100 for a trial membership with admission for two people.

MUSE/IQUE is a member-supported, nonprofit performing arts organization that creates transformative musical adventures and illuminates the music that shapes our lives. By reimagining the traditional format of the live classical orchestral experience, **Artistic & Music Director Rachael Worby** seamlessly blends musical performances with researched curation. Their mission is to build empathy and expand imaginations through transformative live events and strong partnerships with fellow nonprofit organizations in Pasadena and the greater Los Angeles area.

Presented in Partnership with Center Theatre Group

Center Theatre Group, one of the nation's preeminent arts and cultural organizations, is Los Angeles' leading not-for-profit theatre company, which, under the leadership of the Brindell & Milton Gottlieb Artistic Director Snehal Desai, Managing Director / CEO Meghan Pressman, and Producing Director Douglas C. Baker, programs the Mark Taper Forum and the Ahmanson Theatre at The Music Center in Downtown Los Angeles, and the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Culver City. Center Theatre Group is one of the country's leading producers of ambitious new works through commissions and world premiere productions and a leader in interactive community engagement and education programs that reach across generations, demographics, and circumstances to serve Los Angeles.

Founded in 1967, Center Theatre Group has produced more than 700 productions across its three stages, including such iconic shows as *Zoot Suit*; *Angels in America*; *The Kentucky Cycle*; *Biloxi Blues*; *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*; *Children of a Lesser God*; *Curtains*; *The Drowsy Chaperone*; *9 to 5: The Musical*; and *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*.

CenterTheatreGroup.org

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