Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely

Thu, May 4 at 8pm
Royce Hall

RUNNING TIME
Approximately 90 minutes
No intermission

Funds provided by the Gladys Turk Endowment.

Five percent of single ticket sales for this event will be donated to the Women’s March LA Foundation.

PROGRAM

Toshi Reagon — Vocals and guitar
Judith Casselberry — Vocals and guitar
Ganessa James — Bass
Juliette Jones — Violin
Marcelle Davies Lashley — Vocals
Josette Newsam Marchak — Vocals
Allison Miller — Drums
Alex Nolan — Guitar

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Toshi Reagon is a one-woman celebration of all that’s dynamic, progressive and uplifting in American music, described by Vibe magazine as “one helluva rock’n’roll-coaster ride.” Since first taking to the stage at 17, the versatile singer-songwriter-guitarist has moved audiences with her big-hearted, hold-nothing-back approach to rock, blues, R&B, country, folk, spirituals and funk. The New York Times described her vocal style as “ranges from a dirty blues moan to a gospel shout to an ethereal croon.” She launched her renowned band, BIGLovely, in 1996, and instantly connects, inspires and empowers.

Over nearly 30 years, Reagon has collaborated with top innovators across a wide spectrum of the entertainment field. Since Lenny Kravitz chose her, straight out of college, to open for him on his first world tour, she has collaborated alongside music’s top innovators, with her triumphant voice and irresistible energy leading to performances with Nona Hendryx, Elvis Costello, Ani DiFranco, Lizz Wright, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Meshell Ndegeocello and Climbing PoeTree.
MESSAGE FROM TOSHI REAGON

Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely started out of my need to always be in congregation as I move through the world. Even if you see me performing as a solo artist I am never alone. Always I carry with me the songs of my ancestors and their hope for the future, which I consider my present. And, nothing is better than the opportunity to make a great sound with a room full of people. Sound is raised, bodies vibrate, hearts open, and opportunity come together is realized.

If I have done anything right in my life—I have made musicians I work with my family and I have inched my way into theirs. Each artist I work with is a spectacular individual scholar of their work. I am constantly moved by their expertise. There are a lot of people who circulate in and out of BIGLovely. When I was asked to do the show for CAP I knew I wanted these particular people to come. This is the group that grounds my festival WORD*ROCK*&SWORD: A Festival Exploration of Women’s Lives - All Are Welcome. This is the group that backed all of the artists during the Women’s March. Each person is an individual artist in their own right doing incredible things.

It is true—when it feels like the whole world is going crazy. When world leaders are obsessed with violence as a solution to peace. The antidote is to make sure you gather. If you can’t agree on what to talk about, if you get tired, if you get angry—raise a song, open your heart and try again.

Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely with singers Judith Casselberry, Marcella Davies Lashley, Josette Newsam Marchak. Instrumentalist Allison Miller, Ganessa James, Alex Nolan, Juliette Jones

Toshi’s current projects include working on Ndegeocello’s Can I Get a Witness (The Gospel of James Baldwin) and collaborating with Dorrance Dance on The Blues Project, which won the 2015 Bessie Award for Outstanding Production. Reagon will debut an opera based on Octavia E. Butler’s novel Parable of the Sower in fall 2017.

Toshi Reagon’s honors include a 2009 Out Music Award, the 2007 Black Lily Award for Outstanding Performance, and a 2004 New York Foundation for the Arts award for music composition. She was one of several women honored by the National Women’s History Project for “amazing intelligence, talent, courage and tenacity [that testify] to the myriad ways that generations of women have moved history forward.” Toshi is a 2015 Ford Foundation Art of Change Fellow and in 2017, was the first recipient of the UNC, Carolina Performing Arts Melon DisTil Fellowship.

BIGLovely did its first performance as a band in September 1996 at a residency at The Fez in New York City. Toshi’s girlfriend wrote her a loveletter and addressed it “To My BIGLovely,” and that’s how they came up with the name. An all-star NYC-based band, everyone in BIGLovely has their own band or plays with a lot of other people. BIGLovely served as the house band with Reagon as the music director at the Women’s March on Washington in January 2017. They have super cool subs when the regulars can’t make it.

Judith Casselberry was born in Denver, Colorado, and raised in the U.S. Army (everywhere). She’s been playing with her sister Toshi in various configurations since 1984 and hopes to continue until the day she “closes her Black eyes.” She performed as vocalist and guitarist with the internationally renowned duo Casselberry-DuPreé sharing the stage with Odetta, Richie Havens, Stevie Wonder, Jimmy Cliff, Linda Tillery, and Ladysmith Black Mombazo, among others. She is associate professor of Africana Studies at Bowdoin College in Brunswick Maine, and author of The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism (2017 Duke University Press).

Ganessa James is an electric bassist and singer/songwriter. She has 20 years experience playing bass in soul, funk, and rock music bands. Ganessa got her start on the independent music scene in Brooklyn. Shortly thereafter, she was tapped to join Saul Williams on a North American tour, playing stages from the Wiltern in Los Angeles to Coachella. She briefly served as the NYC bassist for the rock-funk diva Ndegeocello. She has toured internationally as a bassist and vocalist with Tamar-Kali and the Black Rock Coalition Songwriters Tribute. She began working with Toshi Reagon in 2009 and continues to record and play in a selection of Toshi’s many incredible projects—she’s honored to be a part of the BIGLovely family. Ganessa’s solo acoustic EP Believer (available on iTunes) reflects an exploration of personal vulnerability in her songwriter's journey.

Juliette Jones is an avid performer and highly sought-after musician, she has established herself as a consummate artist. A multi-genre acoustic and electric violinist, she also works as an arranger and composer and has contracted for a number of live, television and multimedia events, including the 51st New York Film Festival. A BMI composer, Juliette has arranged and recorded for Grammy®-Award winning and nominated producers Om’Mas Keith, Rob Lewis and Cory Rooney; and has taped and performed for the Golden Globes, Late Night with Jimmy Fallon, Late Night with Seth Meyers, Glee, MTV Unplugged, Saturday Night Live, BET...
Juliette has collaborated with a veritable list of “who’s who” in the music industry including Stevie Wonder, Aretha Franklin, Justin Timberlake, Janelle Monáe, Toshi Reagon, John Legend, Pharrell, Common, Frank Ocean, Hit-Boy, Florence + The Machine, J. Cole, Kid Cudi, Richard Smallwood and Sheila E. She is the founder of Rootstock Republic and has shared creative partnership with VH1, Red Bull Studios, Interscope Records, Tidal and Beats by Dre.

Marcelle Lashley is a soul singer, fusing gospel, jazz, 1970s soul through a journey that is at once timeless and timely. Born in Brooklyn (of Liberian and Sierra Leonean descent), this gifted singer offers a full bodied voice influenced by Mary Townsley, Roberta Flack, Dannibelle Hall, Aretha Franklin, Chaka Khan, Billie Holiday, Donnie Hathaway and the Hawkins singers, with musical contributions by Bernice Johnson Reagon (founder of “Sweet Honey in the Rock”), and others. Long a figure on the New York scene (featured with everyone from Cee-Lo Greene to Toshi Reagon to Carl Hancock Rux), Lashley finally took the plunge into another realm of brilliance, offering her first solo recording project, destined to be as important an album as Billie Holiday’s Songs for Distingue Lovers or Nina Simone’s Here Comes the Sun. If you believe in the ever evolving emanations of soul music in it’s purest form, you will be enriched by Marcelle’s project titled Easy to Love which can be found in CD Baby. Marcelle has toured five of the seven continents lifting hearts with the sound of music.

Josette Newsam Marchak has performed on the Today Show, Live with Regis and Kelly, and Live with Kelly and Michael and with artists such as Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, Toshi Reagon, Melba Moore, Lou Reed, Macy Gray, and Angelique Kidjo, Nona Hendryx, Billy Bragg, Norm Lewis and Ben E. King. She’s toured with by Bernice Johnson-Reagon and Toshi Reagon’s musical adaptations of Gustave Flaubert’s The Temptation of St. Anthony and Zinnias in partnership with world renowned Robert Wilson. She is currently ‘Mrs. Simms’ in their musical adaptation of Octavia Butler’s Parable of the Sower. She frequently performs with her husband Aron Marchak in their music ministry, Marchak!

Allison Miller
NYC-based drummer/composer/teacher Allison Miller has been named “Top 20 Jazz Drummers” in Downbeat Magazine. Her band, Boom Tic Boom, is a recipient of Chamber Music America’s “Presenter Consortium for Jazz Grant” and Boom Tic Boom’s 2016 release, Otis was a Polar Bear, was chosen for NPR’s Jazz Critics Poll (2016).

As a side-musician, Miller has been the rhythmic force behind such artists as Ani DiFranco, Natalie Merchant, Brandi Carlile, Toshi Reagon, Dr. Lonnie Smith, Ben Allison, Late Night with Seth Meyers, Camille A. Brown and co-leads Holler and Barn. Allison teaches at the New School for Jazz and Contemporary Music in NYC and, starting in 2018, will become the new Artistic Director of Jazz Camp West. She is an Arts Envoy to Thailand and three time Jazz Ambassador. Allison endorses Yamaha drums, Zildjian cymbals, Vic Firth heads, and Evans drumheads.

Alex Nolan began her love of guitar playing at the age of five when she announced to her parents that she wanted to become a rock star. Since graduating magna cum laude from the Thornton School of Music at the University of Southern California, Alex has performed with a variety of artists including Boy George, Jill Sobule, The Indigo Girls, Alicia Keys, Debbie Harry, Aloe Blacc, and Nona Hendryx. From 2014 to 2016, Alex played in the house band, “Everett Bradley & The MVPs,” on NBC’s The Meredith Vieira Show. She currently tours worldwide as lead guitarist for pop icon Cyndi Lauper.
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