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Philly

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Jazz sensation @SomiMusic is bringing her unique voice and vibrant energy to the Perelman Theater on 5/9, presented by @EnsembleArtsPhilly (Facebook/Instagram)! For more info, visit www.ensembleartsphilly.org

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**ENSEMBLE ARTS PHILLY PRESENTS
GRAMMY® NOMINATED ARTIST,
SOMI,
IN A ONE-NIGHT-ONLY FUSION OF AFRICAN
RHYTHMS, JAZZ, AND SOULFUL MELODIES,
MAY 9, 2025**

**“A virtuosic performer in full command of her instrument and powers.”
– *The New York Times***

**“Somi moves seamlessly and effortlessly from church to veldt, from township to jazz club, from urban America to rural Africa.”
– *Jazzwise***

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (April 24, 2025) – Ensemble Arts Philly presents distinguished jazz vocalist and songwriter **Somi**, known for her unique blend of African jazz, soul, and contemporary jazz influences, at the Perelman Theater on May 9, 2025, at 7:30 p.m. Hailed for her story-based songwriting and deeply emotive live performances, Somi’s set will be full of fan favorites and a preview of songs from her forthcoming album.

Somi Kakoma — the vocalist, composer, writer, and performer known in the jazz world simply as ‘Somi’ — was born in Illinois to parents who emigrated from Rwanda and Uganda. Hailed by *The New York Times* as “a performer in full command of her instrument and powers,” she discovered her musical identity traversing the cultural bridge between Africa and America. That sense of discovery continues to guide a career in which she has crafted “an elegant amalgam of the music she loves and the bi-continental experiences that have shaped her life.” (*NPR*)

“A multidimensional recording artist whose reach extends from the concert hall to the Broadway stage, Somi’s debut in our Perelman Theater promises to be an unforgettable evening,” said Frances Egler, Vice President of Theatrical Programming and Presentations. “Her work is culturally rich and musically profound, bringing another perspective to our spring jazz offerings, alongside Herb Alpert and Wynton Marsalis with Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, as well as the Broadway blockbuster touring the nation, *Some Like It Hot*.”

Somi’s last album, *Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba*, is a deeply personal all-star tribute to Miriam Makeba, the groundbreaking South African singer and activist who turned 31 years of political exile during the apartheid era into a career of global triumph and influence. The album was ultimately awarded Best Jazz Vocal Performance at the inaugural Jazz Music Awards. It is also a companion project to the award-winning Off-Broadway musical (also about Miriam Makeba) that Somi wrote and starred in called *Dreaming Zenzile*. Both projects arrived on the heels of the unplanned release *Holy Room - Live at Alte Oper with Frankfurt Radio Big Band* that Somi decided to independently put out shortly after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The album ultimately earned her a 2021 Grammy® nomination for Best Jazz Vocal Album. With that nomination, Somi became the first African woman ever nominated in any of the Grammy® jazz categories. The album also won an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Vocal Album.

Ever committed to storytelling, Somi’s previous studio album *Petite Afrique*, which tells the story of African immigrants in the midst of a gentrified Harlem in New York City, won the 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album and featured special guest Aloe Blacc. *Petite Afrique* was the highly anticipated follow-up to Somi’s major label debut *The Lagos Music Salon*, which was inspired by an 18-month creative sabbatical in Lagos, Nigeria, and features special guests Angelique Kidjo and Common, a work that landed at #1 on US and international Jazz charts. Straddling the worlds of African jazz, soul, and pop, both albums earned her ECHO Award nominations in Germany for Best International Jazz Vocalist.

Closely mentored by the legendary trumpet player Hugh Masekela, Somi has carved out her own path as an artist, scholar, and activist. She is a Doris Duke Artist, Soros Equality Fellow, a United States Artist Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, a Sundance Theatre Fellow, and a former artist-in-residence at Park Avenue Armory, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, Baryshnikov Arts Center, and UCLA’s Center for the Art of Performance. She is also the founder of Salon Africana, a boutique cultural agency and record label. Often celebrated for her activism, Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon asked Somi to perform at the United Nations’ General Assembly in commemoration of the *International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Somi holds undergraduate degrees in Cultural Anthropology and African Studies from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a Master’s degree in Performance Studies from Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, and is currently a Graduate Prize Fellow working on her PhD at Harvard University’s Department of Music. In her heart of hearts, she is an East African Midwestern girl who loves family, poetry, and freedom.

Somi’s performance is a part of Ensemble Arts Philly’s 2024-25 Jazz Series. Other featured upcoming performances include **Herb Alpert & The Tijuana Brass & Other Delights** (May 15, 2025, Miller Theater); **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis** (June 15, 2025, Marian Anderson Hall); **Nate Smith** (October 11, 2025, Perelman Theater); **An Evening with Samara Joy** (November 11, 2025, Miller Theater); **Béla Fleck & the Flecktones: Jingle All the Way** (December 12, 2025, Miller Theater); **Alfredo Rodriguez & Pedrito Martínez** (January 22, 2026, Perelman Theater); **Kurt Elling: Wildflowers** (February 27, 2026, Perelman Theater); **Emmet Cohen: Miles and Coltrane at 100** (March 20, 2026, Miller Theater); **Ende**

Owens & The Cookout (March 28, 2026, Perelman Theater); **Christian McBride & Edgar Meyer** (April 21, 2026, Miller Theater); **Rhiannon Giddens** (May 5, 2026, Miller Theater); and **Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis** (May 26, 2026, Marian Anderson Hall).

Tickets

Tickets can be purchased online at www.ensembleartsphilly.org or by calling 215-893-1999. In-person ticket sales can be conducted daily from 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. at the Academy of Music Box Office, located at 240 S. Broad Street. See www.ensembleartsphilly.org for more information.

SOMI

Perelman Theater

Friday, May 9, 2025, at 7:30 p.m.

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For more information about ENSEMBLE ARTS PHILLY, visit www.ensembleartsphilly.org.

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