

Eric Marienthal, David Benoit and Niki Haris Headline 27th Annual Benefit Concert for High Hopes

Annual fundraiser celebrates 27 years of music, hope and recovery while raising critical funds for life-changing brain injury rehabilitation.

NEWPORT BEACH, CA, UNITED STATES, July 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- More than 700 guests gathered at the Hyatt Regency Newport Beach on Sunday, July 12, 2026, for the 27th annual Eric Marienthal and Friends Benefit Concert, raising vital funds for the [High Hopes Head Injury Program](#).

Hosted by two-time Grammy Award-winning saxophonist Eric Marienthal, this year's concert featured Grammy-nominated pianist and composer David Benoit and acclaimed vocalist

Niki Haris for an afternoon celebrating music, hope, and recovery. Guests enjoyed a VIP reception, live performances, student success stories, silent and live auctions, and special recognition of those who have helped advance High Hopes' mission for more than five decades.

"Every person who attends this concert becomes part of the High Hopes family and helps give our students the opportunity to keep moving forward," said [Mark Desmond, founder and CEO of High Hopes](#). "Their recovery doesn't happen overnight, but with the right therapies, encouragement, and support, we see remarkable progress and renewed hope every day."

VIP guests were welcomed with dinner at Love at First Bite, a hosted bar, and a special performance by Luke Desmond, joined by Logan Munck and Elija Munck, backed by the Ron Kobayashi Band.



From left, jazz pianist David Benoit, emcee Talaya Trigueros, High Hopes founder and CEO Mark Desmond, vocalist Niki Haris and Grammy-winning saxophonist Eric Marienthal at the annual benefit concert.

Marienthal opened the concert with favorites including "Lolo Shuffle," "Two in One," "New York State of Mind," "St. Thomas," "Seafood to Go" and "You Ga (Ta Give It)." Benoit delighted the audience with selections including "Boarding Pass," "Café Rio," "Kei's Song" and "Freedom at Midnight," while Haris energized the crowd with powerful performances of "Takin' It to the Streets," "Mornin'," "Sing" and "I Believe in You."

During intermission, guests were treated to a dessert bar featuring a variety of cakes, pastries and other sweets.

Several [High Hopes students shared personal testimonies](#) about the program's life-changing impact.



Vocalist Niki Haris captivates the audience during the Eric Marienthal & Friends benefit concert, accompanied by saxophonist Eric Marienthal and renowned jazz pianist David Benoit. Proceeds from the evening supported the High Hopes Head Injury Program.

Ron credited the program with restoring his health. "Because of each and every one of you coming here, you've given me my health back," he told the audience. "Health is priceless."

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Everyone who attends the Eric Marienthal & Friends Concert becomes part of the High Hopes family, helping our students move forward with therapy, encouragement, support, and renewed hope.”

Mark Desmond, Founder and CEO, High Hopes Head Injury Program

Stroke survivor Dr. Jamal Hasan shared that he arrived at High Hopes unable to stand or walk and confined to a wheelchair. Through the program's intensive rehabilitation, he is now walking again. "High Hopes is a blessing," he said. "Where else can you receive that much help five days a week?"

High Hopes student Tyler also thanked supporters for making his continued recovery possible, saying their generosity "helps us keep going."

Board President Robert Vermes shared his family's personal connection to the organization after his daughter suffered a stroke four years ago. Today, she is not only walking again but teaching cheerleading and dance to children, a milestone Vermes credited to Mark Desmond and the dedication of the High Hopes team.

Vermes also presented the High Hopes Lifetime Achievement Award to longtime publicist Kelly Bennett, founder of Bennett Unlimited PR, in recognition of her 27 years of promoting the annual benefit concert and helping to share the organization's mission with audiences and media outlets across the country.

The live auction, led by returning auctioneer Kevin O'Callaghan, featured exclusive experiences, including a private dinner and meet-and-greet with Eric Marienthal and Rick Braun at a Newport Beach residence, a Spaghettini wine dinner for six, an Anaheim Ducks VIP hockey package, a Chris Botti at Sea Signature Cruise for two, fine jewelry, entertainment packages, signed memorabilia and the annual auction of Marienthal's colorful performance shirt.



High Hopes student Ron shares how the program helped restore his health during the Eric Marienthal & Friends benefit concert as emcees Mark Desmond and Talaya Trigueros look on.

The event was livestreamed by Alert the Globe and will be rebroadcast in two parts, at www.AlertTheGlobe.com, with Part 1 airing Sunday, July 26, and Part 2 airing Sunday, Aug. 2. Both broadcasts will begin at 5 p.m. PDT. Donations benefiting the High Hopes Head Injury Program will be accepted during both broadcasts.

Sponsors included Ryan's Reach, Stirling Property Management, KJAZZ 88.1 FM, Hyatt Regency Newport Beach, Millie and Severson General Contractors, Xerox, Smooth Jazz News, the Reed Family, 94.7 The Wave and many other generous supporters.

About High Hopes Head Injury Program

Founded in 1975, High Hopes Head Injury Program is the only nonprofit of its kind in the world, providing comprehensive rehabilitation for individuals recovering from traumatic brain injuries, strokes and other neurological conditions. Through advanced robotic therapy, physical and occupational therapy, speech and cognitive rehabilitation, vocational training, and scholarship support, High Hopes has helped thousands of students regain their independence and improve their quality of life.

For interviews or media inquiries, contact Kelly Bennett, Bennett Unlimited PR, at (949) 463-6383 or Kelly@BennettUnlimitedPR.com.

For more information, visit <https://highhopes.ws> and follow @HighHopesHeadInjury on Instagram. Photos by Sheri Determan.

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