

# APOLLO

## Amateur Night at the Apollo Fact Sheet



The Apollo is a national treasure that continues to have a significant impact on the development of American culture and its popularity around the world. Since introducing the first Amateur Night contests in 1934, the Apollo Theater's signature program has played a major role in the cultivation of artists and in the emergence of innovative musical genres including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Amateur Night has been a defining experience for emerging artists since the Theater's very first year and continues to be an important resource for discovering new talent.

In recent years, the Apollo has increased its global reach by bringing Amateur Night to audiences around the world. The first international edition of Amateur Night, *Amateur Night Goes to London*, was hosted by London's Hackney Empire in 2012. That same year, the Apollo introduced Amateur Night Digital, a smartphone app that makes the internationally renowned talent competition available to fans at any time, in any location. In 2019, the second international edition of Amateur Night, *Amateur Night Japan*, was held at the Cool Japan Park TT Hall within the Osaka Castle grounds.

In early 2014, as part of the evolution of the Apollo's signature program, the institution launched the **Amateur Night Song Competition**, a contest that challenged musicians from across the country to compose a song that captures the vitality of the show that has launched so many legendary artists. The contest was judged by music industry professionals, and the broader public via the Apollo Theater's website. After a nation-wide competition that drew more than 125 songwriters and over 20,000 votes, D.C. musician Clifton Williams was awarded \$5,000 and the honor of representing one of our most beloved programs with his music.

Fun facts about the Apollo Theater's Amateur Night:

- Amateur Night has occurred nearly every Wednesday night since the Apollo Theater opened in 1934.
- **Ralph Cooper** created Amateur Night at the Apollo as a live version of his radio show "Amateur Nite Hour," and served as the show's emcee.
- **Ella Fitzgerald** was among the first winners of Amateur Night. She had originally been scheduled to dance, but instead ended up singing.
- Amateur Night has launched the careers of countless legendary artists, including **Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan, Stevie Wonder, Dionne Warwick, Michael Jackson and The Jackson 5,**

**Luther Vandross, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Lauryn Hill, D'Angelo, Machine Gun Kelly, Jazmine Sullivan, H.E.R., and Alexis Morra**

- The classic competition is known for its notoriously “tough” audience. Week after week, it is up to them to decide who will “be good or be gone” to win the grand prize.
- It is a tradition for Amateur Night contestants to rub “the Tree of Hope,” the remains of a chestnut tree that stood outside the old Lafayette Theater in Harlem. Rubbing the tree stump is said to bring good luck to performers.
- In 2019, the Apollo Theater launches **Amateur Night Japan**, the first-ever licensing partnership that brought the famed content to Japan, presented by Yoshimoto Kogyo Co., Ltd.
- The Apollo Theater is forced to close its physical theaters to live audiences with a mandatory shift to online programming due to COVID-19.
- Due to the prolonged closure in 2020, the Apollo Theater holds **auditions for the new season exclusively online** for the first time in its history.