

APOLLO

Milestones in Apollo Theater History

- 1913** The historic neo-classical theater, known today as the Apollo Theater, was designed by George Keister.
- 1914** The Theater opens as Hurtig and Seamon's (New) Burlesque Theater. African-Americans are not allowed in the audience.
- 1932** Sidney Cohen, President of the Motion Picture Theater Owners of America, buys the theater.
- 1934** Cohen sells the 125th Street Apollo Theater to Leo Brecher and Frank Schiffman. The format of shows changes from burlesque to variety reviews. Marketing attention is redirected to the growing African-American community in Harlem. The Theater is renamed **125th Street Apollo Theater**.

In its inaugural show on January 26, the Apollo Theater becomes the showplace for African American music, dance, and comedy and one of the first entertainment venues to welcome an interracial audience. The first performance is *Jazz à la Carte* featuring Ralph Cooper Sr., Aida Ward, Benny Carter and his orchestra, and "16 Gorgeous Hot Steppers."

Amateur Night at the Apollo is launched. 17-year-old **Ella Fitzgerald** and 16-year-old **Pearl Bailey** make their Apollo debuts.

The **Tree of Hope**, cut down from in front of the Lafayette Theatre, is brought to the Apollo Theater by Ralph Cooper. The Tree of Hope still stands on the Apollo stage where *Amateur Night* performers rub the object hoping to share the good fortune of so many artists before them.

- 1935** **Bessie Smith**, "Empress of the Blues," plays the Apollo on New Year's Eve. 19-year-old **Billie Holiday** makes her Apollo debut.
- 1936** **Lena Horne** makes her Apollo debut singing with Noble Sissle's Orchestra.
- 1937** **Count Basie** plays the Apollo for the first time.
- 1943** **Sarah Vaughan** wins *Amateur Night* at the Apollo and is hired by Earl Hines' band as a vocalist.

Frank Schiffman books the experimental bop band of Earl Hines with **Dizzy Gillespie**, **Charlie Parker** and **Little Benny Harris**.

- 1939** **Jackie "Moms" Mabley** performs at the Apollo for the first time.
- 1945** **Nat "King" Cole** and his trio sell out the Apollo for two straight weeks.
- Dinah Washington** makes her first Apollo appearance.
- 1946** **Lionel Hampton's** band is so popular that they have to play seven shows a day for seven days.
- 1947** **Sammy Davis Jr.** makes his first appearance on the Apollo stage with the Will Mastin Trio.

Dizzy Gillespie performs 13 one-week engagements between 1947 and 1953, introducing African American audiences to "Cubop."

1949 **Frank “Machito” Grillo and His Afro-Cubans** perform 13 one-week engagements at the Apollo from 1949 to 1962.

Radio DJ and Latin music enthusiast, “**Symphony Sid**” **Torin** begins producing weekly shows at the Apollo. The first show includes Sid, Machito and His Afro-Cubans, and **Harry Belafonte**.

The Orioles make their Apollo debut and set the stage for the R&B era.

1950 **Clyde McPhatter** wins *Amateur Night*.

1951 **Josephine Baker** makes her Apollo debut.

Dizzy Gillespie, James Moody, and conga player **Chano Pozo** perform together at the Apollo.

1953 **Tito Puente** makes his Apollo debut with his band.

Joe Louis and Leonard Reed perform a comedy routine together at the Apollo.

1954 An all-Latin show for “Mambo Rumba Festival” premieres at the Apollo, featuring the mambo bands of Joe Loco and Tito Puente and Mambo Aces dancers.

1955 The Apollo begins new show formats featuring as many as a dozen vocal acts on one bill. This signals the end of vaudeville-variety formats at the theater.

“Showtime at the Apollo” is first broadcast, taped before a live studio audience. Performers include **Sarah Vaughan, “Big” Joe Turner, Herb Jeffries,** the **Count Basie Orchestra,** comedian **Nipsey Russell,** and the dancer **Bill Bailey.** **Willie Bryant** is the host.

1956 **Thurman Ruth’s Gospel Caravan** debuts at the Apollo. Top acts include **Shirley Caesar,** the **Dixie Hummingbirds,** and the **Staple Sisters.**

Buddy Holly and the Crickets appear at the Apollo.

Redd Foxx performs at the Apollo and his performance is noted as “funny but dirty,” by Jack Schiffman.

In the mid 1950’s, **James Brown** performs in *Amateur Night* at age 22. After winning the competition, he embarks on his journey to become the “Godfather of Soul.”

1957 **Josephine Baker** plays the Apollo in a quarter-million-dollar wardrobe.

Jazz greats **Miles Davis, John Coltrane,** and **Thelonious Monk** appear at the Apollo.

Johnny Mathis debuts at the Apollo.

Moms Mabley signed to headline a week of shows. Her top billing continued for 17 years until just before her death in 1975.

1960 “**Afro-Jazz Revue**” featuring **Hazel Scott, Mario Bauza and His Afro Jazz Band,** and **Babatunde Olatunji** premieres at the Apollo.

Early 1960’s, **Gladys Knight** wins *Amateur Night*

- 1962** **James Brown** records live shows at the Apollo which become the basis for his famous *Live at the Apollo* album (1963 release). Also, classic albums recorded in 1967 and 1971.
- Berry Gordy** brings the Motown Revue to the Apollo featuring emerging stars **Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Little Stevie Wonder, The Temptations, Martha and the Vandellas, and The Contours.**
- 1963** **Dionne Warwick** makes her first professional appearance at the theater.
- 1964** **Celia Cruz** makes her Apollo debut.
- 1966** **Jimi Hendrix** wins *Amateur Night*.
- Tina Turner** performs at the Apollo.
- During the 1960's, a Specter Records show package includes **The Shirelles, Chuck Jackson, Tommy Hunt, Maxine Brown, and The Isley Brothers.**
- The Jewel Box Revue, "25 Men and 1 Girl,"** is one of the most popular shows and features performances by female impersonators.
- 1968** **Stephanie Mills**, an 11-year-old sensation, wins *Amateur Night* for six consecutive weeks, singing the Stevie Wonder classic "*For Once in My Life*."
- Bill Cosby** plays the Apollo.
- 1971** **Aretha Franklin**, the "Queen of Soul," performs at the Apollo for a series of sold-out engagements.
- Attica benefit concert features **John Lennon and Yoko Ono.**
- During the early 1970's, stars of the Philadelphia International record label including **the Delfonics, the O'Jay's, the Stylistics, the Spinners, the Three Degrees, and Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes** are presented.
- 1974** **Richard Pryor** performs to a sold out crowd and the performance is noted as "Dirty! But funny" by Bobby Schiffman.
- 1976** **Redd Foxx** records his Grammy nominated comedy album, *You Gotta Wash Your Ass.*
- 1979** **George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic** open a ten-night run at the Apollo.
- Bob Marley** performs seven sold out shows at the Apollo.
- Percy Sutton's** Inner City Broadcasting Corporation and investors purchase the Apollo Theater.
- 1983** The Apollo receives national, state, and city **landmark status** as Harlem's oldest active theater.
- The Apollo celebrates its **50th Anniversary** with the television special, "**Motown Salutes the Apollo.**"
- 1987** "*Showtime at the Apollo*" debuts on national television.

- 1990** **Celia Cruz** and **Tito Puente** share the Apollo stage with **Miriam Makeba** in celebration of **Nelson Mandela**.
- 1991** **The Apollo Theater Foundation, Inc.**, a not-for-profit organization, is established to manage and program the Apollo Theater.
- 1993** **Prince** plays the Apollo in an exclusive VH1 Concert.
- 1994-1995** A tribute to **Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** launches the Apollo Theater Foundation's first performance series.
- Other performances follow including **Alvin Ailey Dance Theater**, **Boys Choir of Harlem**, and **Betty Carter - Jazz Ahead**.
- 1997** **Tony Bennett** plays the Apollo in a sold-out engagement honoring **Billie Holiday**.
- 1999** **KORN** is the first rock band to perform on the Apollo's stage. The concert is broadcast worldwide via satellite, webcast, and radio.
- 2000** The Apollo Theater and Jazz at Lincoln Center partner to present **Jazz for Young People** concerts at the Apollo to educate Harlem elementary school students about the history and traditions of Jazz.
- 2001** **Dance Theatre of Harlem** presents its first Apollo performance season.
- Whoopi Goldberg** launches her first tour in a decade at the Apollo.
- Maxwell**, **David Byrne**, and **The Strokes** make their Apollo debuts to sold-out audiences.
- Richard D. Parsons** assumes the chairmanship of the Apollo Theater Foundation, Inc. Board of Directors.
- The Apollo begins a major restoration and renovation of its façade and marquee.
- 2002** **George C. Wolfe's** new musical, *Harlem Song*, opens to enthusiastic reviews and has a six-month run.
- The **Apollo Theater Academy** is launched to introduce high school students in New York and New Jersey to the broad range of career opportunities in the music industry.
- Jonelle Procope** becomes President and CEO of the Apollo Theater Foundation, Inc.
- 2005** The first **Apollo Black Music Month**, a month-long celebration of black music, launches with performances by **The Black Eyed Peas**, **The Neville Brothers**, and soul icon **Chaka Khan**.
- 2005-2006** The first phase of **restoration to the landmark Apollo Theater** is completed with the installation of more than 1,500 new house seats, restoration of the 125th-Street façade and new marquee, and a new stage.
- 2006** The Apollo Theater creates the *Apollo Legends Hall of Fame*, inducting prominent past Apollo performers including Ella Fitzgerald, Little Richard, and Gladys Knight & the Pips.
- Aretha Franklin**, West African singer **Salif Keita**, rap artist **T.I.**, and **Little Richard** are featured in the 2006 **Apollo Black Music Month** celebration.
- Apollo legend **James Brown** lays in state on the Apollo stage. Tens of thousands of people gather to pay their respects.
- The **Apollo Theater Education & Community Outreach** initiative is launched featuring the **Apollo Theater Academy Summer Internship Program** and **Career Day**.

- 2007** **James Brown** is posthumously inducted into the Apollo Legends Hall of Fame.
- The Apollo's long-running syndicated television show, "**Showtime at the Apollo**," comes to an end.
- Then-Senator and Democratic presidential candidate **Barack Obama** hosts a campaign fundraiser at the Apollo.
- Jay-Z** makes the Apollo the last stop on his *American Gangster* tour.
- 2008** **Smokey Robinson** is inducted into the Apollo Legends Hall of Fame; Denzel & Pauletta Washington receive the *Ruby Dee & Ossie Davis Humanitarian Award*.
- Elvis Costello** films his Sundance Channel television series **SPECTACLE: ELVIS COSTELLO WITH...** on the Apollo stage.
- Celebrating the release of their first CD in over 30 years, LaBelle returns to the Apollo for a special reunion concert.
- Apollo Rising Capital Campaign* is launched to raise \$96 million in support of the theater's restoration and renovation, future expansion, and new initiatives.
- 2009** Thousands of **Michael Jackson** fans flock to the Apollo Theater to pay tribute to the pop icon, celebrate his life, and mourn his death.
- 2010** The **Apollo Legends Walk of Fame** is unveiled below the Theater's historic marquee. Plaques paying tribute to renowned entertainers are installed for **Quincy Jones, Patti LaBelle, Smokey Robinson, James Brown, Gladys Knight and the Pips, Little Richard, and Ella Fitzgerald.**
- Paul McCartney** plays at the Apollo for the first time to a star-studded crowd.
- 2011** The Apollo launches *Apollo Music Café*, which showcases creative underground artists in a series of diverse performances across genres, including R&B, hip hop, soul, jazz, pop, funk, and rock.
- Stevie Wonder** is inducted into the Apollo Legends Hall of Fame.
- The Apollo's touring exhibition "**Ain't Nothing Like the Real Thing: How the Apollo Theater Shaped American Entertainment**" opens at the Museum of the City of New York.
- The Apollo launches its *Africa Now! Festival*, an annual event celebrating the contemporary creativity across the continent.

2012 President **Barak Obama** becomes the first sitting President to visit the Apollo, during a campaign fundraiser.

Bruce Springsteen plays the Apollo for the first time.

The Apollo launches **Apollo Uptown Hall** series, which features innovative activities linking performing arts presentations, activities, and events that explore social issues of particular relevance to the Harlem community.

The Apollo expands its global reach with the first intercontinental Amateur Night, *Amateur Night Goes to London*, held at London's Hackney Empire, and by launching **Amateur Night Digital**—a smartphone app and website that makes the internationally renowned talent competition available to fans around the world.

2013 *Apollo Live* debuts on Black Entertainment Television (BET).

The Theater is transformed into a nightclub reminiscent of Harlem music clubs of the 1930's and 40's for the premiere of *Apollo Club Harlem*, a 90-minute, fast-paced revue showcasing the Apollo's glorious musical legacy.

Apollo Theater partners with Sadler's Wells, the UK's leading dance house, to present the U.S. premiere of *Breakin' Convention*, an international hip hop dance theater festival based in London.

Metallica plays the Apollo for the first time.

Apollo Theater presents the world premiere of its new production *James Brown: Get on the Good Foot—A Celebration in Dance*, an evening-long dance presentation developed by seven choreographers from around the world which showcase the stylistic and cultural influences the "Godfather of Soul" continues to have on artists and creativity.

Apollo partners with World Music Institute to present the first annual *Africa Now!* Festival, celebrating the contemporary music scene across the continent.

2014 Apollo Theater and **Jazz à Vienne** collaboration launches with first in a series of transatlantic presentations celebrating the Theater's legacy and influence across musical genres—including gospel, soul, funk, blues, and jazz.

Grammy nominated pianist and composer **Jason Moran** curates his first Apollo Theater engagement, in a collaboration with the **Kennedy Center** that explores the deep musical connections between the Harlem and Washington, D.C. jazz scenes.

2015 **D'Angelo** returns to the Apollo for the first time following his Amateur Night win in 1991 at age 16.

The Apollo launches its **first international tour**, of *James Brown Get on the Good Foot: A Celebration in Dance*.

Apollo Theater launches the **Apollo Comedy Club**, a weekly presentation of emerging comedic talent on its soundstage that brings the Theater back to its roots as a testing

ground for great comics—including Richard Pryor, Moms Mabley, and Red Foxx who also become the first non-musical artists inducted into the Theater’s Walk of Fame.

2016 Apollo presents opera on its stage for the first time, in a co-production with Opera Philadelphia. The New York premiere of *Charlie Parker’s YARDBIRD* marks the first of multi-year partnership between the two institutions, which will collaborate on multiple stagings.

2016 **Kamilah Forbes** appointed Executive Producer of the Apollo Theater

2017 The genre-defying opera *We Shall Not Be Moved* makes its New York premiere at the Apollo Theater

Bruno Mars is the first artist to perform on the Apollo’s iconic marquee.

2018 Adapted and directed by Apollo **Executive Producer Kamilah Forbes, Ta-Nehisi Coates’** #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Between The World And Me* has its world premiere on the Apollo stage, with original music by **Jason Moran** and featuring performances by **Angela Bassett, Common, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Susan Kelechi Watson, Joe Morton, Pauletta Washington, and Michelle Wilson**. The show then tours to the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C.

2019 **Ta-Nehisi Coates** is announced as the Apollo’s first Master Artist-in-Residence in 2019, enabling the Apollo to offer him a home for his work and ideas.

Apollo Theater launched **Amateur Night Japan**, the first-ever licensing partnership that brought the famed content to Japan, presented by Yoshimoto Kogyo Co., Ltd.

HBO premiere’s *The Apollo*, a documentary about the iconic theater directed by Academy and Emmy Award winner **Roger Ross Williams** and co-produced by The Apollo Theater. *The Apollo* covers the rich history of the storied venue over its 85 years.

2020 Apollo Theater launches first major commissioning initiative, *Apollo New Works*, dedicated to the creation of a diverse 21st century performing arts canon.

Due to COVID-19, the Apollo Theater is forced to close the physical theaters to live audiences with a mandatory shift to online programming.

The Apollo launches the **Apollo Digital Stage** to continue to connect with artists and audiences during the prolonged closure. Featuring a broad range of programs from the Apollo Theater’s archives as well as curated performances, conversations and more, the Digital Stage has garnered nearly a half a million views for content in the first 11 months.

The HBO documentary *The Apollo* receives the 2019 **Emmy Award** for Outstanding Documentary. The work is also nominated for an Academy Award.

Grammy Award-winning artist **Wyclef Jean** opens the Apollo Theater's digital fall season with the first-ever complete performance of his Grammy-nominated, Double Platinum album, *The Carnival*. The special virtual concert is one of the first in-person concerts in a theater since the prolonged closure.

HBO premieres the **film adaptation** of *Between the World and Me*, directed by Apollo Theater Executive Producer Kamilah Forbes.

Charles Phillips elected as the Chairman of the Apollo Theater Foundation, inc., succeeding
April 2021

Richard D. Parsons, who led the board since 2001.

2021 **Stacey Abrams** is awarded the inaugural Living Legends Award at the Apollo Theater's annual *Dining with the Divas* luncheon.