

APOLLO

Institutional Background



The Apollo is widely considered as the epicenter of black culture, world renowned for redefining contemporary culture through its roles as a partner and collaborator with artists; as a commissioner of new work, producer, presenter, arts educator, and incubator; and as a catalyst for social and civic advocacy. A distinctive American landmark, it is one of the only institutions in the nation where emerging talent and legendary performers share the same stage, becoming part of an exceptional community of performing artists. Throughout its celebrated legacy, the Apollo has consistently been a model of innovation and excellence and a creative anchor for Harlem, the city of New York, and the nation.

The nonprofit institution's initiatives include programs in three core areas—performing arts, education, and community engagement. As an organization committed to expanding the 21st century performing arts canon, the Apollo also serves as a laboratory for artists to push the boundaries of their artistic forms, drawing upon its legacy as an institution that has ushered in the emergence of new, distinctly American, musical genres—including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, funk, and hip hop. In 2020, the Apollo launched *Apollo New Works*, its first major commissioning initiative dedicated to cultivating new works and voices. The institution also furthers its incubation initiative with the Salon Series, which grants artists the opportunity to develop new work on the Theater's soundstage and bring audiences into the creative process with workshop performances.

The Apollo's annual programming includes three signature series: Apollo Music Café, Apollo Comedy Club and Amateur Night, which continues to launch the careers of countless performers—including well known artists from Sarah Vaughan to D'Angelo, Jazmine Sullivan, H.E.R. and Lauryn Hill; special presentations featuring artists from around the globe working in a variety of disciplines; and as a civic convener, offering public conversations for families, and educational opportunities to students, creating the next generation of artists on stage and behind the scenes.

The Apollo was one of the first theaters in New York—and in America—to welcome integrated audiences, opening its doors in 1934 to the local communities of Black, Hispanic, and other immigrant populations. The theater provided important performance opportunities for talented, emerging entertainers who found it difficult to gain entrance to other venues of similar size and resources. The Apollo continues to celebrate the work of up-and-coming artists from all backgrounds—extending its reach internationally with initiatives like the annual Africa Now! Festival and the Women of the World (WOW) Festival; its multi-year partnership with Opera Philadelphia to produce contemporary opera works, and the world premiere of the stage adaptation of the award-winning Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*, developed and

directed by Kamilah Forbes, which went on to become an HBO film directed by Forbes. In 2018, the Apollo partnered with HBO to develop the documentary *The Apollo*, directed by Roger Ross Williams. The film was nominated for an Academy Award and received the 2019 Emmy Award for Outstanding Documentary. In 2020, the Apollo launched the Apollo Digital Stage continue to connect with artists and audiences during the prolonged closure. Featuring a broad range of programs from the Apollo's archives as well as curated performances, conversations and more, the Digital Stage garnered nearly a half a million views in the first 11 months.

Apollo has launched an initial phase of its revitalization with the Victoria Theaters, creating two new theaters within the Victoria Theater Redevelopment Project at 233 West 125th Street. The theaters will be the first physical expansion of the Apollo in its nearly 90-year history. Scheduled to open in 2022, the theaters at the Victoria space will allow the Apollo to increase the number of programming, educational, and community programs it offers as well as support other nonprofit cultural organizations through subsidized rent and space.