Press Release

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts announces

JFK Centennial Week
May 23–29, 2017

Center to celebrate President John F. Kennedy’s 100th birthday with a week of diverse performances and a free Open House

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts today announced a weeklong celebration to honor the 100th anniversary of the birth of its namesake, the late President John F. Kennedy—whose 100th birthday would have been May 29, 2017. The Center kicked off its Centennial celebration last May, and by the end of 2017, will have presented a suite of more than 50 distinct programs inspired by five ideals often ascribed to President Kennedy: Courage, Freedom, Justice, Service, and Gratitude. Special performances from May 23–29, 2017 span theater programs, dance, music, and the return of the Center’s popular Open House, which all memorialize the life and legacy of America’s 35th President. Highlights include performances by DJ Spooky, Yo-Yo Ma with the National Symphony Orchestra, the world premieres of Kennedy Center commissions by composer Mason Bates and Company E, and special Open House performances by Bandaloop, Flexn, and others. Additional programs through 2017 will be announced at a future date.

Leading up to the Centennial celebration event, from April 25 through May 29, the Center will kick off its 35 Days of Giving Centennial Challenge which offers an
opportunity for everyone to play an active role in promoting President Kennedy’s legacy. During these 35 days leading up to President Kennedy’s 100th birthday, people from across the country will be invited to participate online, around D.C., and on-site at the Center to support ongoing and future artistic and educational activities.

“It is a privilege to pay tribute to one of America’s most admired presidents and one who was such a staunch supporter of the arts,” said Deborah F. Rutter, Kennedy Center President. “As the living memorial to President Kennedy, we are honoring his passion for and commitment to the performing arts throughout the year. He called the arts ‘a form of truth’ and spoke of their power to ‘nourish the soul.’ We share his belief that they are vital to our communities, our society, and our shared humanity. We are proud to present this exciting week of Centennial events featuring a memorable slate of dynamic artists, whose inspired presentations bring to life the spirit of exploration and optimism Kennedy so engagingly invoked and is still remembered for today.”

The most comprehensive information about the Centennial can be found on the JFK Centennial website, created specifically for this year’s commemoration. The site chronicles programs hosted to date and provides details for future events, embedded in a rich visual context of stories and historical media that incorporate JFK’s voice and values. Visit jfkc.org.

**JFKC Centennial Week Programs, May 23–29, 2017**

**PAUL D. MILLER aka DJ SPOOKY: REBIRTH OF A NATION**
Tuesday, May 23, 2017, 8 p.m.
By Paul D. Miller aka DJ Spooky
Featuring Sound Impact
Eisenhower Theater–from $19

Conceived as a reimagining of director D.W. Griffith’s infamously racist 1915 silent film, *The Birth of a Nation*, DJ Spooky’s *Rebirth of a Nation* is a culturally significant project that examines how “…exploitation and political corruption still haunt the world to this day, but in radically different forms.” Today, more than a century since the release of *The Birth of a Nation*, the project continues to be presented internationally, engaging audiences in themes of civil rights and freedom, seen through the lens of DJ Spooky’s
unique art of remixing. Dr. King once said that “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice”—one of the drivers behind Miller’s work is influenced by this. “I try to give people thought tools for mindfulness, or for thinking about the patterns we inhabit as not fixed of locked down, but changeable. It’s the beauty of that, which makes life worth living.” The Kennedy Center debut of Rebirth of a Nation is a multimedia performance featuring a string quartet from D.C.-based music ensemble Sound Impact. Two violins, a viola, and a cello will accompany three screen video projections, controlled live on stage by DJ Spooky.

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CONCERT HONORING JOHN F. KENNEDY
Wednesday, May 24, 2017, 8 p.m.
National Symphony Orchestra
Joshua Weilerstein, conductor
Yo-Yo Ma, cello
Sasha Cooke, mezzo-soprano
Concert Hall—$79
Program:

Copland: Fanfare for the Common Man
William Grant Still: Poem for Orchestra
Mason Bates: Passage
John Williams: Cello Concerto
Bernstein: Three Dance Episodes from On The Town

This performance features Kennedy Center Artistic Advisor at Large Yo-Yo Ma and is led by young American conductor Joshua Weilerstein in his Kennedy Center debut.

The National Symphony Orchestra performs the world premiere of Mason Bates’s Passage, an NSO commission created especially for JFK’s 100th. Passage examines the theme of American exploration through the visionary words of Walt Whitman and President John F. Kennedy. Composed for renowned mezzo-soprano Sasha Cooke and the NSO, the work imaginatively sets Whitman’s "Passage to India" alongside recorded fragments of JFK’s moonshot speech given in 1961. Two iconic American voices—that of poet and President—come together on a journey to the ever-expanding human frontier.

HUBBLE CANTATA
Thursday, May 25, 2017, 7:30 p.m.
Paola Prestini, composer
Royce Vavrek, librettist
Concert Hall—from $15
The Hubble Cantata, brought to life by Metropolitan opera star Nathan Gunn (with soprano to be announced), music director Julian Wachner, a 20-piece instrumental ensemble, and a 100-person choir from The Washington Chorus, is an unprecedented live experience. The program pushes the boundaries of art and science as it takes audiences on a journey of wonder and exploration, seeking parallels between human life on Earth and the stars in the heavens. Framed by the birth, life, and death of a star—and connected to a narrative of a couple experiencing loss—the hour-long, space-inspired cantata features a cutting-edge virtual reality film (Fistful of Stars) by Eliza McNitt, music by composer Paola Prestini, and libretto by Royce Vavrek. Through his narration, New York Times best-selling author and eminent astrophysicist Dr. Mario Livio explains the larger celestial implications at stake, placing the characters’ story within the grand scheme of the cosmos.

In a final gesture, this family-friendly performance incorporates virtual reality cardboard headsets, simulating an immersive voyage through the universe, expertly created by The Endless Collective, a leading VR FX firm, with a 360-degree soundscape developed by Arup, the global leaders in acoustic and sound design. This mesmerizing live experience, co-produced by VisionIntoArt/National Sawdust, Beth Morrison Projects and Arup, reflects Livio’s poignant themes and the powerful realization that humans discovered, explore, and continue to expand the understanding of the universe, and man’s place in it.

From our friends in the community:

THE WASHINGTON BALLET
Frontier
Thursday, May 25–27, 2017, 7:30 p.m.
Opera House—from $25

The Washington Ballet, in a self-presentation at the Kennedy Center, has independently commissioned Frontier, choreographed by former American Ballet Theatre principal dancer Ethan Stiefel, inspired by President Kennedy and his aspirations for America as a leader of artistic, cultural, and intellectual excellence. His historic May 25, 1961 “Urgent Needs” address to the United States Congress serves as the impetus for this work. The seminal speech launched what became a legacy in U.S. space travel and exploration. Stiefel investigates space exploration through the perspective of the astronaut, delving into the emotional and physical rigors required for space travel. While Kennedy used space as a model for national achievement, Stiefel uses his art as a conveyance for this message and for Kennedy’s affirmation that America must fulfill a desire to achieve and be exceptional in the arts.

KENNEDY CENTER OPEN HOUSE: CELEBRATING JFK AT 100
Saturday, May 27, 2017, 12 p.m.–10 p.m.
With world premiere commission and activities for all
Campus-wide—FREE
In celebration of John F. Kennedy’s 100th birthday, the Kennedy Center will host an Open House. This free event welcomes the public to explore and experience the performing arts through the halls, theaters, and plazas of the Kennedy Center through more than 30 free performances, activities and events for all ages and tastes. The arts program will feature artists from across the U.S., the Washington, D.C. region, and abroad.

Highlights include:

- **Bandaloop**, the pioneers of vertical dance, will present multiple performances suspended from the roof of the Kennedy Center throughout the day.
- **Company E**, a D.C.-based contemporary dance company, will perform a Kennedy Center JFK Centennial-commissioned work and world premiere, *In Security or Jack and Nikki Do the Cold War Tango*, in the Grand Foyer using both Millennium Stages simultaneously to explore the John F Kennedy/Nikita Khrushchev relationship.
- **Flexn** will present five different performances throughout the day in the Eisenhower Theater of flex dance which is an electrifying form of street dance evolved from Jamaican bruk-up and reggae. Each performance will be in a different format (solo, two-on-two battles, full company), and each focusing on one of the five JFK Centennial ideals as well as opening with a discussion of the works by Peter Sellars and Reggie Gray.
- *Finding a Line: Skateboarding, Music, and Media* will return with a skate park and music stage open and active throughout the day on the plaza.
- Citizen Artist Fellow Paige Hernandez and Baye Harrell will perform “All the Way Live!” in the Family Theater.
- The *National Memorial Day Choral Festival* in the Concert Hall will present patriotic repertoire which will include works that celebrate President Kennedy such as the “Star Spangled Banner,” “America the Beautiful,” “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Inauguration,” and “To the Moon.”
- Local Washington Ballet will participate in Open House activities by presenting their independent commission *Frontier*.

**All of the programming in the three largest theaters and the Grand Foyer will explore and celebrate the legacy of President Kennedy.**

**NSO MEMORIAL DAY CONCERT AND LIVE BROADCAST ON PBS**

Sunday, May 28, 2017, 8 p.m. EDT (Check Local Listings)
U.S. Capitol–FREE

The National Symphony Orchestra delivers its traditional Memorial Day Concert, an uplifting performance honoring the military service of all men and women in uniform as well as their families at home. The award-winning program is broadcast live each year on PBS. Program details to be announced at a later date.
**JFK CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**
Monday, May 29, 2017, 7:30 p.m.
Opera House

Presented on Memorial Day the centennial week grand finale will feature a large-scale, feature-length show with a star-studded cast celebrating President Kennedy and reflecting on his enduring ideals of **Courage, Freedom, Justice, Service, and Gratitude**. Program details announced at a later date.

**FUNDING CREDITS**

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The NSO’s annual series of Capitol Concerts is made possible by the U.S. Department of the Army and the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Capital Region, National Mall and Memorial Parks.

For more information, please visit: jfkc.org/week

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**PRESS CONTACT**
Eileen Andrews
(202) 416-8448
ETAndrews@kennedy-center.org