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# Inclusive, Interactive, and Accessible: The REACH, New Kennedy Center Expansion in D.C., Opens with Free 16-Day Festival from September 7 through September 22



*All images courtesy of the Kennedy Center and Steven Holl Architects*

(WASHINGTON)—This fall, artists and audiences from the Washington, D.C. area, the U.S., and around the globe come together at the nation’s cultural capital to dance, sing, create, collaborate, listen, learn, talk, share, and celebrate the opening of the **REACH**, the **John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts**’s unprecedented new expansion. At a preview event today, May 29, which marks both President Kennedy’s 102nd birthday and 100 days until the historic opening, the Kennedy Center unveiled preliminary details of the **free 16-day REACH Opening Festival on September 7–22**.

Built for active participation and access, the REACH brings visitors directly into the creative process. From masterclasses and workshops to dance parties and DJ sets, the Opening Festival offers a first glimpse of the many varied and interactive ways that visitors will be able to experience art at the REACH. With **more than 400 free events** planned, the multi-genre, multidisciplinary festival features participatory performances, interactive installations, hands-on learning activities, and more, with local and national headliners including **Arrested Development, The Second City, Thievery**

**Corporation, Yalitza Aparicio, Bootsy Collins, Renée Fleming, Robert Glasper, Angélique Kidjo, Alan Menken, Tiler Peck, Mo Willems**, and numerous others. Many of the artists taking part will connect with audiences not only through performance but also through specially designed residencies and experiential workshops that honor the creative spirit in us all.

Kennedy Center President **Deborah F. Rutter** explains:

“The REACH’s unique design will inspire a wide population to share and own their arts experiences. Building on the Kennedy Center’s rich ongoing programming portfolio to reflect the art of our entire nation, the Opening Festival celebrates all art forms and encourages participation, immersion, learning, and discovery.”

All free and open to the public, the Opening Festival events take place throughout the REACH campus, which features three soaring, contiguous pavilions housing ten defined interior spaces and more than 130,000 square feet of lush, landscaped green space. The entire campus is highly flexible, with indoor and outdoor spaces built to accommodate performances, events, film screenings, workshops, art classes, and studio rehearsals.

At once a public incubator, a hands-on learning lab, and a set of dynamic, light-filled collaborative spaces, the REACH was designed by architect **Steven Holl** to support the Kennedy Center’s evolving needs as the nation’s vibrant cultural center. Drawing exclusively on private philanthropy to finance the project’s design, construction, and activation, the Center launched the \$250 million **Building the Future** capital campaign. Set in motion by Kennedy Center Chairman **David M. Rubenstein**’s \$50 million cornerstone gift in 2013, which inspired hundreds of other major donors around the country to participate, the campaign has successfully raised more than \$224 million to date. Today marks the launch of the campaign’s Community phase, with a two-to-one matching offer for donors of \$250 or more. View the full REACH space guide [here](#), see full Opening Festival highlights [here](#), and click [here](#) to receive additional programming updates on June 21 and throughout the summer.

### **Opening Day Highlights**

A glorious microcosm of the Opening Festival, the Opening Day illustrates the rich breadth of experience that the REACH’s versatile, informal spaces are designed to foster. To inaugurate the event, artists and audiences will participate in a campus-wide **Opening Procession**, and the **National Symphony Orchestra** will give an open-air performance of **Beethoven**’s monumental **Ninth Symphony** conducted by **Thomas Wilkins**, featuring four vocal soloists drawn from the **Washington National Opera**’s acclaimed **Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program**, as coached by superstar soprano and Kennedy Center Artistic Advisor at Large **Renée Fleming**. **Stanley J. Thurston** will lead the **300-voice D.C. community-based chorus**, anchored by the **Heritage Signature Chorale**, in a performance that promises to draw the crowd together in an uplifting celebration of music, freedom, and solidarity.

The day’s eclectic offerings include a headlining appearance by Rock & Roll Hall of Famer **Bootsy Collins**, legendary bassist for James Brown and Parliament-Funkadelic, who joins **The Chuck Brown Band** for a joyful celebration of Go-Go, the homegrown funk variety dubbed “the heartbeat of D.C.” (*The Washington Post*). **Underground Comedy**, a local comedy promoter, will present a Stand Up Showcase featuring some of D.C.’s best comedians and up-and-coming talent, New York City Ballet principal **Tiler Peck** will lead an advanced masterclass, and **Skylight Soundscapes**, a specially

commissioned installation by Kennedy Center Composer-in-Residence **Mason Bates**, will use projections and sounds, ranging from Renaissance choral to German techno, to create an immersive, chill-out lounge space. From the comfort of the fully equipped **Virtual Reality Lounge**, visitors can put on an Oculus headset and step into new worlds beyond their imagination. Like Skylight Soundscapes, the VR Lounge will remain open throughout the festival.

Shining a light on the REACH as a focal point for long-term community engagement, Opening Day also calls attention to some of the dedicated artists who work directly with teachers and students in schools across the nation through the Kennedy Center's **Turnaround Arts** program. Among the day's performers are roots singer-songwriter **Valerie June** and Hip Hop trailblazer **Speech**, appearing with his Grammy®-winning group, **Arrested Development**. Modeling the creative process live in real time, performance poet **Jacqueline Suskin** will write customized one-minute poems to prompts from members of the public.

Led by spoken word artist, theater maker, and activist **Marc Bamuthi Joseph**, the Kennedy Center's Vice President and Artistic Director of Social Impact, six newly created **Social Practice Residencies** will support local artists in their work with the **transgender, deaf, Latinx youth, African American ecumenical, female refugee, and First Nations communities**. These six leaders (soon to be announced) will curate and host a series of **interactive events** at the festival, highlighting six-month in-house and extramural residencies to empower their marginalized communities through empathy, inquiry, and creative expression.

### **Opportunities To Participate: Highlights Of The 16-day Festival**

Underscoring the REACH's commitment to bringing visitors into the creative process, in addition to a full and starry performance program (see highlights outlined below), the Opening Festival offers a wide selection of open classes, workshops, and other interactive experiences. Young musical theater aficionados can register for acting, singing, and dancing masterclasses with New York's celebrated **The Broadway Collective**, while Hip Hop lovers can take DJing and breakdancing workshops with transformative local nonprofit **Words, Beats & Life**. **Sidebarre DC** leads "jazz barre" fitness classes to the accompaniment of a live jazz trio and, in collaboration with the Kennedy Center's **Sound Health** program, **Daybreaker** presents early-morning yoga followed by a dance party to jump-start the day. **Public dance classes**—in styles ranging from breakdancing to traditional Chinese—include a session for those with Parkinson's disease and a tap class with the Emmy®-nominated **Syncopated Ladies**. To celebrate **National Dance Day**, now held on September 21, festival-goers will have the chance to learn this year's official nationwide **National Dance Day routine** and take part in a locally inspired "**line dance**."

Three filmmakers—documentarian **Steve James** (*Hoop Dreams*), experimental animator **Jodie Mack** (*The Grand Bizarre*), and **Charles Burnett** (*To Sleep with Anger*), known for his realistic and intimate portrayals of African American families—will be in residence to host workshops accompanying screenings of their films. In addition to performing centerstage with a tip to the legacy of Alice Coltrane, genre-bending harpist **Brandee Younger** will host a workshop, and amateur musicians will also have the opportunity to play alongside members of the **National Symphony Orchestra**. Aspiring comics can try their hand at **Joke-E-Oke**, a game blending karaoke with stand-up, or take improv workshops with famed Chicago troupe **The Second City**. At specially outfitted tables in the REACH's dedicated learning lab, patrons of all ages can learn to draw like author and illustrator **Mo Willems**, the Kennedy Center's inaugural Education Artist-in-Residence, besides using a downloadable **app** to embark on an

interactive adventure led by one of his most popular characters. In an interactive artwork program devised by Australia's **Terrapin Puppet Theatre**, strangers of all ages can create **Infinite Monsters**, each sketching one section of an imaginary creature before coming together to see the whimsical results.

### **Opportunities To Watch Artists At Work: Highlights**

The REACH features informal, flexible spaces where artists can teach, rehearse, and develop new pieces behind an array of glass walls and viewing balconies where visitors can watch them at work. The Opening Festival offers a wealth of such opportunities. During a two-week performance residency, four-time Grammy<sup>®</sup>-winning pianist and producer **Robert Glasper**, whose career straddles jazz, Hip Hop, and R&B, showcases three of his genre-bending projects; he appears with his tribute ensemble celebrating Miles Davis's *Everything's Beautiful* and with his venerated **Robert Glasper Trio**, as well as giving a live account of his award-winning conceptual work *Black Radio*. Other highlights include a trio of **musical masterclasses** presented by the National Symphony Orchestra: on how to listen, by pianist and Artistic Director for the Kennedy Center's Fortas Chamber Music Concerts **Joseph Kalichstein**; on musical arrangement, by NSO Principal Pops Conductor **Steven Reineke**; and on songwriting, by Oscar<sup>®</sup>, Tony<sup>®</sup>, and Grammy<sup>®</sup> laureate **Alan Menken**, whose hit scores range from Broadway's *Little Shop of Horrors* to Disney's *Aladdin* and *Beauty and the Beast*. Visitors can **preview a new short opera** from an up-and-coming composer-librettist team commissioned by Washington National Opera's **American Opera Initiative**, and catch a sneak peek of a new Kennedy Center co-commission, when Grammy<sup>®</sup>-winning singer, songwriter, and bassist **Esperanza Spalding** and 2018 Kennedy Center Honoree **Wayne Shorter** workshop their new jazz opera, *Iphigenia*, which is scheduled to premiere at the Center next year.

### **Opportunities To Listen, Learn, And Talk: Highlights**

To promote deeper understanding and discovery of the festival's many offerings, the REACH plays host to a number of talks, discussions, and lectures. In the Kennedy Center's **Sound Health** program, which explores connections between wellness and the arts, **Renée Fleming** curates discussions and workshops in collaboration with the **American Music Therapy Association** and neurosurgeon and musician **Dr. Charles Limb**. The **National Symphony Orchestra** presents a series of TED-style **Classical Talks**; dance luminaries **Tiler Peck** and **Debbie Allen** take part in panel discussions; Baltimore club sensation **TT The Artist** discusses her film project *Dark City Beneath the Beat*; a Hip Hop culture series addresses such topics as "**Women in Hip-Hop**"; and Helen Hayes Award-winning D.C. playwrights **Aaron Posner** and **Karen Zacarias** lead a conversation about community and the creative process.

The **Moonshot Studio**, an innovative hands-on learning lab, is one of the many informal workspaces where the REACH enables artmakers of all ages and levels of experience to roll up their sleeves and investigate, discover, linger and learn. Expanding the Kennedy Center's ongoing programs for schools, the festival features a wide range of **hands-on engagement activities, workshops, and other learning opportunities** to introduce students and teachers from D.C.-area schools to the new campus and its possibilities. Among the many offerings, kindergarten through second-grade classes will explore **literature through the performing arts**; third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders will celebrate **African culture**; middle-schoolers will investigate **Hispanic heritage**; and high-schoolers will study **creative youth development and citizen artistry** and take comedy workshops with **The Second City**. Teachers can also attend a **professional development open house** to kick off the new school year.

### **Celebrating Our Indigenous Heritage: Highlights**

The Kennedy Center is committed to deepening its engagement with First Nations people, for which the flexible, accessible spaces of the REACH provide the perfect platform. The Opening Festival gathers together representatives of numerous local, national, and international tribes, for art, discussion, and invaluable social interaction. Among the musical performers are neo-folk singer-songwriter **Thea Hopkins** (Aquinnah Wampanoag), a 2019 Indigenous Music Award–nominee; Grammy®-nominated cellist and vocalist **Dawn Avery** (Mohawk); Canada’s **A Tribe Called Red** (Mohawk/Cayuga) with the local **Uptown Boyz** (Piscataway); and Hawaii’s famed **Keali’i Reichel**. Other highlights include hoop dancing from award-winning interdisciplinary artist **Ty Defoe** (Giizhiig/Ojibwe/Oneida), storytelling from **Rose Powhatan** (Pamunkey/Tauxenent), and a performance-installation by Antipodean choreographer, dancer, and artist **Amrita Hepi** (Bundjulong/Ngapuhi). Three panel discussions feature a “**Conversation with Contemporary Artists**” with potter and fashion designer **Virgil Ortiz** (Cochiti/Pueblo), filmmaker **Steven Paul Judd** (Choctaw/Kiowa), and pop artist **Frank Buffalo Hyde** (Onondaga/Nez Perce), led by **Yalitza Aparicio** (Mixtec/Triqui), the Mexican actress who made her debut in *Roma* (2018), becoming the first indigenous American woman to be nominated for a “Best Actress” Academy Award®.

### **Music, Drama, Dance, And Film: Performance Highlights**

The Opening Festival performance lineup ranges from intimate studio experiences to open-air dance parties, DJ sets, film screenings, and mainstage spectaculars. In “**Broadway under the Stars at the REACH**,” **Alan Menken** presides over an al fresco evening of his music performed by the **National Symphony Orchestra**, selected Broadway stars, and **Steven Reineke**. **Renée Fleming** shares a program with three-time Grammy®-winning Beninese singer-songwriter **Angélique Kidjo**. Three-time Emmy®-winning *Fame* star and *So You Think You Can Dance* judge **Debbie Allen** hosts **National Dance Day**, a 12-hour non-stop extravaganza capped by an evening performance of **Fela! The Concert**, an exuberant music and dance party inspired by the Broadway show about Nigerian Afrobeat master Fela Kuti, starring members of the original Tony®-winning production.

Music by the free-jazz pioneer posthumously canonized by the African Orthodox Church is the vehicle for worship at “**The Church of John Coltrane**,” an interactive church service. MacArthur Award–winning pianist and Kennedy Center Artistic Director for Jazz **Jason Moran** performs with his group **The Bandwagon**, and West Philadelphia poet and playwright **Dave Harris** attends a reading of **Everybody Black**, his award-winning 2019 play satirizing approaches to black history. **The Second City** presents celebrity alumni in a variety of sketches and improv jams, and *30 Rock*’s **Judah Friedlander** and *Last Comic Standing* finalist **Rachel Feinstein** take part in a **District of Comedy Showcase**. Interdisciplinary Pittsburgh ensemble **Squonk Opera** performs **Hand to Hand**, a family-friendly production combining live music with original storytelling and a pair of gargantuan puppet hands. **Thievery Corporation**, the D.C.-based production duo whose trademark sound blends downtempo trip-hop with bossa nova and dub, anchors the festival’s live electronic programming, which includes a tribute to revolutionary proto-rapper Gil Scott-Heron. In a block party curated by **Q-Tip**, the Kennedy Center’s Artistic Director of Hip Hop Culture, New York rapper **Pharoahe Monch** debuts his new trio project, *Thirteen* (featuring Monch, Marcus Machado, and Daru Jones), and MTV Award–winning DJ **J.Period** joins some of Hip Hop’s most celebrated emcees to create and record a new mixtape live on stage.

With both an intimate indoor screening room and a giant 42' by 24' outdoor video wall, film takes center stage. On selected festival evenings, the REACH's lawns and groves will come alive with films including family favorite ***The Muppet Movie*** (1979), in a 40th-anniversary screening; ***Amazing Grace*** (2018), winner of this year's NAACP Image Award, which documents the recording of Aretha Franklin's live 1972 gospel album; ***Slow Dancing*** (2007), a series of larger-than-life, hyper-slow-motion video portraits of dancers and choreographers around the world by renowned photographer **David Michalek**; and Washington National Opera's production of ***Show Boat*** (2013), in a special recreation of the beloved "*Opera in the Outfield*" series. Inside the Justice Forum, audiences can view a three-part documentary series tracing the career of **President John F. Kennedy**, to whom the Kennedy Center stands as a living memorial; George Nierenberg's ***No Maps on My Taps*** (1979), with tap-dance masters Bunny Briggs, Chuck Green, and "Sandman" Sims; ***Once in a Hundred Years*** (2019), which examines the life and legacy of African American soprano Marian Anderson; ***A Towering Task*** (2019), a new documentary about the Peace Corps; and, during the festival's Hip Hop Block Party, a selection of movies including Shaolin Jazz's ***Can I Kick It?***, in which a cult martial arts film will be accompanied by a live DJ score.

The festival draws to a euphoric close with **D.C. Lovers Rock**, a West Indian-style sunset dance party. With DJs competing for the crowd in an authentic Jamaican **Sound Clash**, and performances headed by Bob Marley collaborator **Junior Marvin**, queer Cuban Hip Hop duo **Las Krudas**, and dancehall legend **Sister Nancy**, D.C. Lovers Rock unites festival audiences in a shared celebration of love and community.

### **Sculpture And Installation: Highlights**

A variety of sculptures and installations will adorn the indoor and outdoor spaces of the REACH. A dramatic new installation by D.C.-based artist **Sam Gilliam** will greet visitors inside one of the new pavilions, while out in the landscaped gardens, **Joel Shapiro**'s playful 24-foot aluminum piece *Untitled* (2019) will be on semi-permanent display, **Roy Lichtenstein**'s sculpture *Brushstroke* will be on loan from the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and *Milk River*, a new bronze horse by **Deborah Butterfield**, will be on permanent display, being generously donated by art collector Sam Rose. There will also be long-term installations by two alumni of the Kennedy Center's **Citizen Artist Fellowship Program**, which honors emerging and established U.S. artists whose work positively impacts their community. **Ekene Ijeoma**'s *Heartfelt*, a heart-shaped sculpture that lights up when in contact with people, celebrates human connection, while **Michelle Angela Ortiz**'s *The Courage Within Me*, a spinning stabile created with local students, explores what it means to be brave.

All REACH Opening Festival events are free, and reservations for timed passes will be required for entry. Reservations will open in August at [www.kennedy-center.org/The REACH](http://www.kennedy-center.org/The REACH). To join the Opening Festival mailing list for programming updates and reservation information, click [here](#). For high-resolution photos, click [here](#).

### **The REACH at the Kennedy Center: Opening Festival**

*Highlights listed alphabetically by genre*

#### **Broadway:**

Alan Menken (masterclass)

with Broadway stars, National Symphony Orchestra (performance)

The Broadway Collective (masterclasses)

Washington National Opera *Show Boat* (film)

**Classical:**

Washington National Opera's American Opera Initiative (workshop)  
District5 (performance)  
DC Strings Orchestra (performance)  
Renée Fleming (performance; coaching)  
Joseph Kalichstein (workshop)  
National Symphony Orchestra (performances; workshops)  
Steven Reineke, NSO (workshop)

**Comedy:**

*Joke-E-Oke* (interactive game)  
The Second City (performance; workshop; *The Second City's Guide to Jazz* with Jason Moran)  
Underground Comedy Stand Up Showcase  
District of Comedy Showcase, with D.C. comedians Judah Friedlander, Rachel Feinstein, and others (performance)  
*Yeah, But Still* with Brandon Wardell; *Say What?!* with host Reese Waters; and *Off Book: The Improvised Musical Podcast* with Jessica McKenna, Zach Reino, and special guest (podcasts)

**Contemporary:**

Arrested Development (performance)  
The Chuck Brown Band with Bootsy Collins (performance)  
Robert Glasper (residency, workshops, performances)  
Robert Glasper Trio; *Everything is Beautiful* Miles Davis project  
Valerie June (performance)  
Angélique Kidjo (performance)

**Dance:**

Debbie Allen (host, discussion)  
& Debbie Allen Dance Academy (performance)  
The Broadway Collective (masterclasses)  
Ty Defoe (performance)  
Sarah Beth Oppenheim (dance participation)  
Tiler Peck (workshop, discussion)  
Sidebarre DC (dance class)  
Lisa Traiger (performance / lecture)

**Electronica/DJ Culture:**

ELIN  
Eric Hilton (from Thievery Corporation; curating)  
Night Glitter (performance)  
Congo Sanchez Band (performance)  
The Archives (performance)  
Thievery Corporation (performance)  
DJ Divine (sets, discussion)  
Baltimore Boom Bap Society (improv workshop)  
TT The Artist (performance, discussion, film preview)  
Champion Sound Band (performance)

**For all ages:**

Mo Willems (workshop activities, app, and more)  
*Hand to Hand*, Squonk Opera (performance, workshops)  
*Infinite Monsters*, Terrapin Puppet Theatre (interactive, immersive game/installation)  
*The Muppet Movie* 40th anniversary (film)

**Film:**

*Amazing Grace*  
JFK film series

Marian Anderson documentary: *Once in a Hundred Years*  
Charles Burnett (workshop)  
Jodie Mack (workshop)  
Steve James (workshop)  
*The Muppet Movie* 40th anniversary  
Washington National Opera *Show Boat*  
TT The Artist: preview clips of *Dark City Beneath the Beat* with Q&A (preview)  
*Fresh Dressed / Shaolin Jazz* with live DJ score / *Dave Chappelle's Block Party* (Hip Hop)  
Lil Buck: *Me and the Light* (film)  
Yalitza Aparicio (*Roma* actress) (panel discussion)

**Hip Hop:**

Kokayi & Friends (performance)  
Pharoahe Monch (performance)  
J.Period (performance)  
*Fresh Dressed / Shaolin Jazz* with live DJ score/*Dave Chappelle's Block Party* (films)  
DJ RBI (DJ set)  
DJ Miss H.E.R. (DJ set)  
Bobbito García aka Kool Bob Love (DJ set)

**Indigenous Artists:**

A Tribe Called Red with Uptown Boyz (music performance)  
Keali'i Reichel (Hula music and dance performance)  
Ty Defoe (hoop dance performance)  
David Williams (didgeridoo performance)  
Rose Powhatan (storytelling)  
Thea Hopkins & Dawn Avery with Larry Mitchell/Ty Dafoe (music and dance performance)  
Amrita Hepi (installation/performance)  
Yalitza Aparicio (*Roma* actress) (panel discussion)

**Installations:**

Ekene Ijeoma  
Michelle Angela Ortiz  
*Infinite Monsters*, Terrapin Puppet Theatre (interactive, immersive game/installation)

**Jazz:**

Brandee Younger (harpist/keyboardist; performance)  
Jason Moran and The Bandwagon (performance)  
Flying Lotus (performance)  
Church of John Coltrane (worship service)  
Sidebarre DC (dance class)  
Syncopated Ladies (performance, workshop)  
Esperanza Spalding and Wayne Shorter (workshop, residency)

**Poetry:**

Jacqueline Suskin (one-minute poems)

**Sculpture and art:**

Deborah Butterfield  
Sam Gilliam  
Roy Lichtenstein  
Joel Shapiro

**Sound Health (discussion):**

Renée Fleming  
Levine School of Music  
American Music Therapy Association

Dr. Charles Limb

**Theater:**

Dave Harris's *Everybody Black* (reading/performance)

Alan Menken (masterclass),

With Broadway stars, NSO (performance)

The Broadway Collective (masterclasses)

DC Playwrights Forum with Aaron Posner & Karen Zacarias (discussion)

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