



The Kennedy Center Honors

Press Release

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The Kennedy Center Announces 2019 Honorees

**EARTH, WIND & FIRE, SALLY FIELD,
LINDA RONSTADT, *SESAME STREET*, AND
MICHAEL TILSON THOMAS**

**42nd ANNUAL KENNEDY CENTER HONORS TO CELEBRATE
HONOREES' PROFOUND ARTISTIC IMPACT
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2019**

Gala will be broadcast on CBS on December 15, 8 p.m. ET

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts today announced the selection of five Honorees who will receive the 2019 Kennedy Center Honors for lifetime artistic achievements. Recipients to be honored at the 42nd annual national celebration of the arts are: R&B collective **Earth, Wind & Fire**, actress **Sally Field**, singer **Linda Ronstadt**, children's television program ***Sesame Street***, and conductor and musical visionary **Michael Tilson Thomas**.

"The Kennedy Center Honors celebrates icons who, through their artistry, have left an indelible stamp on our collective cultural consciousness," stated Kennedy Center Chairman David M. Rubenstein. "Earth, Wind & Fire's hooks and grooves are the foundation of a seminal style that continues to shape our musical landscape; Sally Field has brought us unforgettable characters, both joyous and poignant, for more than five decades; Linda Ronstadt is the defining voice of a generation, spanning genres, languages, and continents; *Sesame Street* continues to revolutionize how children and adults learn about our world; and Michael Tilson Thomas goes far beyond keeping score: he has shaped American music and musical institutions for the 21st century."

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“In this class of Honorees, we are witnessing a uniquely American story: one that is representative of so many cultural touchstones and musical moments that make our nation great,” said Kennedy Center President Deborah F. Rutter. “When I look at this distinctive group, I see the hopes, aspirations, and achievements not just of these artists, but of the many generations they have influenced and continue to influence. We’re not just looking back; these Honorees are urging us to look forward as well.”

The 42nd annual Kennedy Center Honors marks the first time a television program will receive the award. The co-founders of *Sesame Street*, Joan Ganz Cooney and Dr. Lloyd Morrisett, will accept the Kennedy Center Honors on behalf of the show, Muppets creator Jim Henson, Muppets artists Caroll Spinney and Frank Oz, and the thousands of creatives who have built the program’s 50-year legacy.

Earth, Wind & Fire are being honored as a musical group. Members Philip Bailey, Verdine White, and Ralph Johnson will be present to accept the Kennedy Center Honors on the band’s behalf.

Throughout its 41-year history, the annual Honors Gala has become the highlight of the Washington cultural and society calendar, and its national broadcast on CBS is a high point of the television season. On Sunday, December 8, in a star-studded celebration on the Kennedy Center Opera House stage, produced by Ricky Kirshner and Glenn Weiss of White Cherry Entertainment, the 2019 Honorees will be saluted by today’s leading performers from New York, Hollywood, and the arts capitals of the world. Seated in the Box Tier of the iconic Kennedy Center Opera House, the Honorees will accept the recognition and gratitude of their peers through performances and tributes. The 2019 Kennedy Center Honors Gala concludes with a dinner in the Grand Foyer.

The Kennedy Center Honors medallions will be presented on Saturday, December 7, the night before the Gala, at a State Department dinner. The Founding Chair of the State Department dinner is Elizabeth Stevens.

The Honors Gala will be recorded for broadcast on the CBS Network for the 42nd consecutive year as a two-hour primetime special on Sunday, December 15 at 8 p.m. ET.

White Cherry Entertainment is well known for producing the perennial award-winning Tony Awards® for the last 18 consecutive years, and also for producing the Primetime Emmy Awards®, NFL Opening Kickoff and Super Bowl Halftime Shows, the Democratic National Convention, Presidential Inaugural Galas, and many other special events. To date, White Cherry Entertainment has won nine Emmy Awards®, while

Kirshner and Weiss have individually received an additional six Emmy Awards®, eight Directors Guild Awards, a Peabody Award, and 40 Emmy® nominations. This is the fifth consecutive year White Cherry will produce the Kennedy Center Honors.

CBS is the Exclusive Sponsor of the Kennedy Center Honors.

Boeing is the Exclusive Underwriter of the Kennedy Center Honors Gala.

Delta Air Lines is the Official Airline of the Kennedy Center Honors.

The Kennedy Center Honors Founding Producer is George Stevens, Jr.

The Honors recipients recognized for their contributions to American culture through the performing arts—whether in music, dance, theater, opera, motion pictures, or television—are confirmed by the Executive Committee of the Center’s Board of Trustees. The primary criterion in the selection process is excellence. The Honors are not designated by art form or category of artistic achievement; the selection process, over the years, has produced balance among the various arts and artistic disciplines.

The Honoree selection process includes solicitation of recommendations from the Kennedy Center Board of Trustees, the artistic community, and the general public. This year’s selected Honorees were chosen based on the recommendation of the Center’s Special Honors Advisory Committee, which is chaired by David Bohnett and includes David M. Rubenstein, Deborah F. Rutter, Michael Lombardo, Cappy McGarr, and Shonda Rhimes, along with past Honors recipients and distinguished artists Julie Andrews, Martina Arroyo, Gloria Estefan, Herbie Hancock, Twyla Tharp, and John Williams. These individuals play a critical role in the evaluation and selection process, and the Kennedy Center is indebted to them for their involvement.

ABOUT THE HONOREES

Earth, Wind & Fire (musical group; Philip Bailey, Verdine White, Ralph Johnson)

Earth, Wind & Fire (EWF) are a music institution. Over their five-decade history, the group has sold out concerts all around the globe, scored eight Number One hits, and sold more than 100 million albums worldwide, making EWF one of the best-selling musical groups of all time. The group has won an impressive nine Grammy Awards® including one for Lifetime Achievement in 2012. In 2000, EWF was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, cementing their lasting impact on popular music.

For their record-breaking success, EWF have been awarded with Lifetime Achievement honors from ASCAP, NAACP, BET, and a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. EWF’s reach extends to heads of

state. They have been invited to perform for Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, who said in an interview with *Rolling Stone* that EWF was a “rhythm and blues and pop staple.”

With a sound that blends funk, jazz, pop, soul, and R&B, EWF cannot be confined to a specific label except their own. Timeless songs have bridged the gap among generations and nationalities, whether it’s the funky and infectious “Let’s Groove,” the timeless dance classic “September,” or the heartfelt “Reasons.” EWF’s catalog of hits has become the soundtrack to many lives now, then, and forever.

EWF’s influence has reached musical giants such as Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, and Prince. Additionally, many of today’s chart-topping artists, including Kanye West, Justin Timberlake, and Alicia Keys, have hailed the band for their artistry.

The music of EWF is more alive than ever as it continues to inspire new audiences and thrill those who have been with the group from the beginning. Like the elements in its name, Earth, Wind & Fire’s music has withstood ever-changing trends in the world and shows no sign of vanishing as they continue to create uplifting music that will forever reach a sacred universal atmosphere.

Recent Kennedy Center history: *Earth, Wind & Fire* were among the guest cast paying tribute at the previous Kennedy Center Honors for Honoree Al Green (2014).

Sally Field (actress)

With a career that has spanned more than five decades, Sally Field is a two-time Academy Award® and three-time Emmy Award®-winning actress, who has portrayed dozens of iconic roles on both large and small screens. Highlights from her extensive film credits include *Hello, My Name is Doris*; *Lincoln*; *Forrest Gump*; *Steel Magnolias*; *Murphy’s Romance*; *Places in the Heart*; *Absence of Malice*; *Norma Rae*; *Mrs. Doubtfire*; *Soapdish*; *Not Without My Daughter*; and *Punchline*. Her TV roles include *Sybil*, *Brothers & Sisters*, and *ER*, and most recently the Netflix series *Maniac*.

Born in Pasadena, California, and raised in a show business family, Field began her career in 1964 in the television series *Gidget*. She went on to star in *The Flying Nun* in 1967 and eventually starred in three television series by the age of 25.

In 2002, Field made her Broadway debut in Edward Albee’s *The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?*, and in 2004, appeared as Amanda Wingfield in Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* at the Kennedy Center. In 2017, she revisited that role on Broadway and received a Tony® nomination. In March, Field made her West End debut to critical acclaim in Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* opposite Bill Pullman at the Old Vic. In 2012, Field was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and in 2015, was honored by President Obama with the National Medal of Arts. Her memoir, *In Pieces*, was published last September and became an instant *New York Times* best-seller.

Recent Kennedy Center history: *Sally Field* starred as Amanda in Tennessee Williams’s *The Glass Menagerie* revival at the Kennedy Center in 2004. Additionally, she was among the guest cast paying tribute at the previous Kennedy Center Honors for Honoree Paul Newman (1992).

Linda Ronstadt (singer)

Linda Ronstadt is arguably the most versatile vocalist of the modern era, having forged a four-decade career which established her as one of the very important artists in one of the most creative periods in the history of modern music. She has broadened the latitudes of the pop singer, expanding the vocalist’s

canvas to include country, Rock ‘n’ Roll, big band, jazz, opera, Broadway standards, and Mexican and Afro-Cuban influences. With worldwide album sales of more than 50 million, at least 31 gold and platinum records, and 10 Grammy Awards®, Ronstadt is the consummate American artist.

Ronstadt sang her last concert in 2009, and shortly thereafter announced her retirement from singing. Unlike most retirements, however, Ronstadt’s has been quite busy. Released in 2013, her book, *Simple Dreams, A Musical Memoir*, made the *New York Times* best-seller list and kicked off an extensive book tour. In December of 2013, Ronstadt was elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and during the summer of 2014, she was honored by President Barack Obama, who awarded her the National Medal of Arts at a White House ceremony on July 28, 2014. From 2014 to late 2018, Ronstadt toured occasionally with her highly acclaimed one-woman show, *A Conversation with Linda Ronstadt*. Featuring photos, audio, and selected video, Ronstadt recounted episodes from various times in her long career, as well as her thoughts on music and what it has meant in her life.

Ronstadt continues to serve on the Advisory Board of *Los Cenzontles*, an academy in California’s East Bay dedicated to the preservation of Mexican Heritage. Founded by Eugene Rodriguez, the organization serves to educate the community about Hispanic art, music, and culture.

In early 2019, Rhino Entertainment released *Linda Ronstadt—Live in Hollywood*, her first and only live concert album, recorded on April 24, 1980.

Recent Kennedy Center history: *Linda Ronstadt narrated the tribute for 2016 Kennedy Center Honorees the Eagles—the late Glenn Frey, Don Henley, Timothy B. Schmit, and Joe Walsh.*

***Sesame Street* (children’s television program)**

In 1969, *Sesame Street* debuted to answer a single bold question: could television be used to educate children? Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind the iconic program, brought together a barrier-breaking multicultural cast, deep early childhood education expertise, and the unforgettable Muppets of *Sesame Street*, and proved that it could. The Sesame team has been asking big questions—and reaching inspiring milestones—ever since.

Today, Sesame Workshop is an innovative force for change, with a mission to help kids everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder. It serves vulnerable children worldwide through a wide range of media, formal education, and philanthropically-funded social impact programs addressing vital subjects as diverse as autism, gender equity, and critical early learning for young refugees.

Sesame Street was the first preschool program to integrate education and entertainment and has brought joyful learning to generations. Currently airing new episodes initially on HBO, it has been broadcast continuously since 1969 on PBS in the U.S. and also reaches millions of children in more than 150 countries internationally. Indigenous co-productions reflecting local languages, customs, and educational needs have been produced for audiences in many countries around the world.

Joan Ganz Cooney and Dr. Lloyd Morrisett co-founded the Children’s Television Workshop (renamed Sesame Workshop in June 2000) in 1968, and *Sesame Street* launched the following year. Cooney, a producer and media executive, served as the organization’s President and Chief Executive Officer until 1990 and currently serves as Chairman of the Executive Committee of Sesame Workshop’s Board. In November 2007, she introduced the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop, dedicated to advancing children’s learning in a digital age. Dr. Morrisett is an experimental psychologist by training. After 30 years as Chairman of Sesame Workshop’s Board of Trustees, he is now a Trustee and Chairman Emeritus.

Recent Kennedy Center history: Sesame Street was featured in the video montage honoring previous Kennedy Center Honoree Yo-Yo Ma (2011). Elmo then introduced a live musical tribute, singing with the children's choir. Previous Honorees that have participated in Sesame Street, either as a special guest or as a creative collaborator, include: Harry Belafonte (1989), Tony Bennett (2005), Victor Borge (1999), Carol Burnett (2003), Johnny Cash (1996), Ray Charles (1986), Ruby Dee (2004), Carmen de Lavallade (2017), Robert De Niro (2009), Gloria Estefan (2017), Suzanne Farrell (2005), Sally Field (2019), Dizzy Gillespie (1990), Philip Glass (2018), Hamilton creators Alex Lacamoire and Lin-Manuel Miranda (2018), Herbie Hancock (2013), Lena Horne (1984), Marilyn Horne (1995), Billy Joel (2013), James Earl Jones (2002), B.B. King (1995), LL COOL J (2017), Loretta Lynn (2003), Rita Moreno (2015), Itzhak Perlman (2003), Linda Ronstadt (2019), Paul Simon (2002), James Taylor (2016), Lily Tomlin (2014), and Stevie Wonder (1999).

Michael Tilson Thomas (conductor and musical visionary)

Michael Tilson Thomas is Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony (SFS), Co-Founder and Artistic Director of the New World Symphony, and Conductor Laureate of the London Symphony Orchestra. He is an 11-time Grammy Award® winner and has, over the course of his career, conducted the major orchestras of Europe and the United States.

Born in Los Angeles, he studied piano, conducting, and composition at the University of Southern California, and as a young musician worked with such artists as Igor Stravinsky and Aaron Copland. In his mid-20s, he became Assistant Conductor—and later Principal Guest Conductor—of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which he conducted in his New York debut. He subsequently served as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Principal Guest Conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra.

In 1988, he co-founded the New World Symphony, an orchestral academy in Miami Beach that prepares gifted music graduates for leadership roles in classical music. Over the years, he has guided the artistic and professional development of more than 1,100 young musicians, many of whom have gone on to careers with major orchestras and institutions.

He became Music Director of the San Francisco Symphony in 1995, and his tenure has been a period of significant growth and heightened international recognition for the orchestra. He has led SFS in championing contemporary and American composers alongside classical masters, while also innovating new ways of engaging 21st-century audiences with classical music. In 2020, he concludes his 25-year directorship and becomes Music Director Laureate.

Throughout his career, he has been an active composer, with major works including *From the Diary of Anne Frank*, commissioned by UNICEF and premiered in 1991 with narrator Audrey Hepburn, and *Shōwa/Shoáh*, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Hiroshima bombing.

He is a Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, a member of the American Academies of Arts and Sciences and Arts and Letters, and has been profiled on CBS's *60 Minutes* and ABC's *Nightline*. He was awarded the National Medal of Arts and has also been inducted into the California Hall of Fame.

Recent Kennedy Center history: Michael Tilson Thomas conducted the San Francisco Symphony at the Kennedy Center in 2010, and again in 2019, presented by Washington Performing Arts.

Kennedy Center Honors Ticket Information:

For ticket inquiries, please contact Honors@kennedy-center.org.

Statements, full bios, and photos of the 2019 Kennedy Center Honorees are available to media upon request.

For photos of the 2019 Kennedy Center Honorees, [please visit here](#).

For more information about the Kennedy Center, please visit our [website](#).

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2019 KENNEDY CENTER HONOREE STATEMENTS

“Receiving the prestigious Kennedy Center Honor fills us with a lot of pride and gratitude. We have always wanted to make music that inspires and contributes to humanity, and this is acknowledgement that we have helped enrich lives and the arts.” –**Earth, Wind & Fire** co-founders Philip Bailey, Verdine White, Ralph Johnson

“I first saw *Gone with the Wind* at the old Egyptian Theater on Hollywood Blvd. The year was 1957 and I eleven. This arrogant, defiant, and boldly ambitious female rocked me and on the way home, I asked my mother who she was, who they all were. I was shocked to learn that the film had actually been made in 1939, that many members of the cast had long since passed away and that Vivien Leigh, my Scarlett, was no longer a young vibrant woman. How could that be? How could she have the power to challenge my little girl self so many years later? I’ll never forget those hours in that crowded, dark theater. That’s the power of art. More than ever in my lifetime we need the artistic community to tell their stories, to sing their songs, to illuminate the human experience, and their sense of truth. Truth is being challenged.

I’ve spent my life exploring something I could never see, trying to grab hold of what it is to be alive, expressing myself using other people’s words. And now, to learn that I will be given one of the prestigious Kennedy Center Honors, seems hard to fathom. I am grateful, humbled, and profoundly proud.

The great Lillian Gish once said that to have a long career an actor must possess taste, talent, and tenacity. I also think you need a sturdy pair of breeches. When I recall the day I started out in 1964, and fast forward to today in 2019, I don’t know how I got here. Except by the seat of my pants.” –**Sally Field**

“On behalf of Sesame Workshop, we are deeply grateful to receive this distinguished award from the Kennedy Center. Fifty years ago, we set out to see if the powerful medium of television could be used to teach young children and help them arrive at school ready to learn. We never imagined that we would be creating the longest street in the world, reaching hundreds of millions of children. This honor is a testament to all who helped create *Sesame Street* and those who continue to help us carry out our mission to help children everywhere grow smarter, stronger, and kinder.” –Joan Ganz Cooney and Dr. Lloyd Morrisett, co-founders of Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit organization behind *Sesame Street*

“The life of an artist, or of an arts institution, has essentially two moments. The first is inventing yourself which takes vision and gumption. The second is going the distance, sustaining the vision, and sharing it. I was fortunate to grow up around people who did both. My family and my devoted teachers lived every day reaffirming the highest standards and ideals of the arts and of our nation. They understood that the arts really matter when they have a creative role in a living tradition. I am honored that the Kennedy Center, which is a living center of both arts and ideals, has chosen to recognize my work. I hope that I can be thought of as a representative for all American classical musicians at this remarkable event.” –**Michael Tilson Thomas**

“My deepest thanks to the Kennedy Center Honors committee for this wonderful accolade. I am humbled beyond measure to be included in the company of this distinguished group of Honorees, many of whom have had a profound influence on my own development as an artist. My thanks also go out to the many people who have helped me through all the stages of my career, and to the audiences who accepted me and made me part of their lives. ¡Muchísimas gracias!” – **Linda Ronstadt**