

**The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts**  
announces

**The Kennedy Center Gala**  
with Tony Award Winner Idina Menzel  
**Celebrating the Human Spirit**  
Wednesday, April 3, 2019

**Honoring Recipients of the**  
**2019 Kennedy Center Award for the Human Spirit**  
**Patrick G. Ryan and Shirley W. Ryan, Distinguished Philanthropists**  
**Forest Whitaker, Citizen Artist**

(WASHINGTON)— Arts patrons will come together on Wednesday, April 3, 2019 for **The Kennedy Center Gala Celebrating the Human Spirit**, honoring philanthropists **Patrick G. Ryan and Shirley W. Ryan** of Chicago, and actor, producer, and humanitarian **Forest Whitaker**, the recipients of the 2019 **Kennedy Center Award for the Human Spirit**. The evening features an intimate dinner and awards presentation, a Gala Performance by Tony® Award-winning icon **Idina Menzel**, and an after-party. Carol Melton and Jodie W. McLean are the co-chairs of the 2019 Kennedy Center Gala. *Sponsorship and package options vary and concert-only tickets may be available; attire for the evening is cocktail; please see below for more information.*

Kennedy Center President **Deborah F. Rutter** reflected, “The Kennedy Center celebrates great art and artists on stage every day. Inspired by the words and values of President Kennedy, with the Human Spirit Awards we acknowledge the leaders off stage who are catalysts in bringing great art to life. The Ryans and Forest Whitaker have made so many contributions to the arts through their actions and words, and they set an inspirational example to which we all can aspire. It is our great privilege to honor them at the Kennedy Center Gala.”

Stage, film, television, and music legend Idina Menzel will headline the evening, offering a Gala Performance in the Eisenhower Theater that features Broadway standards, popular music, and some of the film songs for which she is best known. Just as the Kennedy Center Gala is a philanthropic event in support of arts and arts education programs, Menzel is involved in philanthropy as well, having co-founded the A BroaderWay Foundation, an organization dedicated to offering girls from underserved communities an outlet for self-expression and creativity through arts-centered programs.

Formerly known as the Spring Gala, the reimagined Kennedy Center Gala shifts the focus of the evening to the Human Spirit Award recipients, who will receive their awards at an exclusive pre-performance dinner in the Nations Gallery. As in past years, the fundraiser provides critical philanthropic support for the Kennedy Center's many artistic performances, local and national arts education initiatives, and outreach activities available throughout the year to patrons, students, and families across the country. Kennedy Center educational programs directly impact an estimated 1.4 million students each year, and indirectly impact millions more. *Packages are available for the full evening, or concert plus after-party only; see below for more information.*

The Kennedy Center Award for the Human Spirit recognizes recipients who have had an enduring impact on the advancement of arts, contributing to a culture of giving through philanthropy and through service. The award is given in two categories, the *Distinguished Philanthropist Award* and the *Citizen Artist Award*.

The *Distinguished Philanthropist Award* honors a lifetime commitment to and advocacy for the performing arts, recognizing individuals who have had a substantial influence on the broader cultural life of their community and country through both personal commitment and philanthropy. Past recipients are Wallis Annenberg (2016), Joan and Sanford Weill (2017), and Eli and Edythe Broad (2018). This year's recipients are Patrick G. Ryan and Shirley W. Ryan of Chicago, in recognition of their long and transformational contributions to Chicago's cultural institutions. Their foundation focuses on the arts, children and youth services, and other issues. The Ryans are involved supporters of the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Northwestern University, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, and the Chicago Community Trust, among many other charities.

The Citizen Artist Award recognizes leaders who present and produce the arts in their communities, and deepen the impact of the arts and arts education in a demonstrated way at the local, state, or national level. Past recipients are Theaster Gates (2016), Aaron and Afa Dworkin (2017), and Gary Sinise (2018). This year's recipient is actor, producer, and humanitarian Forest Whitaker, who champions peace-building initiatives in the U.S., Africa, and Latin America. Through his foundation, the Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative, he mobilizes young people and children from vulnerable and violence-affected places to empower them as catalysts of positive change in their communities. Whitaker is a Turnaround Arts artist.

For the fourth year, artist and founder of Pioneer Works Dustin Yellin has been commissioned to create original works of art that will serve as the physical awards. The artist made a major exhibition of 12 *Psychogeographies* at the Kennedy Center in April of 2015, one of which is part of the Kennedy Center's permanent art collection and currently on display in the Center's Hall of States.

### **About Patrick G. Ryan and Shirley W. Ryan**

Patrick G. Ryan, a widely respected entrepreneur and insurance leader, founded two prominent insurance firms, Aon Corporation and Ryan Specialty Group, and is a member of the International Insurance Hall of Fame. In 2008, he was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, one of the nation's oldest and most prestigious honorary societies and independent research centers, founded in 1780, reflecting his many contributions to higher education. He received in 1987 the esteemed Horatio Alger Award, which honors individuals who are dedicated to the principles of integrity, hard work, perseverance, and compassion for others. Mr. Ryan has served on Northwestern University's Board of Trustees for the past 41 years and was Chairman of the Board for 14 years. In 2009, Northwestern awarded Mr. Ryan an honorary doctorate in humane letters.

Shirley Welsh Ryan is nationally recognized for her work of 40 years to optimize infants' physical development by supporting early detection and early intervention for infants' motor, sensory, and communication development. Ryan was appointed by U.S. Presidents H. W. Bush and Bill Clinton to serve on the National Council on Disability. Since 1985, as chair and cofounder with her husband, Patrick G. Ryan, she has led Pathways.org's pediatric multidisciplinary clinic, the Pathways.org Medical Round Table, and the website and social media. In 1990, the

Pathways.org Medical Round Table created the first Infant Milestone Chart of typical and atypical development endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatricians. The chart and Pathways.org's video-based, game-based website are used today by 300 institutions of higher learning and millions of parents. Pathways.org has merged with the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, ranked the top U.S. rehabilitation hospital for the past 28 years (former Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago). The mission of Pathways.org is to promote that all children at their two-month checkup be screened for motor, sensory, and communication development and to receive intervention, if necessary, with trained pediatric therapists to insure their proper physical development. Ryan is a trustee of the Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) and the Lyric Opera of Chicago (Lyric). The AIC Learning Center and the Lyric's Ryan Opera School were named in their honor of Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan. Ryan is a graduate of Northwestern University, and in 1976 she founded Northwestern's graduate-level Learning for Life lecture series, which continues today. She holds Northwestern University's highest alumni honor, the Alumni Medal. A University of Notre Dame trustee emeritus, she was awarded an honorary doctorate for her work on advancing accessibility for all.

The couple founded the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Foundation, which was established in 1984. The Foundation focuses on the arts, healthcare, primary and secondary education, providing scholarships for those with extreme financial need, doctoral students, the sciences through support of nanotechnology, and children and youth services. The Ryans continue to be extremely involved supporters of the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, the Art Institute of Chicago, the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Northwestern University, the Chicago Council on Global Affairs, The Chicago Community Trust, among many other charities. Both Mr. and Mrs. Ryan separately have been honored with the Making History Award from the Chicago Historical Museum, Chicago's oldest cultural institution.

### **About Forest Whitaker**

Forest Whitaker, artist and social activist, is the founder and CEO of the Whitaker Peace & Development Initiative (WPDI), whose mission is to empower young women and men to become leaders, peacemakers, and entrepreneurs in their communities through a unique conflict resolution and peace building program, combined with innovative use of technology and skills building. Whitaker is also the UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace and Reconciliation, and a member of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Advocacy Group. In addition to his humanitarian work, Whitaker is one of Hollywood's most accomplished and versatile figures. He has received many distinctions for his acting, including the 2007 Academy Award® for Best Actor for his portrayal of Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in *The Last King of Scotland*.

Through WPDI, he has developed the Youth Peacemaker Network, a global peacebuilding social network with hubs in South Sudan, South Africa, Uganda, and Mexico. He and WPDI are committed to providing educational tools and economic opportunities to young women and men in regions touched by violence and armed conflict.

In the United States, as a founding member of the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, Whitaker worked with elementary school students to demonstrate to them the limitless power of the arts to express their voices and creative energies. Through Turnaround Arts, a program of the Kennedy Center that uses the arts to transform struggling schools, Whitaker worked with Findley Elementary School in Des Moines, IA, and Martin Luther King Elementary School in Compton, CA.

Whitaker's commitment to peace and social issues has led him to work in close collaboration with UNESCO, which seeks to build peace through education, science, culture, and communication. In 2011, Whitaker was designated as a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Peace and Reconciliation. In 2014, he started collaborating with the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict as an Advocate for Children Affected by War, a topic on which he was invited to speak before the UN Security Council. That same year, he was designated a UNESCO Special Envoy for Peace.

Whitaker’s artistic and humanitarian achievements have been widely recognized at home and abroad. He has received the Cinema for Peace Award, the Humanitas Prize, the NAACP Chairman’s Award, the Los Angeles Press Club’s Visionary Award, Refugees International’s McCall-Pierpaoli Humanitarian Award, the Broadcast Film Critics Association’s Joel Siegel Award, the Crystal Award at the World Economic Forum, and was named Peacemaker of the Year by the Southern California Mediation Association.

### **About Idina Menzel**

Tony Award®-winning icon Idina Menzel has a diverse career that traverses stage, film, television, and music. Menzel’s voice can be heard as Elsa in Disney’s Oscar®-winning *Frozen*, the highest-grossing animated film of all time. The film’s song “Let It Go,” voiced by Menzel, won the Oscar® for Best Original Song and the Grammy Award® for Best Song Written for Visual Media. *Frozen 2* is slated for a November 2019 release. A skillful songwriter, Menzel’s prolific recording career includes multiple cast albums and the solo albums: *Still I Can’t Be Still*, *Here, I Stand*, and her latest album *idina.*, released September 2016 on Warner Bros Records as well as *idina: live* in October 2018. Garnering huge critical acclaim, Menzel reached superstardom on Broadway with her Tony Award®-winning performance as Elphaba, the misunderstood green girl in the blockbuster *Wicked*, and in her Tony®-nominated role as Maureen in the Pulitzer Prize winning *Rent*. Menzel was most recently seen on Broadway in the original production *If/Then*, for which she earned her third Tony® nomination. In May 2018, she starred in Roundabout Theatre Company’s Off-Broadway production of *Skintight* as Jodi Isaac, a woman reeling from her ex-husband’s engagement to a much younger woman. Philanthropy is also important to Menzel, who co-founded the A BroaderWay Foundation in 2010. This organization is dedicated to offering girls from underserved communities an outlet for self-expression and creativity through arts-centered programs.

### **About the Kennedy Center**

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is America’s living memorial to President John F. Kennedy, attracting millions of visitors each year to more than 2,000 performances, events, and exhibits. With its artistic affiliates, the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera, the nation’s busiest performing arts center is dedicated to providing world-class art, powerful education, and outstanding memorial experiences to the broadest possible constituency. Across all its offerings, the Kennedy Center is committed to increasing accessible, inclusive opportunities for all people to participate in and learn through the arts, including more than 400 free performances each year and a variety of Specially Priced Ticket programs for students, seniors, persons with disabilities, and others.

## **Package and Ticketing Information**

**Gala packages**, which include a pre-performance dinner with the award recipients, Gala Performance featuring Idina Menzel, and Roof Top Terrace After-Party, start at \$1,200 per person. **Party Passes**, which include the Gala Performance and After-Party, are \$350. Packages are available now. For further information, please visit [www.kennedy-center.org/pages/specialevents/gala](http://www.kennedy-center.org/pages/specialevents/gala) or call (202)416-8338.

A limited number of **Gala Performance-only tickets**, which start at \$99, will go on sale to Members on February 19 and any remaining seats will go on sale to the general public on February 20. Tickets may be purchased at the Kennedy Center Box Office, online at [www.kennedy-center.org](http://www.kennedy-center.org), or by calling Instant Charge at (202) 467-4600.

### **Funding Credit**

The Kennedy Center Gala Celebrating the Human Spirit Premier Sponsor is **Boeing**, whose contributions play a crucial leadership role in supporting the presentation of the Kennedy Center’s artistic and educational programs throughout the year.

To learn more about the Kennedy Center, please visit [www.kennedy-center.org](http://www.kennedy-center.org).

# # #

Discover the Kennedy Center on social media



**MEDIA CONTACT**

Michelle Pendoley

(202) 416-8196

[mapendoley@kennedy-center.org](mailto:mapendoley@kennedy-center.org)