

APOLLO

**The Apollo Presents the Return of
Africa Now! Festival Live and In Person with
*Somi and Friends:***

***The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba,*
a Concert Featuring East African Jazz Vocalist and
Grammy Nominee Somi and Special Guests Dianne
Reeves, Thandiswa Mazwai, and Msaki**

**Festival line-up includes screening of *Queen of Glory* by
actor and director Nana Mensah (Netflix’s “The Chair”),
a performance by Congolese dancer, singer, and
multi-instrumentalist Nkumu Katalay with DJ YB, and more**



Somi. Image courtesy the Apollo Theater.

Harlem, NY – (February 24, 2022) – The Apollo’s -annual *Africa Now!* festival returns this April, headlined by Grammy-nominated, East African jazz vocalist **Somi**—celebrating the launch of her forthcoming album that honors the late South African singer-songwriter and civil rights activist Miriam Makeba. Set to debut on March 4, marking what would have been Makeba’s 90th birthday, *Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba* is an album accompanying Somi’s musical production *Dreaming Zenzile*, featuring Somi in the role of Makeba, an artist whose music criticized apartheid, placing her at the forefront of political activism. Somi will be joined by award-winning jazz singer Dianne Reeves, South African musician and vocalist Thandiswa Mazwai, and composer and vocalist Msaki.

Music and entertainment from the continent continues to drive trends across all facets of culture around the globe. The Apollo's *Africa Now!* Festival returns for its eighth year to celebrate the best cultural innovators from the African Diaspora. This year's festival takes place from March 4 through March 19.

"We're thrilled to welcome back our *Africa Now!* celebration and to continue honoring and presenting contemporary art from the African diaspora," said **Kamilah Forbes, the Apollo's Executive Producer**. "Over the past eight decades the Apollo has amplified Black voices and used its platforms to create an intersection of art and activism, so having Somi, a contemporary artist and activist, perform new music from her upcoming album that honors the late Miriam Makeba, a respected musical and activist icon of the 1960s, is exactly the kind of artistic conversation and experimentation that the Apollo champions."

Somi was closely mentored by the legendary trumpet player Hugh Masekela, who was a longtime collaborator to Miriam Makeba. Makeba and Masekela were both prominent figures in African jazz music and activism in South Africa and around the world, acclaimed for their musical talents and popular songs that were critical of apartheid. Their visibility earned them monikers such as "Mama Africa" and "the Father of African Jazz." Both Makeba and Masekela performed several times at the Apollo in the 1960s, sometimes together and often with other jazz artists and musicians, including John Coltrane and Machito and His Afro Jazz Band in an ensemble concert. *Somi's musical production Dreaming Zenzile* made its world premiere at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis in 2021 and is touring in theaters across the country ahead of its Off-Broadway debut at New York Theatre Workshop in Summer 2022.

In addition to Somi's one night only performance, the festival kicks off on **March 4** with *Apollo Comedy Club* featuring digital host and comedian **Akintunde**, as seen on Comedy Central **Alfred Kainga**, founder of Feel the News **Marcela Onyango**, and comedian and actor **Yedoye Travis** with music by **DJ Qool Marv**. The festival also includes an Apollo Music Café performance featuring Congolese dancer, singer, and multi-instrumentalist **Nkumu Katalay** and **DJ YB** on **March 5**, a screening and post-film discussion of *Apollo Film: ImageNation's Cocktails and Sol Cinema – Queen of Glory*, by director **Nana Mensah** (Netflix's "The Chair") who vividly captures the Ghanaian-American experience of being caught between two worlds in her film on **March 10**, and a virtual Apollo Livewire discussion curated by Ethnomusicologist Fredara Hadley in dialogue with contemporary artists about some of the legendary artists and historic performances by artists from the continent on **March 15**. The festival culminates on **March 19** with **Somi** and special guests **Dianne Reeves, Thandiswa Mazwai, and Msaki**.

Looking ahead to 2022, the Apollo will offer a dynamic line-up of free and ticketed programs in person at the Apollo's historic theater and online on the [Apollo Digital Stage](#). Highlights include the long-anticipated return of the *Amateur Night at the Apollo* competition on Wednesday, February 16 at 7:30pm EST and on select Wednesdays thereafter; Apollo Master Artist-in-Residence Ta-Nehisi Coates and The Roots' Tariq "Black Thought" Trotter, in conversation; the *Lyricist Lounge 30th Anniversary Concert* featuring hip-hop trailblazer KRS-1 and others to be announced; the premiere of *The Gathering: A Collective Ring Shout*, co-presented by the American Composers Orchestra and the Apollo and co-curated by National Black Theatre, and more. As with all of its programming, the non-profit Apollo's season centers Black artists and voices from the African Diaspora with myriad opportunities for artists and audiences to come back together at the iconic theater. For a complete line-up and more information about the Apollo, please visit www.ApolloTheater.org.

Event details follow below.

ABOUT THE EVENTS

Friday, March 4 – Apollo Comedy Club

Doors open 9:00pm EST, show at 10:00pm EST

Apollo Soundstage – Live and In-Person

Tickets: \$25

Africa Now! edition featuring Akintunde, Alfred Kainga, Marcela Onyango, and Yedoye Travis with music by DJ Qool Marv.

Saturday, March 5 – Apollo Music Café

Doors open 9:00pm EST, show at 10:00pm EST

Apollo Soundstage – Live and In-Person

Tickets: \$25

Africa Now! edition celebrating the best of contemporary African music, featuring Congolese dancer, singer, and multi-instrumentalist **Nkumu Katalay** and **DJ YB**.

Thursday, March 10 – Apollo Film: ImageNation’s Cocktails and Sol Cinema – Queen of Glory

6:00pm EST reception, 7:00pm EST screening

Apollo Soundstage – Live and In-Person

Tickets: \$25

Presented as part of the Apollo’s *Africa Now!* festival, director Nana Mensah (Netflix’s “The Chair”) vividly captures the Ghanaian-American experience of being caught between two worlds in her film, *Queen of Glory*. Sarah Obeng is set to move to Ohio with her boyfriend when her mother suddenly dies. She must then pick up the pieces of her mother’s life and put together a traditional Ghanaian funeral in New York. In the end, Sarah uncovers more than she initially expected as she explores the world her mother left behind. The evening will include a post-film conversation with the filmmaker.

Tuesday, March 15 – Livewire from the Archives: Bridging the Diaspora

6:30pm EST

Apollo Digital Stage – Virtual Broadcast

Free with RSVP

From Babatunde Olatunji/Olatunji Dancers, Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, Salif Keita, Burna Boy, Somi, and others, the Apollo stage has provided a nexus between the African and the African American performance experience. Curated by Ethnomusicologist Fredara Hadley, she will be in dialogue with contemporary artists about some of the legendary artists from the continent who have performed at the Apollo and the significance of the Apollo’s *Africa Now!*.

Saturday, March 19 – Somi and Friends: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba

8:00pm EST

Apollo Mainstage – Live and In-Person

Tickets start at \$25

The Apollo presents East African jazz vocalist Somi performing the music from her new theatrical production, *Dreaming Zenzile* and her latest album, *Zenzile: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba*. Both projects are the jazz singer’s celebration of the late South African singer-songwriter and civil rights activist Miriam Makeba and her “invaluable musical contributions and messages of social justice.”. Somi will be joined by award-winning jazz singer Dianne Reeves, South African musician and vocalist Thandiswa Mazwai, and composer and vocalist Msaki.

ABOUT SOMI

Somi Kakoma was born in Illinois to immigrants from Rwanda and Uganda, and is an acclaimed vocalist, composer, and writer of African jazz, soul, and pop. Her album *Holy Room - Live at Alte Oper with Frankfurt Radio Big Band* (Salon Africana 2020) earned her a 2021 Grammy nomination for Best Jazz Vocal Album and made her the first African woman ever nominated in any of the Grammy jazz categories. The album also won the 2021 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Vocal Album.

Also recognized for her activism in her music and civic engagements, her studio album *Petite Afrique* tells the story of African immigrants in the midst of a gentrified Harlem in New York City and won the 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album.

She has collaborated with artists such as Aloe Blacc, Angélique Kidjo, and Common on her recent projects. In addition to her Grammy and NAACP recognitions, Somi is also a Doris Duke Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, and has participated in artist-in-residences at Park Avenue Armory, UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance, and more.

Somi was recently named a Sundance Theater Fellow for her original musical *Dreaming Zenzile* about the great South African singer and activist Miriam Makeba. In September of 2021, the production, in which Somi also plays the role of Makeba, made its world premiere at The Repertory Theatre of St. Louis and will continue to be seen in theaters across the country until its forthcoming Off-Broadway debut at the New York Theatre Workshop in Summer 2022. Somi's new studio album—that also honoring Miriam Makeba—will be released in March 2022 in tandem with the play. Somimusic.com

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TICKETS

Tickets for *Africa Now! Festival's Queen of Glory*, Apollo Music Café, and Apollo Comedy Club are \$25, the Livewire discussion is free, and tickets for *Somi and Friends: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba* start at \$25. To purchase tickets to *Africa Now!* and all other events of the Apollo's Winter/Spring 2022 season, visit www.ApolloTheater.org.

SUPPORT

Leadership support for Somi and Friends: The Reimagination of Miriam Makeba is provided by the HBO Fund for Theater. Additional support is provided by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Apollo's 2022-23 season is made possible by leadership support from Coca-Cola, Accenture, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Citi, the Sherman Fairchild Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Howard Gilman Foundation, the Jerome L. Greene Arts Access Fund in the New York Community Trust, HBO, and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

Public support for the Apollo Theater is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Kathy Hochul and the New York State Legislature, and from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.

COVID-19 PROTOCOLS

The health and safety of our audiences, artists, and staff is the Apollo's top priority. Please note that all attendees must present a government-issued picture ID prior to entry and show a completed vaccination card authorized by the FDA or WHO against COVID-19 (dated at least 14 days before the show). Proof of vaccination can be displayed on smartphones. Proof of vaccination may also include a CDC Vaccination Card (or photo), NYC Vaccination Record, or an official immunization record from outside New York City or the United States. Photo ID for children under 12 will not be required if they are accompanied by parents/guardians with government-issued photo ID. All attendees are required to wear masks inside the theater, and there is no eating or drinking allowed. For a complete list of the Apollo's COVID-19 safety protocols, please visit www.ApolloTheater.org.

About the Apollo Theater

The legendary Apollo Theater—the soul of American culture—plays a vital role in cultivating emerging artists and launching legends. Since its founding, the Apollo has served as a center of innovation and a creative catalyst for Harlem, the city of New York, and the world.

With music at its core, the Apollo's programming extends to dance, theater, spoken word, and more. This includes the world premiere of the theatrical adaptation of Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me* and the New York premiere of the opera *We Shall Not Be Moved*; special programs such as the blockbuster concert *Bruno Mars Live at the Apollo; 100: The Apollo Celebrates Ella*; and the annual *Africa Now!* Festival. The non-profit Apollo Theater is a performing arts presenter, commissioner, and collaborator that also produces festivals and large-scale dance and musical works organized around a set of core initiatives that celebrate and extend the Apollo's legacy through a contemporary lens, including the *Women of the World (WOW)* Festival as well as other multidisciplinary collaborations with partner organizations.

Since introducing the first *Amateur Night* contests in 1934, the Apollo has served as a testing ground for new artists working across a variety of art forms and has ushered in the emergence of many new musical genres—including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Among the countless legendary performers who launched their careers at the Apollo are Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan, Billie Holiday, James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Gladys Knight, Luther Vandross, H.E.R., D'Angelo, Lauryn Hill, Machine Gun Kelly, and Miri Ben Ari; and the Apollo's forward-looking artistic vision continues to build on this legacy. For more information about the Apollo, visit www.ApolloTheater.org.

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For more information, please contact:

Fatima Jones / Maya Brown
Senior Director of Marketing and Communications/ Marketing and Communications Assistant
press@apollotheater.org

Destanie Martin-Johnson / Julie Danni
Resnicow and Associates
Dmartin-johnson@resnicow.com / JDanni@resnicow.com

212-671-5172 / 212-671-5173