

APOLLO 90

Opening Ceremony for The Apollo Stages at the Revitalized Victoria Theater Celebrates the City’s Newest Cultural Spaces

Mayor Eric Adams, ESD Commissioner Hope Knight, Apollo Board Chair Charles Phillips, Apollo President and CEO Michelle Ebanks, Chairman Emeritus Richard “Dick” Parsons, Opened the New Apollo Stages featuring a performance by Grammy-nominated vibraphonist Stefon Harris and more



Photo: Shahr Azran Photography

Harlem, NY—March 7, 2023 –The Apollo today officially celebrated the opening of The Apollo Stages at the Victoria Theater—the first physical expansion in the institution’s 90-year history—with a special ceremony and iconic Apollo sign-lighting featuring **Mayor Eric Adams**, Empire State Development

Commissioner **Hope Knight**, The Apollo's Chairman of the Board **Charles Phillips**, Apollo Chairman Emeritus **Richard "Dick" Parsons**, Apollo President and CEO **Michelle Ebanks**, and Artistic Director **Kamilah Forbes**, as well as performances by four-time Grammy-nominee **Stefon Harris**, acclaimed singer **Nia Drummond**, the marching band **Marching Cobras** and more. Attendees toured the new space, highlighting everything from the updated marquee to the theaters' behind-the-scenes technical aspects. More than 100 New Yorkers were in attendance at the ceremony, from Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine, Harlem Community Development Corporation President Curtis Archer, leaders of cultural institutions from across the city including National Black Theatre, Apollo board members, and others. With this expansion, The Apollo continues to be an invaluable part of New York City through its mission to drive the cultural community of Harlem forward. Photos from the event can be found [here](#).

"As The Apollo celebrates its 90th year, the opening of the new Apollo Stages at The Victoria Theater signifies the beginning of a new era for us. With two new theaters, we are able to expand artistic opportunities in the community, but also the role we play here to artists and audiences alike," said **President and CEO Michelle Ebanks** at the event. "We are excited to strengthen our support to artists and organizations in Harlem and across New York while expanding our mission to amplify Black voices and opportunities for the next generation of creatives of color."

The new 25,000-square-foot facility, designed by KGA (Kostow Greenwood Architects), includes two theaters, a central lobby and main floor gallery space that serve as convening points for patrons, and administrative offices for Apollo staff, visiting artists, and artistic collaborators. The theaters and offices inhabit the third and fourth floors of the revitalized mixed-use Victoria Theater building just a few steps away from The Apollo's Historic Theater on 125th Street in Harlem, which will be undergoing its first-ever full-scale renovations later this year. The Apollo now operates across five stages with the addition of The Apollo Stages at the Victoria Theater alongside two stages within the Historic Theater and the digital stage at www.ApolloTheater.org.

"One of Harlem's historic crown jewels shines brighter today thanks to New York State's investment in its overdue and much deserved restoration," **Governor Kathy Hochul** said. "The Victoria Theater is not only a symbol of the Harlem's past grandeur, but also a testament to its current vibrancy, and a guarantee that this legendary New York neighborhood will continue to be a cultural force – and with the Apollo's support – launch the careers of some of the world's most talented artists and performers."

Empire State Development President, CEO & Commissioner Hope Knight said, "The reopening of the Victoria Theater – and the broader mixed-use revitalization project – sets the stage for Harlem's continued renaissance as a world-renown cultural destination drawing visitors from around the globe. This project successfully utilized Harlem's historic legacy and transformed it into a modern, dynamic, thriving development that will drive local job creation and economic growth on 125th Street for years to come."

"The Apollo Stages at The Victoria Theater has been a grand undertaking, spanning two generations of leadership. Envisioned by Apollo's former President Jonelle Procope and brought to life by Michelle Ebanks, this new space reinforces and reintroduces The Apollo as the paradigm of Black creativity to a new generation," said **The Apollo's Chairman of the Board, Charles E. Phillips**. "The tremendous work of this team has made significant progress on our Apollo Rising 2.0 Capital Campaign, signified by

the opening of The Apollo Stages at The Victoria Theater, and the upcoming renovation of the Historic Theater. We are all deeply excited for the beginning of this new era.”

The Apollo serves as the operator and manager for the theaters and cultural spaces located within the revitalized Victoria Theater. The revitalization of the Victoria, originally designed as a vaudeville house by Thomas W. Lamb in 1917, was an undertaking initiated by the State of New York in partnership with Empire State Development (ESD). As part of this project, the building also includes residential units, retail space, and a hotel, weaving itself into the economic fabric of Harlem and providing opportunities for local businesses while providing creative and community resources. To learn more about The Apollo Stages at The Victoria Theater, click [here](#).

The creation of The Apollo Stages at The Victoria Theater and support for its programming were made possible by the generosity of America's Cultural Treasures, a sponsored project of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors; Laura and Frank Baker; BNY Mellon; Booth Ferris Foundation; Howard Gilman Foundation; and The New York Community Trust – LuEsther T. Mertz Advised Fund.

The Apollo has always been an institution embedded in the Harlem community, an organization that acts as both an incubator and as a catalyst for social and civic advocacy. In addition to performances, people come together at The Apollo to celebrate life moments and cultural revolutions through its panels and discussions, and mourn for icons such as Aretha Franklin and James Brown, filling a vital role as a thought-leader and convener for public discourse and expression for the community in Harlem and across the country.

ABOUT THE DESIGN

Greeting visitors at the 125th Street entrance in Harlem is a restored marquee and façade announcing The Victoria. En route to the theaters themselves is The Apollo’s Laura and Frank Baker Gallery, offering a communal space for audience members to gather before performances, complete with refreshments and rotating exhibitions.

The new 199- and 99-seat studio theaters, the latter named after former Apollo President Jonelle Procopé who stepped down in 2023 after leading the organization for two decades, are designed by Brooklyn-based theatrical consultant P&PFC, Inc.’s Christopher Buckley for full theatrical productions, live music performances, film screenings, special events, and recordings. Both theaters are flat-floor venues with acoustically isolated slabs and resilient sprung dance floors—as well as dressing rooms and chorus rooms. Notably, The Apollo has introduced across both theaters, a custom-built, retractable seating system to allow for multiple configurations, making it adaptable to the needs of performers and collaborators.

As The Apollo expands, it will also begin the first-ever full-scale renovation of its Historic Theater, which is slated to begin in summer 2024.

ABOUT THE APOLLO

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 *[at] The Intersection Arts and Ideas Festival*, *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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