

**FOR RELEASE:**

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**The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts  
Announces 2026 Programming Framework  
To Mark the 250th Anniversary  
of the Declaration of Independence**



*National Cultural Center invites the country to participate in exploring **The Promise of US** through artistic and cultural programming that encourages everyone to engage, evolve, and elevate in their own communities*

***“I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty”***

– President John F. Kennedy, Amherst, MA (1963)

(WASHINGTON)—The Kennedy Center announces it will mark the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026 with a yearlong celebration, **The Promise of US**. This overarching inspiration will guide Kennedy Center 2026 programming as it reflects on our nation’s progress and acknowledges the work yet to be done.

Over the semiquincentennial year, the Kennedy Center’s programming will uplift and empower artists who speak to the promise of our country and the promise of our peoples, organized into three inspiration pillars: **Sounds of US**, **Stories of US**, and **Future of US**.

“America has long been seen as a country that drives art forward, from generation to generation,” stated Deborah F. Rutter, Kennedy Center President. “We also recognize that our nation’s 250-year-old artistic identity is complex—embracing both individualism and the collective ‘We The People.’ Our intention with this thematic programming is to capture what the future holds for American culture. At

its core, The Promise of US is a call to participate—we invite artists, audiences, and communities alike to join in creating performances, convenings, new works, and conversations across the country.”

The first opportunity for such participation will be [Portraits of US](#). Beginning today, the Kennedy Center invites individuals to submit their own artistic self-portrait to create a digital mosaic of faces that will express the promise of America’s future. *Portraits of US submission details* [here](#).

[Sounds of US](#) revels in the diverse and unique soundscapes that make up America and speaks to its promise.

- **A Song For US** – a brand new choral work commissioned by the Center to foster understanding and unity and promote the proven benefits of group singing. The new piece, a gift to be shared with the country, will culminate in a grand community sing at the Center.
- **Sounds of US Series** – 10 wide-ranging artists will be invited throughout 2026 to curate a free day of events in response to the question “What does America sound like?” Each artist will explore distinctive American sound traditions and genres through their own artistic lens; programs will include interactive workshops, live performances, and exhibits.
- **Songs for Tomorrow** – The Center will launch an online song-writing competition aimed at emerging composers and songwriters. The context encourages participants to invite the public into their songwriting process to create original songs centered around the idea of “fearlessness.”

[Stories of US](#) reflects on how artists—through visual arts, theater, and interactive experiences—shape the narrative of our nation through their art forms.

- **Our Nation on the Millennium Stage** – Throughout 2026, the Kennedy Center’s series of free performances on the Millennium Stage in D.C. will feature artists, companies, independent filmmakers, and writers from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. territories. In a national outreach, Millennium Stage will also tour in six communities across the country to showcase community stages and spaces.
- **ONE. TWO. THREE.** – The Center teams up with Canada’s National Arts Centre and Orange Noyée to present an exploration of migration and North American identity. Playing themselves and portraying their own stories and experiences, 12 Mexican, 12 Canadian, and 12 United States artists and performers join forces with National Arts Centre’s Artistic Director of French Theatre, Mani Soleymanlou, to create a bold and unique spectacle that challenges preconceptions and transcends stereotypes about cultural heritage.
- **National Scrollathon® Exhibition** – As previously announced, from May 26 through September 7, 2026, the National Scrollathon® Exhibition led by Steven and William Ladd, will bring the nation’s largest communal art-making effort to the Kennedy Center after years of collaborations around the country. This project, involving more than 250,000 participants invited in collaboration with museums, arts centers, and service organizations from all over the U.S., assembles an encompassing visual art installation that will reveal the American story in all its beautiful complexity and documenting where we are right now.

With [Future of US](#), the Center looks forward and anticipates the evolution and innovation of artistic and cultural expression in America.

- **America the Fearless Festival, June 15–July 12, 2026** – A four-week grand exploration of the essence of our nation’s art and culture—our diversity and the American spirit. Encompassing all genres and art forms, the festival underscores the idea that American culture is a living, breathing entity, constantly evolving and being reshaped by its people.
- **Kennedy Center Arts Hackathon** – Designed to harness the early career potential of artists and technologists as culture changemakers, this two-day hackathon event will spark interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation. Participants will engage in team formation, ideation and development of projections representing current and emerging trends in arts and tech.

Across the campus in 2026, the Center will **celebrate American choreographers**; explore American stories, ideals, conflicts, and compositions through a new cycle of works from **Washington National Opera**; welcome back *Hamilton* and honor the American musical theater tradition; and commission new works by American composers across musical genres for the Kennedy Center and **National Symphony Orchestra**.

More programs representing all three inspiration pillars will be announced in 2025.

Throughout 2026, the Kennedy Center will be collaborating with the Library of Congress, National Archives, the National Geographic Society, PBS, and more organizations to be announced, to build exciting programs and opportunities for audiences and participants in D.C. and across the nation.

Specific program details will be announced in early 2025. Organizations interested in learning more about **The Promise of US** are invited to visit [www.Kennedy-Center.org/PromiseofUS](http://www.Kennedy-Center.org/PromiseofUS).

### **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 Center is one of the nation’s busiest performing arts centers 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. On September 7, 2019, the Kennedy Center inaugurated the REACH, its first-ever major expansion. Designed by Steven Holl Associates, the REACH provides visitors with new opportunities to interact and engage with the Center as the nation’s premier nexus of arts, learning, and culture. On September 8, 2022, the Kennedy Center unveiled *Art and Ideals: President John F. Kennedy*, a new 7,500-square foot permanent exhibit exploring Kennedy’s presidency and his commitment to the arts. To learn more about the Kennedy Center, please visit [www.kennedy-center.org](http://www.kennedy-center.org).

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

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