



Press Release

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FOR RELEASE:

January 16, 2025

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
will present
The 26th Mark Twain Prize for American Humor
to
CONAN O'BRIEN



**Prize Will Be Awarded at the Kennedy Center
at a Gala Performance on March 23, 2025**

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will present the 26th Mark Twain Prize for American Humor to **Conan O'Brien** on March 23, 2025, in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall. The Prize, which is named to honor one of the world's greatest humorists, will be awarded at a gala performance featuring some of the biggest names in comedy. The program will premiere exclusively on Netflix, date to be announced.

The Mark Twain Prize for American Humor recognizes individuals who have had an impact on American society in ways similar to the distinguished 19th-century novelist and essayist Samuel Clemens, colloquially known as Mark Twain. As a social commentator, satirist, and creator of characters, Clemens

was a fearless observer of society who delighted and informed onlookers with his uncompromising perspective on social injustice and personal folly.

“For four decades, Conan O’Brien, has brought his unique blend of the smart, silly, insightful, and hilarious into our homes,” said Deborah F. Rutter, President of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. “From *Saturday Night Live* and *The Simpsons*—including the unbelievably funny monorail episode—to late night, podcasts, and all things Team Coco, Conan is a master of invention and reinvention, consistently pushing the envelope in search of new comedic heights. I look forward to honoring his immense legacy and enduring impact with an uproarious evening in the Concert Hall on March 23.”

“I am honored to be the first winner of the Mark Twain Prize recognized not for humor, but for my work as a riverboat pilot,” said Conan O’Brien.

As a recipient of the Mark Twain Prize for American Humor, O’Brien will receive a copy of an 1884 bronze portrait bust of Mark Twain sculpted by Karl Gerhardt (1853–1940). Previous recipients of the Kennedy Center Mark Twain Prize are Richard Pryor (1998), Jonathan Winters (1999), Carl Reiner (2000), Whoopi Goldberg (2001), Bob Newhart (2002), Lily Tomlin (2003), Lorne Michaels (2004), Steve Martin (2005), Neil Simon (2006), Billy Crystal (2007), George Carlin (2008), Bill Cosby (2009; rescinded in 2018), Tina Fey (2010), Will Ferrell (2011), Ellen DeGeneres (2012), Carol Burnett (2013), Jay Leno (2014), Eddie Murphy (2015), Bill Murray (2016), David Letterman (2017), Julia Louis-Dreyfus (2018), Dave Chappelle (2019), Jon Stewart (2022), Adam Sandler (2023), and Kevin Hart (2024).

The event was created by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Bob Kaminsky, Peter Kaminsky, Mark Krantz, and John Schreiber.

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts is America’s living memorial to President Kennedy. It is the nation’s busiest performing arts facility and annually hosts more than 2,000 performances for audiences totaling nearly 2 million; Center-related touring productions and television and radio broadcasts welcome 40 million more. The Center presents performances of music, dance, and theater—balancing classical art forms with contemporary genres such as comedy, jazz, and hip hop—supports artists in the creation of new work, and serves the nation as a leader in arts education.

The 26th Mark Twain Prize will be produced by David Jammy and the creative team at Done+Dusted, the Kennedy Center’s producing partner for the Mark Twain Prize since 2018. The event will stream on Netflix, the exclusive televised home of the Mark Twain Prize since 2024.

ABOUT CONAN O’BRIEN

Conan O’Brien was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, and started his path in comedy when he served twice as the president of *The Harvard Lampoon*. O’Brien went on to become a writer and producer on several television shows, including *Saturday Night Live* and *The Simpsons*, until 1993, when NBC tapped him to take over as host of *Late Night*. Since then, he’s won five Emmy Awards®, seven Writers Guild Awards, and the People’s Choice Award for “Favorite Television Host.” O’Brien has hosted two Emmy Awards® and performed at the White House Correspondents Dinner for two presidents. In 2010, his live comedy tour was the subject of the documentary *Conan O’Brien Can’t Stop* and led to a second multi-city stand-up tour in 2018.

In 2021, O'Brien concluded his 11-year run with *CONAN* on TBS, solidifying his 28-year career as a late-night host and one of the longest tenures in late night history. His Emmy Award®-winning *CONAN Without Borders* series has visited 13 countries and his podcast *Conan O'Brien Needs a Friend* currently has over 660 million downloads since it launched in 2018. With more than 50,000 ratings and reviews on Apple Podcasts, the show maintains an almost perfect 5-star average and has won numerous awards. His award-winning digital brand Team Coco, which spans digital and branded content, live events, merchandise, and expertly produced comedy specials was acquired by SiriusXM in 2022. O'Brien is currently in production on the second season of his Emmy Award®-winning international travel series, *Conan O'Brien Must Go*, which streams on MAX. Next up, he can be seen in Mary Bronstein's *IF I HAD LEGS I'D KICK YOU* premiering at the 2025 Sundance Film Festival and will be hosting the Academy Awards® on March 2nd.

FUNDING CREDIT

United Airlines is the official airline of the Mark Twain Prize.

TICKET INFORMATION

Sponsorship packages for the Mark Twain Prize gala performance, which start at \$1,500 and include a pre-performance reception, gala performance tickets, and a post-performance celebration, are on sale now and can be reserved online or through the Development Office by emailing MarkTwainRSVP@kennedy-center.org. Funds raised through the event support the Kennedy Center's mission to make the arts accessible to all, be a national leader in arts education, and honor President John F. Kennedy.

Information about limited sales of performance-only tickets will be made available at a later date.

Performance tickets will be available at the Kennedy Center Box Office, online at kennedy-center.org, and via phone through Instant Charge, (202) 467-4600; toll-free at (800) 444-1324. For all other ticket-related customer service inquiries, call the Advance Sales Box Office at (202) 416-8540.

For more information, please visit the [Mark Twain Prize webpage](#).

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

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Eileen Andrews

(202) 416-8448

etandrews@kennedy-center.org