

50 YEARS

celebrating

THE PERFORMING ARTS

Illustration by Amanda Weisbrod

Since its opening in 1971, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts has served as one of the nation's premiere creative hot spots. This timeline highlights a brief history of the center, showcasing renovations, improvements and legendary performances of the past.



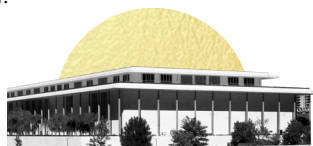
1958 | President Eisenhower signs the National Cultural Center Act, which financed a structure dedicated to the performing arts.



1962 | The Kennedys host An American Pageant of the Arts, a televised fundraiser for the National Cultural Center.



1964 | President Johnson renames the National Cultural Center as The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. He breaks ground for the Center later that same year.



1971 | The Kennedy Center opens. It was designed by architect Edward Durrell Stone, who also designed the Modern Museum of Art.



1978 | The first Kennedy Center Honors take place. Honorees include Marian Anderson, Fred Astaire, George Balanchine, Richard Rodgers and Arthur Rubinstein.



1986 | The National Symphony Orchestra, led by conductor Mstislav Rostropovich, officially joins the Kennedy Center.



1997 | The Kennedy Center opens Millennium Stage, which was created to bring the performing arts to everyone.



2005 | The Family Theater opens. With 324 seats, it serves as a venue for world-class, family-friendly performances dedicated to the youth of the nation.

Sources: kennedy-center.org. Photos: Courtesy of The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; Wikimedia; 1978 Honors, Richard Braaten; 1979 Honorees, Richard Braaten; 1983 Carol Burnett, Jack Buxbaum; 1996 Honors, Joan Marcus; 2005 Beyoncé, Joan Marcus; 2019 Chuck Brown Band, John Shore; 2020 Gladys Knight, courtesy of CBS.



2021 | The Kennedy Center kicks off its 50th anniversary year with an oral history exhibit titled "If These Halls Could Talk."



2019 | The REACH, an outdoor pavilion dedicated to showcasing the process of the performing arts, opens.



2014 | Deborah Rutter is appointed as president of the Kennedy Center. She is the first woman to hold this position.



2011 | The Washington National Opera officially joins the Kennedy Center.

2021

2020

6

2010

5

4

2000

3

1990

1980

2

1971

1970

November 22, 1963
JFK's assassination

1960

LEGENDARY HONORS PERFORMANCES

Each year, The Kennedy Center Honors celebrates those in the performing arts for their contributions to American culture. A tribute performance, ranging from musical acts to comedy routines, is put on for each honoree.

Below features a tribute performance from each decade the Honors has been presented. **Follow along on the inner timeline** to see when they take place in history.

1



1979 | Joe Williams, Peggy Lee, John Hendricks and Count Basie belt out a tribute to honor jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald, one of that year's honorees.

2



1983 | Carol Burnett, an actress, comedienne, singer and writer, takes the stage to honor actor Jimmy Stewart. Burnett later receives her own honors in 2003.

3



1996 | Robert Duvall, Kris Kristofferson, Lyle Lovett, Emmylou Harris and Rosanne Cash perform a musical tribute honoring country star Johnny Cash.

4



2005 | Beyoncé hits the stage with her own version of "Proud Mary," a tribute to honoree Tina Turner's rendition of the Creedence Clearwater Revival classic.

5



2012 | Ann and Nancy Wilson of Heart join Jason Bonham, the son of Led Zeppelin's original drummer, to honor the rock band by performing "Stairway to Heaven."

6



2020 | Gladys Knight honors country icon Garth Brooks by putting her signature gospel spin on the musician's 1992 release, "We Shall Be Free."

"The life of the arts, far from being an interruption, a distraction, in the life of a nation, is very close to the center of a nation's purpose... and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization."

— President John F. Kennedy, 1962