

Amateur Night at the Apollo

Friday, January 31, 2003, 8 pm
Zellerbach Hall

Featuring

Capone, host MC
"The Gangsta of Comedy"
New York Kings of Comedy

Talent, host MC
Def Comedy Jam
New York Kings of Comedy

C.P. Lacey
The Executioner AKA Sandman

MoniJae
Apollo Hostess

Ray Chew & The Crew
The Apollo House Band

Joe Gray
Lead Vocalist

Bobby Douglas
Joseph Gray
Artie Reynolds
Ralph Rolle

Presented by

Coca-Cola & the Apollo Theater Foundation, Inc.
in association with American Airlines and ICM Artists

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with the support of the Friends of Cal Performances.

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and the California Arts Council, a state agency.

IMPORTANT DATES IN APOLLO THEATER HISTORY

1913

The neo-classical theater, known today as the Apollo Theater, was designed by George Keister and construction began, spearheaded by Charles J. Stumpf and Henry Langhoff Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The construction site is located at 253 West 125th Street, between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard (Seventh Avenue) and Frederick Douglass Boulevard (Eighth Avenue).

Jules Hurtig and Harry Seamon, two of New York's leading burlesque entertainment operators, obtain a 30-year lease on the newly constructed theater, which is opened as Hurtig and Seamon's (New) Burlesque Theater. Black people are not allowed in the audience. Sidney Cohen, a powerful theatrical landlord, holds the mortgage note.

Following a fierce "burlesque war" in Harlem, Bill Minsky (the man credited with originating "dirty burlesque") and his partner Joseph Weinstock take over Hurtig and Seamon's Theater. The Hurtig and Seamon's (New) Burlesque Theater now becomes known as the 125th Street Apollo Theater.

1932

Bill Minsky dies. Sidney Cohen, department store owner, theater owner, and president of the Motion Picture Theater Owners of America, buys the theater following Minsky's death.

1933

Newly elected mayor Fiorello La Guardia begins his campaign against burlesque in New York City.

1934

Sidney Cohen and his manager, Morris Sussman, change the format of shows from burlesque to variety revues and redirect their marketing attention to the growing African-American community in Harlem.

1934

On Friday, January 26, the Apollo welcomes African-American patrons for the first time. The Apollo officially opens "a colored revue" called Jazz à la Carte featuring Ralph Cooper Sr., Benny Carter and his Orchestra, along with "16 Gorgeous Hot Steppers." Ralph Cooper brings the timeless Amateur Night to the Apollo. A young dancer-turned-vocalist by the name of Ella Fitzgerald makes her Amateur Night debut.

1935

Following a fierce billing war (which he lost), Cohen sells the 125th Street Apollo Theater to theatrical rivals Leo Brecher and Frank Schiffman. On New Year's Eve, Bessie Smith, the "Empress of the Blues," plays the Apollo.

1937

Count Basie plays the Apollo for the first time. The featured vocalist is nearly overcome by stage fright and needs to be shoved (gently!) from the wings. Once in the spotlight, Billie Holiday regains her composure and dazzles the audience with her voice.

1943

Sarah Vaughan wins Amateur Night at the Apollo and is hired by Earl Hines' band as a vocalist.

1945

Nat "King" Cole and his trio sell-out the Apollo Theater for two straight weeks.

1946

Lionel Hampton's band is so popular that they have to play seven shows a day for seven days.

1947

Sammy Davis, Jr., makes his debut on the Apollo stage dancing with the Will Matsin Trio.

1956

A young southern man performs in Amateur Night at the Apollo. After winning the competition, James Brown embarks on his journey to become the "Godfather of Soul."

The exquisitely beautiful Josephine Baker plays the Apollo in a quarter-million-dollar wardrobe.

1962

Entertainment guru Berry Gordy brings the Motown Revue to the Apollo, featuring Motown's young emerging stars: Marvin Gaye, Diana Ross and the Supremes, Smokey Robinson and the Miracles, Little Stevie Wonder, the Temptations, Martha and the Vandellas, and The Contours.

1964

The world famous rock group The Beatles make its first trip to New York City. The group says that the Apollo Theater is the place they want to visit more than anywhere else.

1965

Racial tensions in the United States are high and Harlem explodes into riots. Angry crowds respect the Apollo Theater and leave it untouched while destroying surrounding businesses.

1968

Greeted as the star of *I Spy*, Bill Cosby plays the Apollo. In the same year, 11-year-old singing sensation Stephanie Mills wins *Amateur Night* for six consecutive weeks, singing the Stevie Wonder classic "For Once in My Life."

1969

The Jackson Five, one of the greatest R&B groups of all times, travels to the Apollo to break into show business and win *Amateur Night*. Michael Jackson is only ten years old.

1971

The "Queen of Soul" Aretha Franklin returns to the Apollo Theater. Masses of her fans are turned away from the sold-out engagements. The marquee reads: "She's Home."

1977

Parliament/Funkadelic are the last artists to appear under the Schiffman management of the Theater. The Apollo, which journalists from around the world claim is "the most prestigious showcase for Black music in the world," closes. It reopens as a movie theater but is unsuccessful.

1978

The Apollo Theater falls into bankruptcy and goes dark.

1981

Percy Sutton's Inner City Broadcasting Corporation and a group of private investors purchase the Apollo Theater.

1983

The Apollo receives federal, state, and city landmark status as Harlem's oldest functioning theater.

1985

On May 5th, the Apollo Theater's renovation is celebrated with a 50th Anniversary grand reopening and television special, "Motown Salutes the Apollo." *Amateur Night* is re-launched on Christmas Eve this same year.

The Apollo Theater Foundation, Inc., a not-for-profit organization, is established to manage, fund, and program the Apollo Theater.

Legendary Apollo *Amateur Night* host Ralph Cooper Sr. passes away. His funeral service is held at the Apollo Theater.

1993

The Artist formerly known as Prince plays the Apollo in an exclusive VH1 Concert.

1994

The Apollo Theater is chosen as the site for the 36th Annual Grammy Nomination Press Conference. The Apollo Theater Foundation launches its first performance series with a tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Other performances follow, including Alvin Ailey Dance Theater, Boys Choir of Harlem, and Betty Carter – *Jazz Ahead '95*.

1996

Swing into Spring: A Harlem Tribute to Lionel Hampton is presented at the Apollo in celebration of Lionel Hampton's 88th birthday.

1997

Legendary performer Tony Bennett plays the Apollo in a sold-out engagement honoring Apollo legend Billie Holiday. HBO Sports and Cedric Kushner Promotions host a historic boxing match for HBO Boxing After Dark.

1998

George Clinton and the P-Funk All-Stars “land” in Harlem to play the Apollo.

1999

The popular band KORN rocks the Apollo Theater as the first rock band to perform on the world famous stage. The entire concert is heard the globe over via satellite, webcast, and radio.

The Apollo Theater and Jazz at Lincoln Center present four Jazz for Young People concerts informing students from Harlem-area elementary schools of the traditions and legends of jazz, America’s original art form.

Plans for the first open-ended run of a musical-theater production at the Apollo are announced. Dance Theatre of Harlem presents its first Apollo performance season. Whoopi Goldberg launches her first tour in a decade. Maxwell, David Byrne, and The Strokes make their Apollo debuts to sold-out audiences.

January 26th, the Apollo temporarily goes dark as the first part of a multi-phased historical restoration and renovation begins. The re-opening of the Apollo Theater in March makes a splash with a sensational star-studded cast in a benefit performance of Eve Ensler’s *The Vagina Monologues*.

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