

# APOLLO

## **In Their Words** *Apollo Legends on the Apollo Experience*

"Harlem is a part of my culture. I spent a lot of time performing in the Apollo when I was younger... I know how the building is backstage. I know how it works, how it is... I can go up and down the stairs and remember everything."

**Stevie Wonder**  
*The Daily News*

"It is an honor for me personally to stand on this Apollo stage in this magnificent theater."

**Tony Bennett**

"[The Apollo Theater is] the Holy Grail. I dreamed of playing here for many a year."

**Paul McCartney**

"The Apollo Theater has been a proving and testing ground for so many years for young, aspiring, and up-and-coming artists. And of course, the New York audience is a great barometer for whether or not you are going to make it."

**Aretha Franklin**  
*Jet Magazine*

"We knew that way off in some never-never land of rhythm and blues there was a place called the Apollo. It was the home of the gods and the true temple of soul...All the men and women who worked this stage were our teachers and our masters."

**Bruce Springsteen**

"I can't believe they let us play this place...This place has so much history."

**Metallica (James Hetfield)**  
*The Daily News*

"It never gets tired, it never gets old, the magic of the Apollo...I wouldn't be the artist I am today if I didn't have that point of reference, watching amateurs go up there, nervous as day one."

**Usher**  
*Bloomberg*

"When you go out on that stage and you feel the history of every one that's been on that stage, from James Brown to the Jacksons, there's something special (about) keeping that alive."

**Jamie Foxx**

"This is home. When I came to New York, they didn't say, 'Oh my god, one day kid, you'll make it down at the Garden.' They didn't say, 'You'll make it at Carnegie Hall.' They said, 'You'll make it at the Apollo, you're on your way to the world.' This is the proving ground."

**Lionel Richie**

"I was a country boy, and Lifts was my first time in the Big Apple, in the big city. The Apollo opened its arms and made me feel right at home. I felt that I could be just as big and important and outstanding as

those wonderful guys up on the stage, Duke Ellington, Moms Mabley, Pigmeat Markham, all those great ones.”

**Ossie Davis**  
*Jet Magazine*

“... Sunday after mass, we would go back home, have a late breakfast and then go to the Apollo. That, to me, was a thrill that never left. Even now, when I walk into the theater, I get the same charge as when I was a kid. I saw Cab Calloway, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald...and later played [with] Duke Ellington. It was awesome.”

**Harry Belafonte**  
*New York Post*

“Probably the first real at-stake performance for me was the Apollo Theater. If you didn’t rock it you got booed off the stage and that’s a lot of pressure—the thought of getting booed and everybody in New York City knowing what happened. I remember the turntables went dead for a second so I had to freestyle and I just started rocking, and thank God I made it through.”

**Queen Latifah**  
*Metro*

“I think the greatest performances of anybody have been at the Apollo.”

**Dionne Warwick\***

“I came here as an immigrant, and was well aware of the Apollo’s legacy—so I knew how important it would be to get a gig there and to do well. I first played the Apollo at 15 with my band, The Fugees, and after we didn't get booed, they didn't throw eggs, we felt we had a chance, and that we could get anywhere. Needless to say, the Apollo has been tremendously important in my career, and in the careers of so many others.”

**Wyclef Jean**

“I grew up here in the Apollo Theater. I recall the first time I ever walked into this building and the Miracles and I came through the front door, and there was a mural on the wall of all the wonderful black artists whose origin was here at the Apollo Theater. People who came here and performed here before I was born, and the Apollo is like a stepping stone; it always has been for black artists.”

**Smokey Robinson**

“When we [The Pips] heard we were coming here we felt like we were graduating University, as if we were getting our doctorates...This [the Apollo Theater] was a school more [so] than a theater.”

**Gladys Knight**

“There’s nothing like an audience at the Apollo. They didn’t ask me what my style was, who I was, where I’d come from, who influenced me, or anything. They just broke the house up.”

**Billie Holiday\***

“It really was kind of special. There was a marvelous rapport. The audience talked back to the performer. The performer talked back to the audience.”

**Sammy Davis, Jr.\***

“When we played here, neither of us wanted to stand in the center of the stage. Right in the center, that’s hallowed ground.”

**Elvis Costello**

“When you come to the Apollo, it’s different; it’s not like when you go to other places. This is your test...you can’t come here [Amateur Night] like on American Idol. Say you’re pitchy; the crowd’s going to tell you you’re pitchy. You can’t wait for the judge ‘cause you won’t make it to the next song anyway.”

**Sinbad**

“The Apollo is like coming to school. It’s 1,500 seats of critics and they know what they know because they’ve seen it. This is the college, it’s the place you come to learn your craft. The things that I’ve learned here [at the Apollo] I’ve been able to take through my whole career and I still apply them.”

**Eddie Levert**

“The influence of the Apollo reaches beyond the shores of this country—it is truly the premiere platform for world music. When the Beatles first came to America, they told me that the first place they wanted to go was to the world-famous Apollo. I first played the Apollo in 1951 with Lionel Hampton and fell in love. From Big Bands to R&B, and bebop to hip-hop, this is one of the best stages in the world and deserves its place in entertainment and American history.”

**Quincy Jones**

*Jet Magazine*

“We knew that if you ever made it, you’d go to the Apollo.”

**Johnny Otis\***

\*Quotations from *Showtime at the Apollo* by Ted Fox