

THE PUBLIC.



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PRESS KIT

FREE. FOR ALL. FOREVER. THE REVITALIZED DELACORTE THEATER BELONGS TO ALL NEW YORKERS; REOPENS THIS SUMMER WITH EXPANDED CIVIC PROGRAMMING

Public Forum Returns

Amy Sherald, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Michael Sandel, and Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen to Headline

Participants Include Frankie J. Alvarez, James Ijames, Niles Luther, James Shapiro, Christian Slater, Anna Deavere Smith, Ayanna Thompson, Logan Ury, and Constance Wu

Public Stories

PUBLIC STORIES: GOVERNMENT VOICES to Feature Municipal Employees in Partnership with DC 37, New York's Largest Union

April 23, 2026 – The Public Theater (Artistic Director, Oskar Eustis; Executive Director, Patrick Willingham) proudly announces that the revitalized Delacorte Theater will welcome more audiences than ever this summer. Alongside Free Shakespeare in the Park, Mobile Unit, and Public Works, Public Forums and Public Stories stand as affirmations of more than just programming, but as a declaration of interdependence, a reassertion of The Public Theater's belief that culture belongs to everyone.

Monday evenings, typically the night off from The Public's Free Shakespeare in the Park performances, will now feature the revival of the **PUBLIC FORUM** series. The series will feature a distinctive mix of performance and conversation and a focus on American voices on this year's 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Public Theater Associate Artistic Director **Alexa Smith**, who leads the program with **Jeremy McCarter**, shares, "**Amy Sherald, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Michael Sandel, Ayanna Thompson, and Logan Ury** join New Yorkers in Central Park for a live invitation to wrestle with the biggest questions right now, drawing energy from across art forms and industries. Everyone is part of it. This is a people's 'Theater of Ideas' in motion."

Additionally, **PUBLIC STORIES** is The Public's new civic storytelling program, expanding work done with the Public Works community for the past three years. By centering community members as storytellers and artists, **PUBLIC STORIES** affirms storytelling as a vital practice in a democratic society. As the country recognizes the Declaration of Independence's 250th anniversary as a document that catalyzed our democracy, The Public is producing **PUBLIC STORIES: GOVERNMENT VOICES**, directed and conceived by **Julian Goldhagen**, in partnership with **District Council 37 (DC 37)**, New York's largest union and the

country's largest municipal employee union. Any current or former municipal, state, or federal employees can access a series of free storytelling workshops and, then this summer, have the chance to share their work before select performances of Free Shakespeare in the Park and Mobile Unit. Learn more at ThePublic.NYC/PublicStories.

As previously announced, **SHAKESPEARE FOR THE CITY** presented by Citizens, running May 22 through September 8, will feature Free Shakespeare in the Park's **ROMEO & JULIET**, directed by **Associate Artistic Director/Resident Director Saheem Ali**, and **THE WINTER'S TALE**, directed by **Daniel Sullivan**, Public Works at the newly revitalized Delacorte Theater, and Mobile Unit's **AS YOU LIKE IT**, directed by **Emma Rosa Went**. The JL Greene Foundation returns as Lead Sponsor of Free Shakespeare in the Park.

PUBLIC STORIES

PUBLIC STORIES: GOVERNMENT VOICES

Partnering with **District Council 37 (DC 37)**, New York's largest union and the country's largest municipal employee union, **PUBLIC STORIES: GOVERNMENT VOICES** will feature government workers as storytellers in select performances of Free Shakespeare the Park and Mobile Unit. Learn more at ThePublic.NYC/PublicStories.

PUBLIC FORUMS

Mondays at The Delacorte Theater at 8:00 p.m.

Reserved seats for donation are available for Public Theater members now. Free tickets will be distributed on the day of each Public Forum. More information will be available in May.

QUICK BRIGHT THINGS COME TO CONFUSION, OR WHAT WE DO FOR LOVE

June 15

With its madcap romances, busted friendships, and chaotic fairy magic, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has surprised and delighted audiences for more than 400 years. In this special event, actors **Constance Wu**, **Christian Slater**, and **Frankie J. Alvarez** will present Shakespeare's story of the play's four young lovers in all their lovestruck comic confusion, sparking a conversation about why and how we do so many crazy, inspired, devoted, disloyal things in our friendships and love affairs. Audiences will hear insights from **Kwame Anthony Appiah**, the NYU philosopher who writes the weekly "Ethicist" column in *The New York Times Magazine* and serves as Public Theater trustee; **James Shapiro**, Public Theater Shakespeare Scholar in Residence since 2012 and Larry Miller Professor of English at Columbia University; **Ayanna Thompson**, Public Theater Shakespeare Scholar in Residence and Regents Professor of English at Arizona State University; and **Logan Ury**, behavioral scientist, dating coach, and author of *How to Not Die Alone*.

AMERICAN SUBLIME

June 22

A new theatrical exploration inspired by artist Amy Sherald's acclaimed body of work, originally exhibited as 'American Sublime' at major US museums, is now taking shape for the stage. The evening will feature live performance excerpts alongside a conversation with Sherald and director **Zhailon Levingston**, joined by additional collaborating artists, reflecting on the creative process and the evolution of Sherald's work for the stage. Creatively developed in association with National Black Theatre (Sade Lythcott, Chief Executive Officer; Jonathan McCrory, Executive Artistic Director), Jeffrey Seller and Thomas Kail, and JamRock Productions. Participants include **James Ijames**, **Niles Luther**, and **Anna Deavere Smith**.

CITIES UNDER SIEGE

June 29

The arrival of an estimated 3,000 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents in Minnesota—dubbed Operation Metro Surge—began a period of significant civic unrest with far-reaching impact on public safety, law enforcement, the local economy and workforce, education, and the daily lives of Minnesotans. In January 2026, The Public Theater and The Guthrie Theater partnered to commission acclaimed documentary theater artists **Jessica Blank** and **Erik Jensen** to capture firsthand interviews, begin in-depth engagement with affected communities, and embark on the creation of a new play featuring Minnesotans' real experiences. This special Forum evening will feature excerpts from this urgent work in progress and discussion around how cities and civilians respond in moments of crisis.

DIVISION AND RENEWAL: AN EVENING WITH MICHAEL SANDEL

August 10

American society has rarely been more polarized. How did we reach this moment of crisis, and what can any of us do to repair what has been broken? **Michael Sandel**, the Harvard professor and globally acclaimed “rock-star philosopher,” will return to The Delacorte Theater for a night of public philosophy, engaging an audience of New Yorkers—plus very special onstage guests—in a spirited conversation about meritocracy, dignity, and where we go from here.

SUMMER BOOK CLUB CELEBRATION WITH THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY

August 17

Calling all New Yorkers! As part of its annual Summer at the Library programming, The New York Public Library, in partnership with The Public Theater, invites New Yorkers to join a summer book club and read one novel together. The book club will culminate in a marquee event at the Delacorte Theater featuring readings, commissioned performances, and public conversation inspired by and celebrating the book. Stay tuned for the book selection reveal and official launch in May—just in time for Memorial Day weekend.

BIOS

KWAME ANTHONY APPIAH, Silver Professor of Philosophy and Law at NYU, grew up in Ghana and was educated at Cambridge University, where he received both a BA and a PhD in philosophy. He taught previously at the University of Ghana, Cambridge, Yale, Cornell, Duke, Harvard, and Princeton. His books include *Assertion and Conditionals*, *For Truth in Semantics*, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, *The Ethics of Identity*, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers*, *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*, and *The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity* and two textbook introductions to philosophy. He is also the author of three mystery novels. Professor Appiah is President of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Fellow of the Royal Society, the Royal Society of Literature, and the British Academy, and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society. He has served as President of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association and as Chair of its Board. He began writing the *Ethicist* column for the *New York Times Sunday* magazine in 2015 and has written frequently in the *New York Review of Books*. President Obama presented him with a National Humanities Medal in 2012. In 2024, he was awarded the Kluge Prize for Achievement in the Study of Humanity by the Library of Congress.

JESSICA BLANK AND ERIK JENSEN are a multihyphenate, married creative team whom *The New Yorker* calls “the foremost practitioners of documentary theater in the U.S.” Documentary theater is a medium that unites journalistic best practices with the emotional power of the well-made play, creating a forum in which pressing true stories can be told with much more depth and complexity than most media allows. Blank and Jensen have spent over two decades creating documentary theater that wrestles with the most urgent issues of our time while circumventing the false polarization that too often diminishes our national dialogue and blinds us to the human experience behind the headlines. Their work includes *The Exonerated*, a play based on interviews with death row exonerees across the U.S.; *Aftermath*, the first major American theatrical work to tackle the impact of the Iraq war on ordinary civilians; *Coal Country*, based on interviews with survivors of the 2010 Upper Big Branch Mine disaster; *The Line*, a rapid-response

documentary play based on interviews with New York City medical first responders at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic; and numerous others.

ZHAILON LEVINGSTON is a Louisiana-raised storyteller, director, and activist. He is a Board Member for the Broadway Advocacy Coalition, which he co-created, and teaches the Theatre of Change course at Columbia University. Levingston is also the Artistic Director of Inheritance Theatre Project. Select credits include *Chicken and Biscuits* (Broadway), *Cats: The Jellicle Ball* (Perelman Performing Arts Center, Broadway), *Table 17* (MCC), *Wonderful Town* (Encores), *Alex Newell and the Gospel of a Diva* (Audible/Minetta Lane), *Little Miss Perfect* (Olney Theatre Center), *Patience* (Second Stage), *The Wiz* (Cincinnati Children's Theatre), *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical* (Broadway), and *Hadestown* (Korea).

MICHAEL SANDEL teaches political philosophy at Harvard University. His books—on justice, democracy, ethics, and markets—have been translated into more than 30 languages. He has been described as a “rock star moralist” (*Newsweek*) and “the world’s most influential living philosopher” (*New Statesman*). In 2025, he was named the recipient of the [Berggruen Prize](#), the most prestigious global award for philosophy. Sandel’s book [The Tyranny of Merit: Can We Find the Common Good?](#) seeks a way beyond the polarized politics of our time. A new edition of his classic book [Democracy’s Discontent](#) has been described as “essential—and ultimately hopeful—reading for all those who wonder if our democratic experiment will survive in the twenty-first century.” His previous books include *Justice: What’s the Right Thing to Do?*; *What Money Can’t Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets*; and *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*. Sandel’s free online course [“Justice”](#) has been viewed by tens of millions of people. His BBC series [“The Global Philosopher”](#) explores the ethical issues lying behind the headlines with participants from around the world. Sandel has been a visiting professor at the Sorbonne, delivered the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Oxford, served on the President’s Council on Bioethics, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His lectures have packed such venues as St. Paul’s Cathedral (London), the Sydney Opera House (Australia), The [Delacorte Theater](#) in New York’s Central Park, and an [outdoor stadium in Seoul](#) (S. Korea), where 14,000 came to hear him speak.

AMY SHERALD (b. 1973, Columbus, GA) documents contemporary African American experience in the United States through arresting, intimate portraits. Sherald engages with the history of photography and portraiture, inviting viewers to participate in a more complex debate about accepted notions of race and representation, and to situate Black life in American art. In addition to being the first woman and first African American to ever receive the grand prize in the Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition from the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., she was also awarded the Pollock Prize for Creativity by Pollock-Krasner Foundation, as well as the David C. Driskell Prize from the High Museum of Art. In 2018, Sherald was selected by First Lady Michelle Obama to paint her official portrait for the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. She is represented by the contemporary art gallery Hauser & Wirth, and her work is held in public collections such as the Baltimore Museum of Art; Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, AR; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

ABOUT FREE SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK

Since its inception, over six million people have enjoyed more than 160 free productions of Shakespeare and other classical works and musicals at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park. Conceived by founder Joseph Papp to make great theater accessible to all, Free Shakespeare in the Park continues to be the bedrock of The Public’s vision of artistic excellence and free access to culture.

The Public launched “Forever Public,” an ambitious, multi-year capital campaign with a goal of raising over \$175 million to secure the transformative mission of free theater for everyone. In addition to establishing the Fund for Free Theater endowment, Forever Public provided capital support to make the Delacorte revitalization possible.

Built in 1962, the theater had not undergone meaningful capital upgrades since 1999. The Public, in partnership with the Central Park Conservancy, NYC Parks, the New York City Department of Cultural

Affairs, and Ennead Architects, created a design and construction plan that minimized impact on Central Park and foregrounded resilience and sustainability to ensure the longevity of Free Shakespeare in the Park for many years to come.

Following groundbreaking in October 2023, reconstruction of interior spaces and the grandstand layout began with subsequent installation of redesigned lighting towers and the new wood façade made from salvaged NYC water towers. Concurrently, the Central Park Conservancy renovated the Delacorte Restroom. The revitalized Delacorte reopened in summer 2025 and offers a state-of-the-art experience for audiences, artists, and staff alike with improved access for people living with disabilities.

ABOUT CIVIC ARTISTIC PROGRAMS

Civic Artistic Programs is The Public Theater's hub for furthering access, civic engagement, and community-focused artistic innovation, focused on building connections with community organizations and their members.

Now in its 16th season, The Public Theater's **MOBILE UNIT** is a modern reimagining of Joseph Papp's Mobile Theater. Mobile Unit reaches across economic and geographic barriers to the arts by meeting our communities where they are—staging free professional theater productions and programs in local neighborhood venues such as libraries, homeless shelters, correctional facilities, and community centers across all five New York City boroughs. Mobile Unit has served thousands of audiences with critically acclaimed productions, including a 2018 National tour of Lynn Nottage's Pulitzer Prize-winning play *Sweat*. In 2020, Mobile Unit received a Special Drama Desk Award for its program. During the pandemic, Mobile Unit launched a digital workshop inside the NYC Department of Corrections called *Hip-Hop vs. Shakespeare*, where participants were encouraged to write their own stories. In summer 2021, Mobile Unit returned in-person with *Mobile Unit's Summer of Joy*, co-produced with National Black Theatre, popping up at public plazas in neighborhoods hit hard by the coronavirus pandemic. Mobile Unit believes theater is its most powerful when it reflects and connects to the lives of our community.

PUBLIC WORKS, a major artistic program of the Public Theater, aims to restore and build community by connecting people through the creation of extraordinary works of art. Public Works is animated by the idea that theater is a place of possibility, where the boundaries that separate us from each other in the rest of life can fall away. Working with partner organizations in all five boroughs, Public Works invites community members to take classes, participate in programming, attend performances, and join in the creation of ambitious works of participatory theater. Public Works deliberately blurs the line between professional artists and community members, creating theater that is not only for the people, but by and of the people as well. Public Works exemplifies The Public's long-standing commitment to putting community at the core of the theater's mission. Public Works seeks to create a space where we can not only reflect on the world as it is, but where we can propose new possibilities for what our society might be. The Public Works model continues to be adopted by theaters across the country and around the world. The Public Works community partner organizations are **Brownsville Recreation Center** (Brooklyn), **Casita Maria Center for Arts and Education** (Bronx), **Center for Family Life in Sunset Park** (Brooklyn), **Children's Aid** (all boroughs), **DreamYard** (Bronx), **Domestic Workers United** (all boroughs), **The Fortune Society** (Queens), and **Military Resilience Foundation** (all boroughs).

PUBLIC STORIES is The Public Theater's civic storytelling program—an invitation for New Yorkers to transform lived experience into shared public art. Through workshops and performances, participants develop and perform true, personal stories drawn directly from their own lives, shaping work that speaks from within communities rather than about them. Public Stories partners with specific communities and gathers New Yorkers to build relationships, explore personal narratives, and craft short-form storytelling performances. It emphasizes true, personal storytelling as both an artistic form and a civic act.

ABOUT DISTRICT COUNCIL 37 (DC 37)

Part of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), District Council 37 is one of the New York City's largest, most diverse and influential unions. Our members run New York's

public, private and non-profit sectors in more than 1,000 job titles. Our mission is about improving members' lives on the job and in our communities. We believe social, economic and environmental justice are union issues and through collective bargaining, activism and coalition-building, District Council 37 fights for a better future for our members, our families and our city.

THE PUBLIC continues the work of its visionary founder Joe Papp as a civic institution engaging, both on-stage and off, with some of the most important ideas and social issues of today. Conceived over 60 years ago as one of the nation's first nonprofit theaters, The Public has long operated on the principles that theater is an essential cultural force and that art and culture belong to everyone. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Oskar Eustis and Executive Director Patrick Willingham, The Public's wide breadth of programming includes an annual season of new work at its landmark home at Astor Place, Free Shakespeare in the Park at The Delacorte Theater in Central Park, the Mobile Unit touring throughout New York City's five boroughs, Public Works, and Joe's Pub. Since premiering *HAIR* in 1967, The Public continues to create the canon of American Theater and is currently represented on Broadway by the Tony Award-winning musical *Hamilton* by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Their programs and productions can also be seen regionally across the country and around the world. The Public has received 64 Tony Awards, 197 Obie Awards, 62 Drama Desk Awards, 64 Lortel Awards, 36 Outer Critic Circle Awards, 13 New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards, 72 AUDELCO Awards, 6 Antonyo Awards, and 6 Pulitzer Prizes. publictheater.org

The Public Theater stands in honor of the first inhabitants and our ancestors. We acknowledge the land on which The Public and its theaters stand—the original homeland of the Lenape people. We acknowledge the painful history of genocide and forced removal from this territory. We honor the generations of stewards and we pay our respects to the many diverse indigenous peoples still connected to this land.

The Public also gives our respect to the people of Seneca Village, a community of Black property owners who were removed from their land and whose village was destroyed in the creation of Central Park. We recognize the sacrifice that these ancestors made and honor Seneca Village's legacy.

Citizens is the presenting partner of **SHAKESPEARE FOR THE CITY**.

Jerome L. Greene Foundation is the lead sponsor of Free Shakespeare in the Park.

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