

APOLLO

Amateur Night at the Apollo Fact Sheet

The Apollo is a national treasure that continues to have a significant impact on the development of American culture and its popularity around the world. Since introducing the first Amateur Night contests in 1934, the Apollo Theater's signature program has played a major role in the cultivation of artists and in the emergence of innovative musical genres including jazz, swing, bebop, R&B, gospel, blues, soul, and hip-hop. Amateur Night has been a defining experience for emerging artists since the Theater's very first year, and continues to be an important resource for discovering new talent.

In recent years, the Apollo has increased its global reach by bringing Amateur Night to audiences around the world. The first international edition of Amateur Night, *Amateur Night Goes to London*, was hosted by London's Hackney Empire in 2012. That same year, the Apollo introduced Amateur Night Digital, a smartphone app that makes the internationally renowned talent competition available to fans at any time, in any location.

As part of the evolution of the Apollo's signature program, the institution is launching the **Amateur Night Song Competition**, a contest that challenges musicians from across the country to compose a song that captures the vitality of the show that has launched so many legendary artists. The contest will be judged by music industry professionals, and the broader public via the Apollo Theater's website, and the final winner will be determined by the Amateur Night audience—known for its tremendous enthusiasm and “be good or be gone” philosophy—on April 30, 2014. amateurnight.org/song.

Fun facts about the Apollo Theater's Amateur Night:

- Amateur Night has occurred virtually every Wednesday night since the Apollo Theater opened in 1934.
- **Ralph Cooper** created Amateur Night at the Apollo as a live version of his radio show “Amateur Nite Hour,” and served as the show's emcee.
- **Ella Fitzgerald** was among the first winners of Amateur Night. She had originally been scheduled to dance, but instead ended up singing.
- Amateur Night has launched the careers of countless legendary artists, including **James Brown, Stevie Wonder, Lauryn Hill, Dionne Warwick, Michael Jackson and The Jackson Five, Billie Holiday, Luther Vandross, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Sarah Vaughan and Machine Gun Kelly**.
- As artist after artist rose from Amateur Night to stardom, the Apollo audience became known for its ability to make or break careers. The audience, who “votes” for contestants by cheering or booing, is known for its critical assessments of artists.
- It is a tradition for Amateur Night contestants to rub “the Tree of Hope,” the remains of a chestnut tree that stood outside the old Lafayette Theater in Harlem. Out-of-work performers once gathered there in hopes of finding employment, and rubbing the tree stump is said to bring good luck to performers.
- Amateur Night winners face off on special “Top Dog” Amateur Nights and in the final “Super Top Dog” competition.