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Philly

Serving the region through world-class performances at the Kimmel Center, Academy of Music, Miller Theater, and Forrest Theatre

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This Black History Month, the @EnsembleArtsPhilly annual “Jazz for Freedom” program returns for area 5-7 graders – a FREE, education series linking social justice to Black American Music and the country’s evolving story of freedom and expression. Learn more at www.ensembleartsphilly.org.

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**THOUSANDS OF 5–7 GRADERS
PARTICIPATE IN ENSEMBLE ARTS PHILLY’S
ANNUAL FREE *JAZZ FOR FREEDOM*
EDUCATION SERIES,
A PROGRAM CONNECTING THE ARTS TO
CULTURAL HISTORY, SOCIAL JUSTICE,
AND CIVIC UNDERSTANDING**

**In-school workshops link Jazz to Black history,
followed by field trips to the Kimmel Center
featuring music, dance, and storytelling**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Philadelphia, PA, February 17, 2026) — In a moment when young people are navigating conversations around identity, belonging, and civic engagement, Ensemble Arts Philly’s annual *Jazz for Freedom* program uses the language of music to build understanding and hope. Celebrating jazz as a vital branch of Black American Music, this annual program aligns with Black History Month celebrations and the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to reach thousands of 5–7 graders with free programming. *Jazz for Freedom* supplements the Philadelphia School District’s English Language Arts and Social Studies curricula by integrating the arts, culture, geography, history, and civics into a comprehensive learning experience. As Philadelphia’s leading provider of free and low-cost performing arts education, Ensemble Arts Philly serves nearly 40,000 students annually through in-school, in-community, and onsite events, and now in its 8th year, *Jazz for Freedom* exemplifies this long-standing investment in arts education,

reaching more than 5,000 students each year.

While the highlight of *Jazz for Freedom* is a field trip to the Kimmel Center, the program includes **over 150 interactive pre-show workshops** – led by skilled Teaching Artists – who visit classrooms to foster a robust and deeper understanding of the intersection of music, creativity, history and democracy. Through these engaging sessions, students explore the cultural significance of jazz and its role in shaping our collective narrative, learning about elements and instruments in the art form, as well as significant artists like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, and Langston Hughes, and focusing on the Civil Rights Movement and the legacy of Dr. King.

With that understanding, thousands of students attend *Jazz for Freedom* **free field trips in February and March** in the Perelman Theater inside the Kimmel Center, experiencing music, spoken word, tap dancing, scatting, commentary on social justice and the ongoing pursuit of equality throughout history, and more. The field trip program is designed to engage and inspire this next generation of audience members, cultural enthusiasts, and performers. Led by local musicians and Ensemble Arts Philly Teaching Artists, it is a journey through jazz history – from its birth in New Orleans to the flourishing jazz scene in Philadelphia today.

2026 *Jazz for Freedom* field trips take place on the following dates:

- Tuesday, February 24: 12:00–1:00 PM
- Wednesday, February 25: 10:30–11:30 AM and 12:00–1:00 PM
- Tuesday, March 3: 10:30–11:30 AM and 12:00–1:00 PM
- Wednesday, March 4: 10:30–11:30 AM and 12:00–1:00 PM

“At Ensemble Arts Philly, we believe the arts are one of the most powerful ways to help young people connect ideas of freedom, creativity, and community,” said Ryan Fleur, president and CEO. “*Jazz for Freedom* invites students to experience how music tells the story of America through jazz – its struggles, triumphs, and enduring spirit. These programs don’t just teach history; they help students discover their own voices and the role they can play in shaping a more compassionate, connected future.”

“The School District of Philadelphia is thrilled to partner with Ensemble Arts Philly and we share President & CEO Ryan Fleur’s goal: to support every Philadelphia student to visit Ensemble Arts’ venues and theaters at least three times between Pre-Kindergarten and 12th grade,” said Dr. Tony B. Watlington, Sr., Superintendent. “The arts cultivate a sense of joy and help students make sense of the world around them. Through programs like *Jazz for Freedom*, students are able to process real-life experiences, explore complex social issues, and apply their learning through a creative framework that deepens understanding and connection.”

“I’ve had the privilege of hosting this program for many years and have watched it evolve and grow, both in the classroom and during field trips to the Kimmel Center. Each year, young people ask big, timely questions about our world and make powerful connections to how jazz has always been a voice for social change,” said Luke Carlos O’Reilly, *Jazz for Freedom* host, teaching artist, and jazz musician. “Seeing their excitement on a free field trip – energized and eager to share what they’ve learned in workshops or been taught at home – and hearing them proudly contribute their own knowledge makes this work deeply meaningful.”

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Ensemble Arts Philly believes in the power of arts education to transform lives and sustain

Philadelphia's arts and culture community. Through free and low-cost education programs at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, the Academy of Music, and the Miller Theater – made possible by generous contributions from individual and institutional donors – the organization engages diverse communities through performance and education. Guided by its IDEAS framework (inclusivity, diversity, equity, and access), Ensemble Arts Philly is committed to building a brighter, more inclusive cultural future and inspiring a new generation to connect with the arts.

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For more information, visit www.EnsembleArtsPhilly.org.