

ARTS & CULTURE

# Enriching Diversity in the Arts: Kauffman Center Has ‘Something for Everyone’

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Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, 1601 Broadway in Kansas City, Mo.

Photo: Kauffman Center

In the heart of our bustling city stands an architectural marvel, the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. But beyond its stunning façade and world-class stages lies a mission that resonates deeply, especially during Black History Month: “To enrich the lives of everyone in the community through extraordinary and diverse performing arts experiences.” This month, we spotlight how the Kauffman Center not only celebrates, but actively promotes diversity in its multi-faceted programming, performance and outreach efforts.

“At the core of our vision,” begins Paul Schofer, CEO of the Kauffman Center (pictured left), “is the commitment to find some-



Paul Schofer, CEO of the Kauffman Center

thing for EVERYONE. And when I say EVERYONE, I mean every single person—regardless of age, gender, race, religion, disability, or economic circumstance.” This principle has guided the Kauffman Center since its doors opened in 2011, driving efforts to create an inclusive space that reflects the diversity of the Kansas City communities it serves.

One of the key strategies to achieving this inclusivity is through its

Kauffman Center Presents programming. Prior to challenges posed by the pandemic, the center averaged nearly 300 on-stage performances per year. Kauffman Presents features nearly 25 ‘hand-picked’ concerts, offering an ‘A-list’ array of headline performances that cater to a broad audience.

“We’re proud to have hosted some of the world’s most prolific artists,” Schofer shares, listing luminaries such as Aretha Franklin, John Legend, Patti LaBelle, and Common among many others. These performances not only showcase black excellence but also celebrate the profound contributions of Black America to the history of music.

In addition to these headline acts, the Kauffman Center places a strong emphasis on nur-

turing younger audiences and engaging the community through its Open Door programming. This multi-faceted approach includes the Future Stages Festival, a vibrant event that gives nearly 600 youth performers the opportunity to shine on world-class stages, drawing in thousands from the community to support and discover the arts.

Kauffman’s Community Tickets’ program and Transportation Fund’ further eliminate barriers to access, ensuring that performances are within reach for all, particularly those from underrepresented communities.

We wanted to make sure that absolutely no student or school in Kansas City had a barrier to the arts because their school couldn’t afford the transportation,” Schofer explains, underscoring the importance of inclusivity in their mission.

Feedback from the

community plays a crucial role in shaping the Kauffman Center’s programming as well. Surveys and conversations with patrons work to inform future performances and artist selections, ensuring that the center remains responsive to its audience’s desires and needs.

“It’s really not a science, how we select artists, because oftentimes suggestions come to us,” Schofer notes, highlighting the organic process of curating their diverse lineup.

Moreover, the Kauffman Center’s commitment to diversity extends beyond the stage. It is interwoven into the organization’s operations, relationships, and initiatives, aiming to create a sense of inclusion for all who walk through its doors.

“We want everyone who comes here to have a sense of belonging,” Schofer states, emphasizing the importance of respect, dignity, and inclusivity in every aspect of the

center’s work.

As we celebrate Black History Month, the Kauffman Center’s efforts to promote diversity shine as a testament to the power of the arts to unite and enrich all communities.

“If you haven’t been here before, you’re missing out on something that’s truly inspiring and uplifting,” Schofer concludes, extending an invitation to all to experience the transformative power of the arts at the Kauffman Center. “We are proud to be apart of this community and look forward to continue serving it for years to come. We know that if you’re able to get here even once, you’ll definitely want to come back—without a shadow of a doubt!” Now that’s something EVERYONE can agree on.

For more information on the Kauffman Center, visit [www.kauffmancenter.org](http://www.kauffmancenter.org) or call 816-994-7222.



Young musicians perform during the 10th Anniversary Future Stages Festival.

Photo: Kauffman Center



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