

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, May 21, 2025



Contact:

Ellen McDonald, Publicist

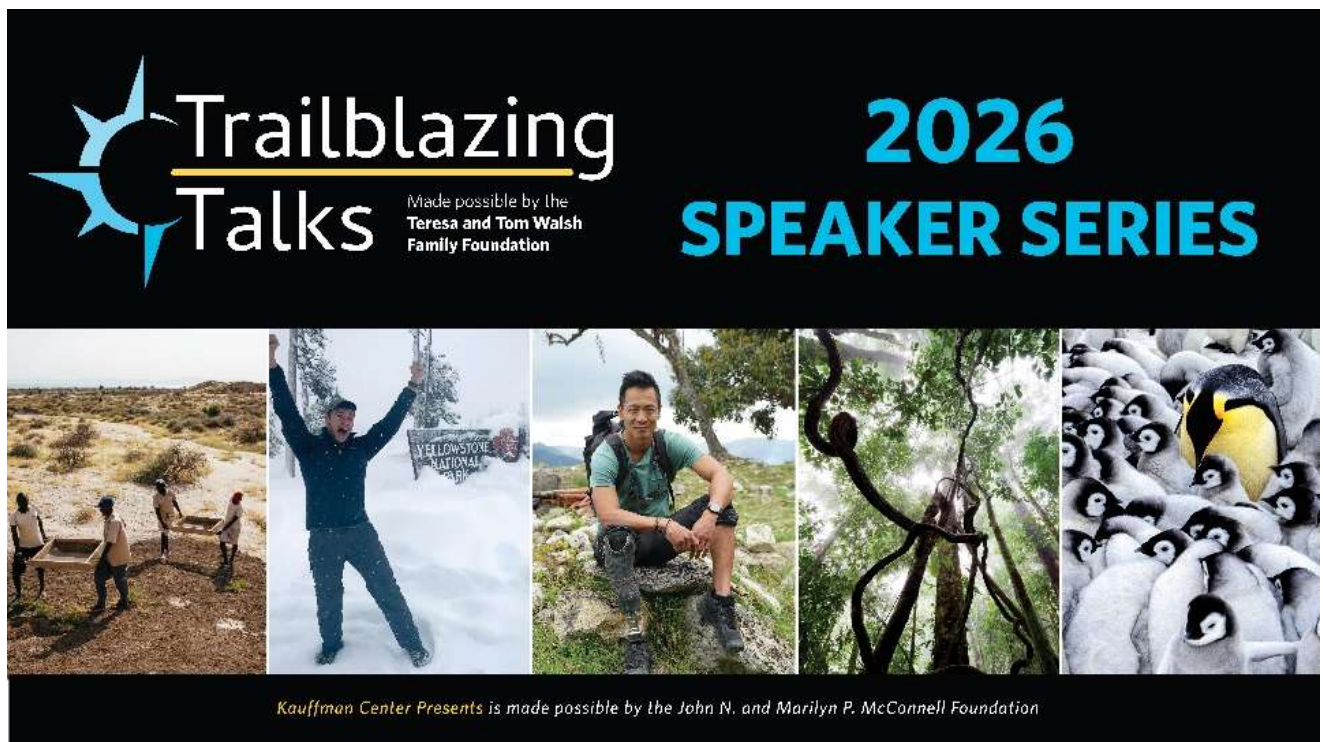
Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

816.213.4355 | publicity@kauffmancenter.org

Emily Lane, Director of Marketing & Community Engagement

Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

816.994.7229 | emily@kauffmancenter.org



**KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
ANNOUNCES 2026 SPEAKER SERIES:
TRAILBLAZING TALKS**

The lineup includes a paleoanthropologist, a CBS Sunday Morning correspondent, nature and science photographers and more.

5-Show subscriptions go on sale Wednesday, May 21, 2025

Kansas City, MO – Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts announces the 2026 **Trailblazing Talks** speaker series, which is made possible by the Teresa and Tom Walsh Family Foundation. The series features six presenters, including a paleoanthropologist, a CBS Sunday Morning correspondent, nature and science photographers and more.

- **Louise Leakey, Paleoanthropologist: Digging for Humanity's Origins**
Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre
- **Conor Knighton, CBS Sunday Morning Correspondent: Leave Only Footprints: My Journey Through Every National Park**
Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre
- **Albert Lin, Explorer: In Search of Lost Cities**
Tuesday, March 10, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre
- **Mattias Klum, Photographer: The Planet in Our Hands**
Tuesday, April 14, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre
- **Frans Lanting, Photographer and Christine Eckstrom, Science Writer: Bay of Life: From Wind to Whales**
Tuesday, May 19, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre

Each one-hour event is illustrated by stunning imagery and gripping video footage shown on the Kauffman Center's 40-foot-by-22.5-foot screen in Muriel Kauffman Theatre. A brief audience Q&A session follows each presentation.

Trailblazing Talks connects Kansas Citians to a deep roster of talented speakers, including renowned photographers, adventurers, authors, scientists and filmmakers, who invite audiences to experience their career highlights. Presenters share first-hand accounts of their daring journeys and insights about the world around us. These stories help us move forward thoughtfully, strive to solve big problems, bridge the distances between us and lift us up – one story at a time.

The lineup for the 2026 series includes wide-ranging topics presented live on stage. You'll follow the footsteps of homo sapiens, learn about the interdependence of our damaged ecosystems, see stunning vistas in our most famous national parks, uncover extreme moments and hear gripping stories from around the planet.

"This is our third year of Trailblazing Talks, and those in attendance were thrilled to immerse themselves in the trailblazers' stories. What a wonderful opportunity to travel the world without leaving your seat! This series offers a chance to be a part of an unforgettable experience which promises to enrich, inspire and expand your own world," President and CEO Paul Schofer said.

The Kauffman Center has curated speakers specifically from the Changemaker Speaker Series.

HOW TO PURCHASE SEASON TICKETS

Trailblazing Talks series subscription packages offer priority seating and as much as 30% savings from individual ticket prices. Five-show season subscription packages will be available to purchase starting at 10 a.m. Wednesday, May 21, 2025. Pricing for the five-show package ranges from \$140 to \$235 and includes applicable fees. Single tickets for all five events go on sale later this fall.

Subscriptions are available through the Kauffman Center Ticket Office at 816.994.7222 or online at kauffmancenter.org/subscriptions.

2026 TRAILBLAZING TALKS

Made possible by the Teresa and Tom Walsh Family Foundation

Louise Leakey, Paleoanthropologist

Digging for Humanity's Origins

Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre

The burning question that consumes Louise Leakey, born in Africa and heir to the famed Leakey dynasty of fossil seekers, is “How is it that Homo Sapiens are the only surviving species out of the genus Homo; the upright ape species that have called Earth home over the past 8 million years?”

Conor Knighton, CBS Sunday Morning Correspondent

Leave Only Footprints: My Journey Through Every National Park

Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre

When Conor Knighton set off to explore America’s “best idea,” a broken engagement and a broken heart had left him longing for a change of scenery. The plan he’d cooked up might have gone a bit overboard. Over the course of a year, Conor visited every national park in the country, from Acadia to Zion. The Emmy award-winning *CBS Sunday Morning* correspondent invites us along on a whirlwind tour, highlighting unexpected stories, colorful characters and profound lessons he unearthed along the way.

Albert Lin, Explorer

In Search of Lost Cities

Tuesday, March 10, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre

Albert Lin is a professional explorer, blurring boundaries between human and machine, while uncovering the lost wisdom of our past. In 2016, Albert lost his leg below the knee as a result of a car accident in the California Dunes. His transformation through the use of innovative prosthetics drives his relentless quest into the farthest reaches of our planet, from Mongolia to the Mayan jungle, employing a technologist’s approach to unearth lost cultural stories and rituals.

Mattias Klum, Photographer

The Planet in Our Hands

Tuesday, April 14, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre

Mattias Klum is a masterful storyteller. Through dramatic images and heart-stopping tales of facing down an Asiatic lion, embedding with a tribe of meerkats, stalking deadly vipers and nearly getting burned alive atop a hot air balloon over a dense Amazon jungle, he weaves humor, beauty and wonder into each talk, reminding us that what we have is worth saving.

Frans Lanting, Photographer and Christine Eckstrom, Science Writer

Bay of Life: From Wind to Whales

Tuesday, May 19, 2026, 7:30 p.m. in Muriel Kauffman Theatre

California’s Monterey Bay is America’s top biodiversity hotspot, and Frans Lanting and Christine Eckstrom’s backyard. One hundred years ago, it was on the verge of ecological collapse and its wildlife was in crisis due to the clear-cutting of Redwood

forests. Today, Monterey Bay is a thriving example of renewal and recovery. Lanting and Eckstrom share this story on stage, demonstrating how damaged ecosystems can be restored when people care – and act – together.

BECOME A TRAILBLAZER

Members of the Trailblazers group are invited to pre-show receptions and Q&As with the awe-inspiring Trailblazing Talks speakers. Memberships are fully tax-deductible and help support bringing Trailblazing Talks events to the Kauffman Center. Join today at kauffmancenter.org/trailblazers or when you purchase a Trailblazing Talks subscription.

The \$650 all-access level:

- Invitation for your household to **all five** pre-show receptions and Q&As with each of the Trailblazing Talks presenters prior to the evening's presentation. Receptions are from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and include complimentary appetizers and drinks. The Q&A with each presenter runs from 6:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- First access to renew or upgrade Trailblazing Talks seats for the following season's series.
- Presale access to Kauffman Center Presents performances.
- Invitations for two to attend the Kauffman Center's members-only concerts and receptions twice a year.

The \$200 level:

- Invitation for your household to **one** pre-show reception and Q&A with one of the series presenters prior to the evening's presentation. Receptions are from 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. and include complimentary appetizers and drinks. The Q&A with each presenter runs from 6:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.
- First access to renew or upgrade Trailblazing Talks seats for the following season's series.
- Presale access to Kauffman Center Presents performances.
- Invitations for two to attend the Kauffman Center's members-only concerts and receptions twice a year.

Questions about Trailblazers membership? Contact Kelly Burt, manager of individual giving, at 816.994.7927 or kburt@kauffmancenter.org.

STUDENT MATINEE SCHEDULE

As part of the Kauffman Center's community engagement offerings, **Trailblazing Talks** will present five student matinee performances in 2026:

- Tuesday, Jan. 27, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.: Louise Leakey, Paleanthropologist – Digging for Humanity's Origins
- Tuesday, Feb. 10, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.: Conor Knighton, CBS Sunday Morning Correspondent – Leave Only Footprints: My Journey Through Every National Park
- Tuesday, March 10, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.: Albert Lin, Explorer – In Search of Lost Cities
- Tuesday, April 14, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.: Mattias Klum, Photographer – The Planet in Our Hands
- Tuesday, May 19, 2026, at 10:30 a.m.: Frans Lanting, Photographer; Christine Eckstrom, Science Writer – Bay of Life: From Wind to Whales

Educators can find more information and request tickets to the matinees in late August 2025 at kauffmancenter.org/student-matinees.

PARKING & DOWNTOWN MAPS

Find information and maps for Kauffman Center parking and street closure updates at kauffmancenter.org/parking. The Arts District Garage is the primary parking garage for patrons. The garage is directly attached to the Kauffman Center just south of the building with multiple access points to surrounding streets. Purchasing event parking in advance is highly recommended as it often sells out. The garage is \$13 per car in advance or \$16 upon arrival or valet is \$22 in advance or \$24 upon arrival. As of July 1, the garage will be \$16 per car in advance, \$20 upon arrival or valet is \$25 in advance or \$27 upon arrival.

ACCESSIBILITY

The Kauffman Center's promise to bring artists and audiences together is reflected in many ways, including removing barriers and providing access to our performing arts experiences for all patrons. You can learn more by visiting kauffmancenter.org/accessibility. To request services or receive additional information that would make your visit more enjoyable, please contact our ticket office at 816.994.7222 or contact@kauffmancenter.org.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Receive updates by following our Facebook page at facebook.com/kauffmancenter, Instagram page at instagram.com/kauffmancenter. Watch videos at youtube.com/kauffmancenter and follow our blog at kauffmancenter.org/news.

MEDIA

Visit the Kauffman Center's online press room for media resources, multimedia library, press release archive and more: kauffmancenter.org/about/press-room.

SPONSORS

The 2026 Trailblazing Talks speaker series is made possible by the Teresa and Tom Walsh Family Foundation. *Kauffman Center Presents* is made possible by the John N. and Marilyn P. McConnell Foundation, Premier Partner Saint Luke's Health System and Mercedes-Benz of Kansas City & Mercedes-Benz of Kansas City South.

ABOUT KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

The Kauffman Center serves as a cultural cornerstone for extraordinary and diverse music, opera, theater and dance performances for Kansas City and the region.

Designed by internationally recognized architect Moshe Safdie, the Kauffman Center has been honored as one of the World's 15 Most Beautiful Concert Halls, which attracts some of the most renowned performers and entertainers. The 285,000-square-foot building includes two performance halls: the 1,800-seat Muriel Kauffman Theatre that hosts dance performances, operas, plays and

Broadway tours and the 1,600-seat Helzberg Hall, a venue for a wide range of musical performances, from chamber music to full orchestral concerts, jazz and pop, lectures and recitals.

The Kauffman Center is the performance home for three of the region's leading performing arts organizations – Kansas City Ballet, Lyric Opera of Kansas City and Kansas City Symphony. In addition, *Kauffman Center Presents* brings in performing artists at the top of their classes as well as Trailblazing Talks, a live speaker series that curates exceptional photographers, scientists and filmmakers.

Since opening, the Kauffman Center has offered over 3,100 performances and welcomed more than 4.5 million visitors.

The Kauffman Center is deeply committed to enriching the community through access to arts experiences and engagement initiatives. Since 2011, more than 450,000 students have attended school matinees at the Kauffman Center with several schools utilizing the Transportation Fund which helps to defray or eliminate the cost of bus transportation. The Community Tickets program provides free public performance tickets to underserved audiences and discounts for students, educators, seniors, veterans and military service members. The annual Future Stages Festival invites more than 650 young artists to perform on the Kauffman Center stages. Visitors of all ages enjoy free access to a wide range of performing arts experiences and interactive arts activities at the festival. Each year, the Kauffman Center also offers various educational programs including internships, educational tours, Career Center Stage and Backstage Intensives.

More information about the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts can be found at kauffmancenter.org.