

Capital One City Parks FOUNDATION  
**SUMMERSTAGE<sup>®</sup>40**

**CAPITAL ONE CITY PARKS FOUNDATION SUMMERSTAGE  
CELEBRATES ITS 40TH ANNIVERSARY IN 2026**

**Festival will celebrate its Milestone Anniversary with Commemorative Events  
Including a Photo Retrospective and  
Special Performances to be announced**

**Digital Landing Page Launches Today Featuring  
Historical Timeline & Fan Portal, Plus Archival Photo Social Media Series**



Sun Ra Akestra at Central Park's Naumburg Bandshell, June 1986. Photo by Jack Vartoogian from the upcoming Arsenal Gallery exhibit *"40 in Focus: SummerStage through the Lens of Photographer Jack Vartoogian."*

New York, NY (February 4, 2026) - **Capital One City Parks Foundation SummerStage**, New York City's premiere performing arts festival, is thrilled to announce that its **2026 season** will mark its milestone **40th anniversary**. SummerStage will celebrate with special events and

experiences highlighting four remarkable decades of performances across New York City's parks.

In June of 1986, the first-ever SummerStage show kicked off with a bang, as avant-garde Afrofuturists Sun Ra Arkestra touched down at the Naumburg Bandshell in Central Park. Both the park and our city's cultural landscape have been forever changed. In the 40 years since, SummerStage has presented thousands of global artists to audiences numbering over seven million, bringing hundreds of free live performances to neighborhood parks across the city. Take a look back at the past 40 years with a highlight video featuring legendary artists across the decades, set to music from longtime friend of SummerStage Angélique Kidjo, [HERE](#).

"SummerStage was created to reflect the extraordinary diversity of New York City and its people. This year, as we celebrate 40 years, the festival continues to showcase the sounds of the city, from the streets and clubs to the parks," said **Joe Killian**, SummerStage Founder & Executive Producer (1986-1993) and City Parks Foundation Board Member. "For four decades, SummerStage has championed unique collaborations, bold commissions, and has embraced a vibrant mash-up of music, dance, and theater, from pop to rap to jazz and more. It has always been about bringing people together and a shared joy of community among fans and I couldn't be more proud of the work that has gone into the last 40 years. I'm thrilled to see it continue on for future generations to experience and enjoy."

To celebrate this anniversary, SummerStage has launched a new landing page today, taking fans on a digital journey through the festival's rich and storied history [HERE](#). The page features unique, photo-driven content and fan experiences. Fans can explore a **timeline** featuring artists from around the world and significant events that helped shape the festival into what it is today. Attendees are also invited to share their photos, videos, and stories from past shows through a **fan portal**. Fan content will be featured throughout the 2026 season at a show in Central Park, on the festival's social media pages, or on the 40th anniversary webpage. Additionally, an **archival photo series** will launch this month across SummerStage's social media channels, showcasing content from the past four decades.

The 40th year will also be celebrated with many special events. From June through August, a free, curated commemorative **photo exhibition** titled "**40 in Focus: SummerStage through the Lens of Photographer Jack Vartoogian**" will be on view at the **Arsenal Gallery** (830 Fifth Avenue) presented by City Parks Foundation in collaboration with NYC Parks Art & Antiquities. The exhibition will feature a selection of intimate, rarely seen imagery that gives viewers a look back at past decades of outdoor live music in New York City, a peek behind the curtain with never-before-seen backstage photos, and honors those artists who have passed on. The show is free and will be open to the public from June 12 - August 21, more details [here](#).

Additionally, the festival is planning **special performances** by legacy artists who have graced our stages throughout the years, marquee talent returning to their hometown boroughs, genre-defying collaborations, and breakout stars from across the globe. Live Nation returns as the exclusive producer of benefit concerts. Select benefit performances are on sale now [here](#), and the full 2026 season lineup will be shared this April on [SummerStage.org](https://www.summerstage.org).

“We can’t wait to share what’s in store for our 40th SummerStage anniversary season,” says Executive Artistic Director, **Erika Elliot**. “We’ve been working hard to curate a lineup that features iconic artists and longtime friends of the festival as well as fresh, new voices that make our festival as diverse and vibrant as the communities we serve. We’re so excited for a summer-long celebration of the past 40 years with New Yorkers across all five boroughs.”

Additionally, SummerStage will be honoring the anniversary with **special giveaways** and **contests** all season long, including surprise VIP upgrades in Central Park, commemorative swag items, trivia games, special prizes, and much more.

To capture the festival’s anniversary aesthetic, SummerStage has brought back illustrator **Julie Wilson**, who originally designed the season artwork in 1992. Heavily influenced by TV cartoons, pop art, and the British Invasion, Wilson made her mark around Brooklyn and Manhattan from the 1980s to the early 2000s, creating billboards in Times Square, murals at Coney Island, paintings and signs for restaurants, and many editorial illustrations for magazines and newspapers.

For more information on Capital One City Parks Foundation SummerStage and updates on the 40th season, visit [www.SummerStage.org](https://www.summerstage.org).

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### **About City Parks Foundation**

At City Parks Foundation, we are dedicated to invigorating and transforming parks into dynamic, vibrant centers of urban life through sports, arts, community engagement and capacity building, and environmental education programs for all New Yorkers. Our programs -- located in 320 parks, recreation centers and public schools across New York City -- reach nearly 300,000 people and organizations each year. Our ethos is simple: thriving parks mean thriving communities.

### **About SummerStage**

Capital One City Parks Foundation SummerStage celebrates its 40th season this year as one of New York's most beloved, broadly accessible, free outdoor performing arts festivals. SummerStage presents more than 70 free and benefit performances in Central Park and 12-15 neighborhood parks each year, reaching more than 227,000 fans. With diverse artists and performances in genres that represent the cultural fabric of New York City, ranging from jazz, hip-hop, Latin, and global to indie and contemporary dance, SummerStage has filled a vital niche in our City's summer arts festival landscape for four decades, reaching more than seven million people from New York City and around the world.

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