



Press Release

OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL

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The Kennedy Center Hosts Surgeon General's Medallion Awards

With performances by
**Aloe Blacc, Ariana DeBose, Renée Fleming,
Ben Folds, Joshua Henry, Jimmie Herrod, and The Lone Bellow**

September 18, 2023, at the Kennedy Center Concert Hall at 7:00 p.m.

Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy to Present Medallion—the Highest Honor a U.S. Surgeon General can Bestow on Civilians—to Six Awardees from Across the U.S.

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts will host a stellar range of artists in a show titled ***Songs for Hope: A Concert Celebration of the 2023 Surgeon General's Medallion Awardees for Health***. The Surgeon General's Medallion is the highest honor the U.S. Surgeon General can present to civilians. The Office of the Surgeon General and the Kennedy Center came together to create a first of its kind event to recognize extraordinary individuals and organizations whose heroic service and sacrifice have advanced the mental health and well-being of their communities. Music, which has the power to heal and inspire, will play a central role in the evening, helping commemorate the awardees and point toward a brighter future.

Performers joining in this celebration will include **Aloe Blacc, Ariana DeBose, Renée Fleming, Ben Folds, Joshua Henry, Jimmie Herrod, and The Lone Bellow** with musical direction by **Benjamin Rauhala**.

"I have long held the belief that it is through shared live experiences that we build both connection and community. In fact, this is the heart and soul of the performing arts—its superpower," **said Kennedy**

Center President Deborah F. Rutter. “When the pandemic prevented us from sitting side by side together in an arts venue or even in our own homes, we missed the art and artists as much as we missed that incomparable feeling of sharing those moments with others. We are so honored that Surgeon General Murthy chose the arts and the Kennedy Center as a platform to recognize heroes across the country whose exceptional work in their own communities has provided healing and hope.”

“Since the pandemic began, there have been precious few opportunities to process what we’ve been through, grieve what we’ve lost, and recognize individuals who have gone above and beyond for others. This is why the Office of the Surgeon General and the Kennedy Center collaborated to create a unique event designed to celebrate those whose extraordinary acts of service, sacrifice, and compassion have advanced the mental health and well-being of their communities,” **said U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy.** “In a night of music and joy, we honor the Surgeon General Medallion recipients with performances from brilliant artists whose music inspires hope and healing. Together, we acknowledge the past, look forward to a brighter future, and applaud those who model kindness, love, and service.”

At the event, U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy will present the Surgeon General’s Medallion to the following awardees:

- **Corey and Jennifer Feist**, co-Founders of the Dr. Lorna Breen Heroes Foundation. The Foundation advances policies, practices, and solutions to improve all health workers’ professional well-being and mental health. Their advocacy efforts resulted in the first federal law focused on improving health worker well-being, Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act, named after the sister/sister-in-law of Jennifer and Corey. Dr. Breen was a physician in NYC who lost her life to suicide after experiencing the first COVID-19 wave as a frontline worker and healthcare leader.
- **Kate’s Club** empowers children and teens, their families, and young adults facing life after the death of someone important to them. The organization provides both in-person and online support programs that focus on developing social connections, improving healthy coping strategies, and building confidence and self-esteem. Since the pandemic began, Kate’s Club has supported more than 10,000 people with tools to process and articulate grief, and to find community and belonging through a shared grief experience.
- **Rev. Eduardo Morales “Father Eddy,”** formerly the priest at Sacred Heart Catholic Church, the only Catholic church in Uvalde, Texas. Morales led the community through the wake of the devastating school shooting at Robb Elementary School. He helped heal the community during this unforeseen time by offering safe spaces and community support, guiding them through an unthinkable difficult chapter of their lives.
- **Major Kevin Cho Tipton**, United States Air Force Critical Care Nurse Practitioner assigned to the Florida National Guard. During the pandemic, he served in South Florida’s public hospital ICUs where they lost over 70% of their patients, including frontline physicians, caregivers, and staff. To increase awareness of healthcare worker burnout, Tipton uplifted the experiences of his patients and peers by sharing their stories. He has since continued as a champion for the well-being of medical workers—helping to rebuild their connections to the communities they serve.

- **Ashanti Branch**, Founder & Executive Director of the Ever Forward Club. A former K-12 educator and administrator, he started the organization with the mission of seeing marginalized students graduate high school by providing them with mental health support, mentorship, and safe spaces. Serving predominantly young Black and Latino boys, the Ever Forward Club provides emotional tools to feel safe, seen, and heard. To combat loneliness, they created the #MillionMaskMovement during the pandemic to help young people and communities gain a deeper understanding of how much we have in common. It has transformed how students connect to their schools and how schools connect to their students.
- **Alysha Lee**, National Teen Board Member at Beyond Differences, a nonprofit whose mission is to end social isolation in middle schools. The high school senior has taken incredible steps to create a culture of belonging for those feeling socially isolated during difficult times. Through Beyond Differences' Stand Up for AAPI Youth Project, she led a student group to create an art-based curriculum in response to an uptick in anti-Asian hate crimes. Lee's paper art crane project connects students from all backgrounds with a message of hope for their communities. Lee's curriculum has impacted 5 million students in 10,000 middle schools in all 50 states, and it is also being translated into other languages and adopted in schools across the country.

Songs for Hope: A Concert Celebration of the 2023 Surgeon General's Medallion Awardees for Health

will include three themes: Grief & Loss; Love & Healing; and Hope. The evening will include the awarding of the Surgeon General's Medallion on those themes. Musical performances from artists who have uplifted their communities will be a central part of the evening to create a night of joy and inspiration. The celebration will later unite artists and the audience alike with an opportunity to make music together in a moving collective experience.

The goal of the evening is to raise awareness of mental health and well-being work that's improving lives and to bring these communities together in joy and celebration. Seats in the venue are available to the public for \$25, and the event will be livestreamed free on the Kennedy Center's YouTube [page](#).

This event builds on the Kennedy Center's commitment to championing the connection between the performing arts and health and well-being—raising public awareness about the benefits of engaging with the arts, facilitating a platform for related health and medical research, and hosting programs for the public-at-large to engage in arts-related activities for the purposes of healing.

More Information on the Surgeon General's Medallion

The Surgeon General's Medallion is the highest honor the U.S. Surgeon General can present to a civilian. As the Surgeon General looks to recognize heroic work to support mental health and well-being during the last few years of the pandemic, he will award the Medallion to a small group of individuals and organizations who exemplify unusual acts of compassion, innovative mental health efforts, and/or exceptional leadership to advance the well-being of their communities. The planned honorees hail from across the country, including California, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and Virginia. The event also marks the first time a U.S. Surgeon General will award the Medallion to multiple individuals in a concert celebration.

FUNDING CREDITS

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KENNEDY CENTER TICKET INFORMATION

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