



For Immediate Release
Thursday, January 29, 2026

Harris Theater for Music and Dance Honors Joan W. Harris with Special Gala Performance

One-night-only performance to include Jessie Montgomery, Nico Muhly, Caroline Shaw, Bobbi Jene Smith, Phillipa Soo, and Tony Sqi Yun, all affiliated with The Juilliard School.

CHICAGO — The **Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance** is pleased to announce its 2026 gala, ***Icons and Innovators: Honoring Joan W. Harris***, which will take place on **Saturday, May 2**, in celebration of Joan Harris's extraordinary contributions to the theater that bears her name and to the performing arts more broadly.

The evening will feature a unique, one-night-only performance co-curated by Lori Dimun, the Alexandra C. and John D. Nichols President and CEO of the Harris Theater, and Damian Woetzel, President of The Juilliard School, of which Ms. Harris is also a longtime trustee.

“The Harris Theater for Music and Dance stands as one of many expressions of Joan Harris’s extraordinary living legacy,” said Dimun. “Through her visionary leadership, generosity, and enduring commitment to the arts—and through her transformative philanthropy at the Irving Harris Foundation—Joan has helped shape a more vibrant and dynamic arts ecosystem. As Damian and I considered how best to honor the depth and breadth of Joan’s impact, it felt only fitting to bring together two institutions she has profoundly influenced—celebrating not only Joan herself, but the power of collaboration and shared purpose in sustaining the arts.”

As the centerpiece of a dazzling evening of artistry, celebration, and community honoring Joan Harris, the performance will feature exceptional artists affiliated with The Juilliard School, including award-winning composers **Jessie Montgomery**, **Nico Muhly**, and **Caroline Shaw**; violist and co-founder of the ground-breaking ensemble yMusic **Nadia Sirota**; acclaimed choreographer and dancer **Bobbi Jene Smith**; Tony Award-winning Broadway star **Phillipa**

Soo (*Hamilton*); and rising classical pianist **Tony Siqi Yun**, fresh from debuts in the world's great halls—from Carnegie to the Concertgebouw.

The spirit of Joan Harris's lifelong dedication will be on display in a combination of music, dance, and theater, demonstrating the power of collaboration. With Juilliard artists as a touchstone—whether alumni or current students or creative partners—the performances are designed to highlight connections across generations, from classic works performed by the artists of today to new voices shaping the classics of our own time.

The evening will come to life through a variety of art forms, from the music of Philip Glass, who attended Juilliard after his time at the University of Chicago, to lauded contemporary pieces by Montgomery, Muhly, and Shaw, to treasured works of musical theater, to new dances that embody tradition and collaboration. Through it all, this program celebrates what Joan Harris has made possible in Chicago, across America, and around the globe.

“The opportunity to celebrate Joan Harris’s exemplary leadership in the arts is tremendously inspiring,” said Woetzel. “Joan gives us the impetus, as she always has, to gather in shared purpose, and Juilliard’s brilliant musicians, actors, and dancers from the past years are so excited to join together in a beautiful artistic expression of gratitude.”

For more than five decades, Joan Harris has been one of the most prominent advocates for the performing arts in Chicago and around the United States, and her unwavering commitment and generosity have had a lasting impact on the country’s arts landscape. In addition to co-founding the Harris Theater, she has served in a number of important roles, including Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the City of Chicago, President of Chicago Opera Theater and Arts Alliance Illinois, and on the Library of Congress Trust Fund Board. She has also served as both President and Chairman of the Irving Harris Foundation, where she helped establish the Cultural Policy Center at the University of Chicago. Her long-running support for the Aspen Music Festival and School resulted in the construction of the Joan and Irving Harris Concert Hall, another esteemed music venue, in 1993. She was a panel member for the National Endowment for the Arts and has held leadership positions with such varied organizations as The Juilliard School, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and the League of American Orchestras.

In 2014, Joan Harris received the National Medal of Arts from President Barack Obama. The award’s citation recognized her for “supporting creative expression in Chicago and across our country. Her decades of leadership and generosity have enriched our cultural life and helped countless artists, dancers, singers, and musicians bring their talents to center stage.”

Along with Sandra P. Guthman and Sarah Solotaroff Mirkin, Joan Harris co-founded the Harris Theater for Music and Dance with the goal of giving downtown Chicago a mid-size performance space that would be versatile for a wide range of programming. Constructed in 2003, the

building was the first multipurpose performance venue built in downtown Chicago since 1929, and immediately became an important home for music and dance in the city. Today, the Harris Theater provides subsidized support for more than 30 Resident Companies and produces the *Harris Theater Presents* series, which brings local, national, and international artists to its location at the northern end of Millennium Park. From the theater's founding to the present day, Joan Harris's support and dedication have ensured that it remains a space for art to thrive and for communities to be inspired.

The *Icons and Innovators Gala* will directly support the Harris Theater and its mission to remain Chicago's home for music and dance, connecting diverse audiences with outstanding artists from across the city, the nation, and the world. The event is co-chaired by Ted Grady and Ross Slotten, Caryn and King Harris, and Nancy and Scott Santi.

Icons and Innovators Schedule

Saturday, May 2, 2026
5:00 PM / Cocktail Reception
6:00 PM / Dinner
8:00 PM / Performance
Festive Cocktail Attire

Pre-performance events will be held on the tented Harris Theater Rooftop with the performance held inside the Harris Theater's Deering McCormick Hall.

Tickets to the *Icons and Innovators Gala* can be reserved by contacting Emma Lawrence, Board and Donor Relations Coordinator, at elawrence@harristheaterchicago.org, or by visiting harristheaterchicago.org/gala.

To purchase performance-only tickets, contact the Harris Theater Box Office or visit harristheaterchicago.org/icons.

The *Icons and Innovators* performance is generously supported by **Irving Harris Foundation**, Lead Presenting Sponsor and *Harris Theater Presents Mainstage* Sponsor.

Leadership support for *Icons and Innovators Gala* is provided by:

Icon Host Committee
Caryn and King Harris
ITW
Abby McCormick O'Neil and D. Carroll Joynes

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Nancy and Scott Santi

Innovator Circle

Abbott
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Joan W. Harris and Louise Frank
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Catalyst Table

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About the Joan W. and Irving B. Harris Theater for Music and Dance

The Harris Theater is Chicago's home for music and dance, connecting diverse audiences with artists from across the city, the nation, and the world. An anchor institution of Millennium Park and the first multi-use performance venue built in downtown Chicago since 1929, the Harris was established in 2003 to create a much-needed home for the city's vibrant community of midsize performing arts organizations. Today, the nonprofit Harris Theater features some of the most diverse arts and culture offerings in the city, from its Chicago-based Resident Companies to the world-renowned visiting artists who perform on its stage through the *Harris Theater Presents* series.

The Harris represents a distinctive model for artistic excellence, collaboration, and creative symbiosis, making the performing arts relevant and accessible to the widest possible audience. Acting as both a home base for and a supportive partner of its Resident Companies, the Harris provides state-of-the-art performance space and ongoing support to more than 30 Chicago-based performing arts organizations. Its 1,500-seat multi-use theater brings innovative and boundary-pushing productions from more than 32 countries across six continents to Chicago, creating unique opportunities for dialogue between Chicagoans and the world's leading artists, thinkers, and innovators. The organization's signature *Harris Theater Presents* series has featured acclaimed artists and ensembles including Joyce DiDonato, Batsheva Dance, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, English National Ballet, Joshua Bell, Monteverdi Choir, Angélique Kidjo, and Paris Opera Ballet. The Theater's education and community engagement initiatives

build bridges between artists and community members, providing master classes, artist talks, and free tickets for more than 50 Community Partner organizations throughout Chicago.

To learn more about the Harris Theater, Chicago's home for music and dance in Millennium Park, visit harristheaterchicago.org and follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

Media Contact:

Kari Shaffer

kshaffer@harristheaterchicago.org

312-334-2454