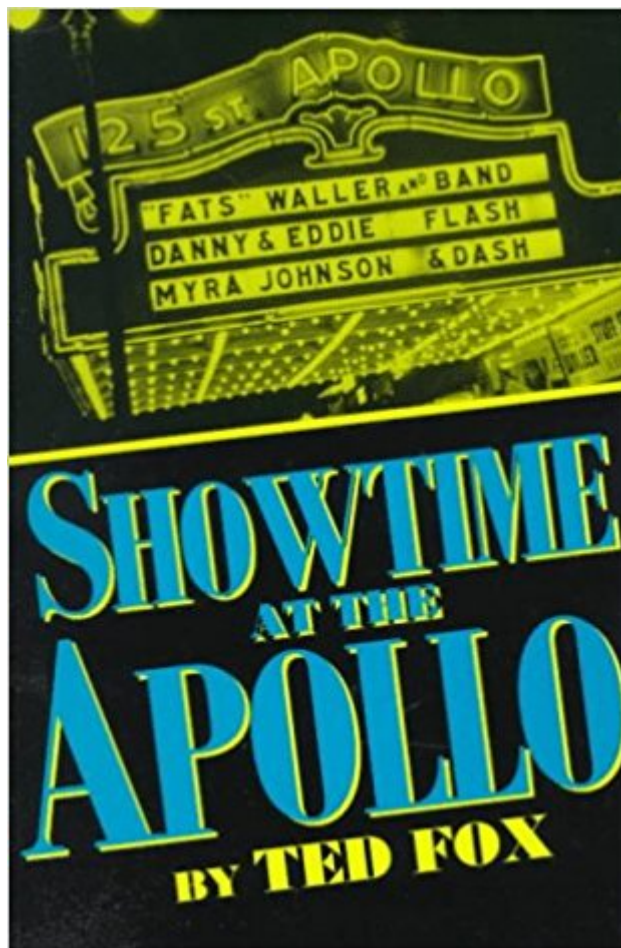


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# Showtime At The Apollo



## Synopsis

For close to 60 years the Apollo Theatre in the heart of Harlem has been one of America's foremost cultural institutions, a top showcase for black entertainers and a launching pad for some of the greatest talents of our time: Billie Holiday, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Ella Fitzgerald, Lena Horne, James Brown, Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Diana Ross, Dionne Warwick, Sarah Vaughan, and Richard Pryor are just a few. Ted Fox has written a history of the special combination of people and atmosphere at the Apollo; he lets the theatre's stars tell a large part of the story through personal anecdotes, augmented by a splendid array of rare pictures. The author also discusses the evolution of black cultural forms in music and comedy, and in so doing, preserves routines, Apollo trademarks, and backstage lore that might otherwise be lost.

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## Customer Reviews

"A wonderful book." -- Tavis Smiley, National Public Radio 3/4/04 "Splendid&#x85;a richly anecdotal picture...The essential book, mandatory for the most casual student as well as the most ardent fan."

-- David Hinckley, (NY) Daily News 1/26/04 "The definitive history of Harlem&#x92;s (and black America&#x92;s) essential theater." -- New York Magazine --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

A night out at the Apollo was something special and enjoyable and more &#x96; the Apollo was home. Nearly every black performer interviewed for Ted Fox's "Showtime at the Apollo: The Story of

Harlem's World Famous Theatre" used the word "home" to describe what the Apollo meant to them. It was home to all the performers who along with the audience comprised the Apollo family. It was a family that often scrapped, a family of sibling love and rivalry, but one bound together by shared experiences, hopes and ambitions. Although for performers the work was terribly difficult, and the theatre, like Harlem itself, was always rough, everyone looked forward to coming home to the Apollo. As Dionne Warwick says in the book, "The theatre was terrible: drafty, dirty, smelly &#x96; awful; and we loved every minute of it." While the Apollo is now re-inventing itself and once again burnishing the legend &#x96; it nearly died in the 1970s and was forced to close its doors. As the civil rights movement began to alter the nation&#x92;s consciousness, other areas of opportunity became available at last to black performers. The system the Apollo was forced to work within for so many years began to collapse. The general acceptance of black culture into American popular culture was the beginning of something brand new, but it was also the beginning of the end for the Apollo Theatre. For it is the final irony that the ultimate casualty of this revolution was the Apollo itself. Today, the Apollo Theatre remains at the heart of the African-American community &#x96; the place that legends still call home &#x96; as it&#x92;s been since 1934&#x85; James Brown, Smokey Robinson and George Clinton come back &#x85;Top black pop stars including Mary J. Blige and P.Diddy, trod the Apollo stage, following in the footsteps of Nat King Cole, Johnny Mathis and Dionne Warwick &#x85; Hip-hop group, The Roots, bring the sounds of the street into the theatre like the Orioles in their day&#x85; The Apollo&#x92;s "Latin Nites" series continues the vibrant tradition of Tito Puente and Mongo Santamaria &#x85;Wynton Marsalis carries the jazz standard of Dizzy Gillespie &#x85;On his 1999 HBO special, Chris Rock shocked and slayed the Apollo crowd summoning memories of Redd Foxx &#x85; Debuting her first tour in a decade at the theatre, Whoopi Goldberg, after enjoying mass stardom, paid homage to the Apollo much as Bill Cosby once did&#x85; Anxious neophytes continue flocking to Amateur Night in hopes of making it big by touching The Tree of Hope &#x85;Through good times and bad, changes in time, taste and technologies it will always be Showtime at the Apollo. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Recently the descriptive "legend" has been bestowed willy-nilly on recipients of ephemeral celebrity and of dubious merit and accomplishment. But the Apollo Theater in Harlem, N.Y. is a genuine legend, equal, and even superior to any music theater in the world. The Classical Revival style building at 253 West 125th street in Harlem was designed by George Keiser and built in 1913-14 as the Hurtig & Seamon's Burlesque Theater, which had a "Whites Only" policy that was rigorously enforced. By the early 1930s, the place fell into disrepair and closed. Sidney Cohen, who owned

several theaters in Harlem, bought and renovated the theater, renaming it "Apollo Theater" that catered to the Black residents of the area. The "Apollo" faced stiff competition from other music halls, especially Schiffman's "Lafayette" and Brecher's "Harlem Opera House" that booked dynamic acts, such as Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson and Louis Armstrong. After Cohen died, Schiffman and Brecher took over the "Apollo" and progressed from vaudeville acts to swing era big bands, comic acts, dance and variety shows. The theater became a gathering place for the neighborhood; men, women and children would flock to the Apollo, when it opened its doors at 10 AM, and some would stay all day through the night to watch the multiple shows offered. Cartoons and newsreel were usually followed by a full length feature film. "Where stars are born and legends are made" was no idle boast from the "Apollo". A pantheon of future stars, black and white, were launched from its stage; Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Moms Mabley, the Staple Singers, Richard Pryor, Sam Cooke, Harry James, Stan Getz, Dave Brubeck, Stevie Wonder and myriad others performed at the "Apollo". Every Monday evening 'Amateur Night' was broadcast on the 12 radio stations and hopeful performers would rub the Tree of Hope stump and later be chased by the "Executioner" or 'Porto Rico', if booed by the rowdy audience. Ella Fitzgerald, Thelma Carpenter and Jimi Hendrix were First Prize winners of the competition. In 1962, James Brown and the Famous Flames, recorded the first 'Live at the Apollo'. The album was a hit and a precursor to a series of live recordings by many artists from the "Apollo". "Showtime at the Apollo" by Ted Fox was originally published in 1983 and went to 3 editions, it has now been revived and has not lost any of its appeal. Fox has written the definitive history of the Apollo theater in Harlem, from its inception as a burlesque venue, reserved exclusively for Whites, to its metamorphosis into an iconic cultural center for African Americans and the entire nation. The author traces the genesis of the theater, the rise of the venue during the "Harlem Renaissance" to its deterioration during the neighborhood's decay by drug infestation, and finally to its rebirth under new ownership in 1980s. Through personal interviews, first source documentation, photo archives and in-depth research, Ted Fox has written a respectful, honest and unvarnished tribute to what is arguably the greatest music hall in the nation, equal to the venerable "Moulin Rouge" in Paris. Anyone interested in American music and/or African American history will find this to be a terrific resource and a great addition to any library. Full disclosure: I was asked by the publisher to review this complimentary EBook.

I cannot express what an insightful and fully informative education I had on the Apollo Theatre! My knowledge about the famous theatre did not go past the rock and soul era of the Theatre. But, there is so much to learn on exactly how far this theatre goes back. I believe every aspect of the history is

told. This theatre was where everybody who was anybody made their appearance at the Apollo. The names that are mentioned, dating back to the earliest days, covering all types of shows, jazz, big bands, gospel, blues, rock, dance, comics, and novelty acts. To many performers, it was home while also known as the "number one" theatre on the map. In the forties, the war years, where Big Band dominated and you can learn about the greats here, Charlie Parker, Earl Hines, Ink Spots, Dinah Washington, Pearl Bailey, Billie Holliday, Dizzy Gillespie, Wynonie Harris, and so many more mentioned. The fifties covered Eartha Kitt, Josephine Baker and her costumes, and Johnny Mathis and his fear of performing before black people, etc. What was insightful was the talk about Amateur Night. So many famous people began their career on Amateur Night. How this was in operation was very interesting. You will also hear about the novelty acts, comedians and the dancers. There was a time in the sixties when the focus was on the Disc Jockeys and their popularity. Equally telling was the Gospel era at the Apollo, gospel women, Big Mama Thornton, Sister Rosetta Tharp, quartets such as The Dixie Hummingbirds, Soul Stirrers. Most well-known to me was the era of the sixties, James Brown, Ray Charles, Jackie Wilson, etc. The photo images are plentiful, great historic photos of the past. It is wonderful to get an idea of the entertainers, conditions, staff, buildings, mechanics, operations, etc. The later chapters focus on the Apollo struggling and "How the Apollo Got It's Groove Back". Again, I have not read a more comprehensive, thoroughly insightful, entertaining history on an iconic "home", the Apollo. Rizzo

Excellent synopsis of the history of a great theater. From its origins, through the depression to the '80s the theater showcased not only acts, but music. Located in Harlem, it was the theater hosting Black actors, singers, dancers before they were able to break into mainstream or white theaters. It was THE unique theater well ahead of its time and original in its format. The best and greatest white acts begged to get on stage while those growing up in Harlem called that stage "home." Worthwhile reading.

This book is a tender blend of juicy gossip, incredible research forged into a fascinating story, and a definitive re-telling of the fabled Apollo. No history of American music can omit the extraordinary talent assembled at an unassuming theater in Harlem. Ted Fox, using interviews, an infectious passion for his subject, and a captivating writing style, takes readers on a tour through the Apollo's history. Fox is no romantic. He sees and tells the whole story. The talent is on display, but so is the gambling and the robberies. The business history of the Apollo, seemingly not a very fascinating story to tell, becomes a tale that illuminates the realities of the music business in a way I haven't

read before. And while this book is, as promised, a history of the Apollo, it also is a sequence of snapshots of performers. There's Ray Charles backstage playing his piano hoping to get in front of the audience. There's Elvis, dazzled by being in the place all the performers thought of as home. This book is applied sociology, giving us an unblinking picture of race in America, a picture accompanied by the beat of incomparable music.

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