



# **BIG EARS**

## **2025 Annual Report**

**"... the best and most exhilarating festival  
in the country, if not the world."**

**JOHN DILIBERTO, ECHOES**

## OUR MISSION

Big Ears works alongside artists, audiences, and communities to create joyful and transcendent cultural experiences that defy boundaries, fuel curiosity, ignite the spirit, and nourish the soul.



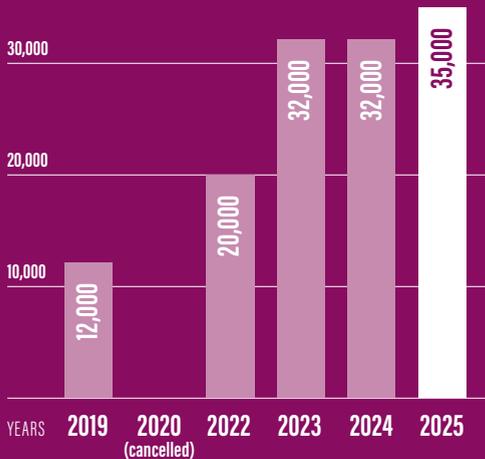


## WHO WE ARE

Big Ears has been connecting audiences to joyful, unforgettable cultural experiences since 2009. The festival became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 2016 and works with a robust range of supporters and partner organizations to continue fulfilling its mission.

Each year, Big Ears brings together the most innovative and influential artists, welcoming thousands of music lovers and tastemakers from around the world to experience its diverse performances and events.

### ANNUAL FESTIVAL ATTENDANCE



## OUR TEAM

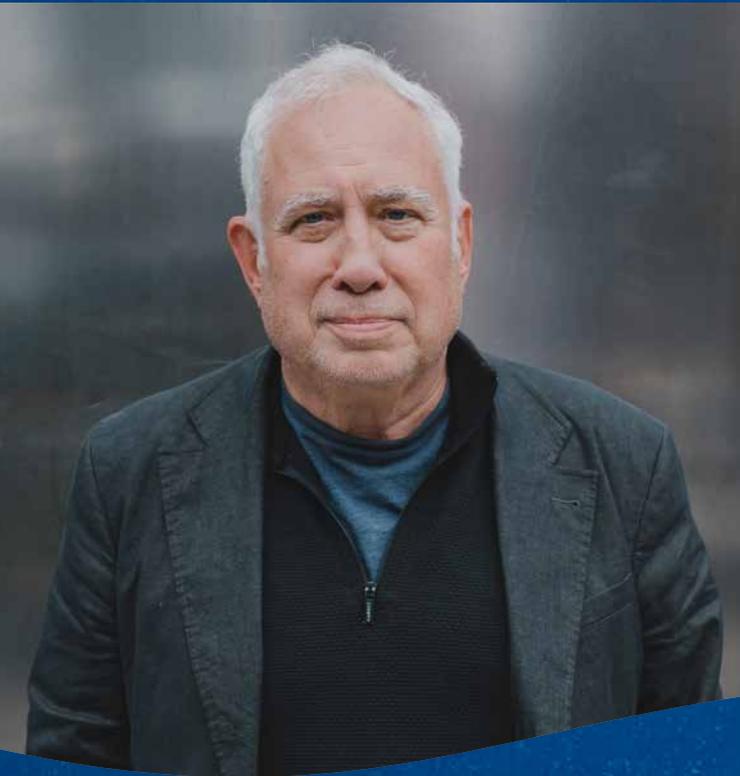
- Ashley Capps | *Founder / Executive & Artistic Director*
- Bryan Crow | *Festival Director*
- Morgan Fleming | *Administrative Manager*
- Sara Houchins | *Director of Development & Community Relations*
- Emmy Carter | *Director of Communications*
- Cecilia Stair | *Community Outreach Coordinator*

### 2024-2025 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Mark Grayson | *Chair*
- Tommie Rush | *Vice-Chair*
- Anthony B. Creamer II | *Treasurer*
- John Lynch Sanders | *Secretary*
- Chris Ballou
- Lauren Sampson Bowman
- Ashley Capps
- Dr. Amy Elias
- Dr. Sally C. Johnson
- Jeanette Kelleher
- Jamie Lewis
- Cynthia Moxley
- Chuck Parrish
- Madeline Rogero
- Greg Tardy
- John T. Winemiller

“The genre-defying festival remains an iconic gathering of many of the world’s most influential and visionary musical creators.”

### DOWNBEAT



## FROM OUR FOUNDER & DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

This was a watershed year for Big Ears, as both a festival and an organization. The March festival weekend was our most successful one yet, and the ever-emerging ideas, opportunities, and possibilities have continued bringing new energy, focus, and commitment to our long-term vision.

This year's festival was overflowing with extraordinary musical performances: from Beth Gibbons' haunting, utterly captivating performance and the indie-rock masterclass delivered by Yo La Tengo, to the soulful, genre-bending power of ANOHNI and the Johnsons and the epic instrumental festival closing with Explosions in the Sky; we traveled the spaceways with the Sun Ra Arkestra and danced into the night with pulsating grooves of DARKSIDE; joined Charles Lloyd and friends in a moving homage to the late Zakir Hussain; experienced a beautiful, meditative performance from Ambrose Akinmusire as well as a delightful, often humorous performance by the 80-year-old soul legend Swamp Dogg. The discoveries just kept coming: Kate Soper's riveting philosophical opera, Carla Kihlstedt's celebration of Edward Gorey, and so many more, one enriching experience after another.

And we will never forget Michael Hurley's always unique, one-of-a-kind performances, which now possess a deep poignancy, proving to be his next-to-last ever.

This year, expanding collaborations and partnerships added a new dimension to the Big Ears experience. Blue Note Records brought the Blue Note Lounge, where label head and music legend Don Was led conversations and treated us to a DJ set of hand-picked vinyl; celebrating their 11th

anniversary, Chicago's International Anthem hosted "Chrysanthemum Tea" at the Jig & Reel, featuring special pop-up performances; and Joyful Noise presented a lively jam session at Pretentious Brewing Company. There was an inspiring Ukrainian food and music collaboration between our local celebrated deli, Potchke, and the band DakhaBrakha. The visual projections of Age of Reflections at Church Street United Methodist Church created a mesmerizing, immersive experience for meditative concerts by Steve Roach, William Basinski, and others. The celebrated gospel group, Dedicated Men of Zion, collaborated with the Knoxville Gospel Choir in a richly invigorating and inspiring performance.

We hosted several memorable conversations, including one with legendary producer, manager, and raconteur Joe Boyd. He joined Ann Powers for an illuminating discussion, and he also presented a listening session and a multimedia exploration of his extraordinary book of international music history, *And The Roots of Rhythm Remain*. Renowned writers Nate Chinen, Ashley Kahn, and Marcus J. Moore also led deep conversations with festival artists about art, music, and life.

Beyond the festival, we reached deeper into our Knoxville community. Pianist Lara Downes, who was guest soloist this year with the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, took her evolving project, *Declaration: Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness*, to workshop sessions with community groups of all ages and backgrounds.

We launched the Big Ears podcast in collaboration with Fully Altered Media early in the year. The University of Tennessee introduced a class about Big Ears for their spring semester, nurturing an exciting, inspiring, and continuing interaction that takes interested students deeper into the cultural experience of the festival.

And there's so much more, yet it still feels as if we're in the early stages of this remarkable adventure.

You are a vital part of the extraordinary community that has grown around Big Ears and embraced its potential. Your support makes our work possible. Thanks to you, along with our dedicated Board of Directors, our small but mighty full-time staff, and the extended family of professionals and partners who join us in bringing Big Ears to life each year. We are empowered now more than ever to share the transformative and inspirational power of music, art, and community—and the beauty and potential of the human spirit—with those around us. When the imagination is nurtured and supported, anything becomes possible.

Thanks for joining us in this journey.

To a bright future!

ASHLEY CAPPS

Founder / Executive & Artistic Director



# Impact Areas

## ARTS PROGRAMMING

Weaving together performances of classical, jazz, rock, electronic, and a myriad of folk traditions, both regional and worldwide, Big Ears challenges traditional boundaries—both musical and cultural. Its kaleidoscopic programming explores both the diversity and common ground of different musical genres, while inviting audiences to step beyond the familiar, in a rewarding journey of exploration and discovery.

## ARTS ACCESS

Big Ears expands access to the arts by bringing educational activities led by festival artists directly into schools and community organizations, and by offering free public access to select festival venues and programs. Each year, we also support a long-running emerging artist scholarship and hands-on internship program. Beyond the festival weekend, Big Ears maintains an active, year-round presence across Knoxville with programs that engage students, youth, older adults, and more—broadening access to adventurous arts experiences that spark curiosity, build community, and open minds to an ever-expanding world of sound and creativity.





BIG EARS FESTIVAL

# 2025 Big Ears Festival





From March 27-30, 2025, the twelfth Big Ears Festival delivered four unforgettable days of immersive music, art, and connection. Programming included over 250 performances, discussions, workshops, films, exhibitions, and surprise collaborations—transforming downtown Knoxville into a beacon of sound and imagination. Across a walkable landscape of historic theaters, churches, museums, clubs, and outdoor venues, the city pulsed with energy as artists and audiences came together in a shared spirit of fearless artistic exploration and discovery.



**4** days

**25** venues

**252** performances, concerts,  
and presentations

**35k** visitors from 49 states  
and over 20 countries

# 2025 ARTISTS

[ahmed] Dedicated Men of Zion  
Adam Rudolph: Don Was  
Hu Vibrational & Sunrise Quartet Dougie Bowne & Matt Nelson  
Alabaster DePlume Edsel Axle  
Alan Sparhawk Eiko Ishibashi  
Allison de Groot & Tatiana Hargreaves Eliza McCarthy  
Amaro Freitas EMEL  
Ambrose Akinmusire esperanza spalding  
ANOJNI and the Johnsons eucademix (Yuka Honda)  
Anoushka Shankar Explosions in the Sky  
Antipop Consortium Fay Victor  
Arooj Aftab Fieldwork  
Arushi Jain Flore Laurentienne  
Astrid Sonne Fred Moten & Brandon Lopez  
Axiom 5 Free Form Funky Freqs  
Barry Altschul's 3 Dom ganavya  
Factor Geoff Dyer  
Beak-> Hank Roberts  
Béla Fleck, Edmar Castañeda, Sánchez Trio Helado Negro  
Beth Gibbons Ibelisse Guardia Ferragutti & Frank Rosaly  
Bia Ferreira iiisa  
Bill Frisell Immanuel Wilkins' Blues Blood  
Billy Collins James McVinnie  
Bob Holmes & SUSS Present: Across the Horizon Nights Jeff Parker ETA IVtet  
Brandon Seabrook Jenny Scheinman's All Species Parade  
Brighde Chaimbeul Jeremiah Chiu & Marta Sofia Honer  
Canzoniere Grecanico Salentino Jessica Pratt  
Carla Kihlstedt & Present Music Joan As Police Woman  
Carlos Niño & Friends Joe Boyd  
Cass McCombs Joe Lovano's Paramount Quartet  
Cassandra Jenkins Joel Harrison Free Country  
Chanel Beads Joel Harrison's Alternative Guitar Summit  
Charles Lloyd Jonny Greenwood's *133 Years of Reverb*  
Chuck Johnson Joseph Keckler  
Claire Chase Josh Johnson  
Clarice Jensen Joy Guidry: AMEN  
clipping. Joyful Noise All-Stars  
Cowboy Sadness Jules Reidy  
DakhaBrakha Julia Holter  
Dan Weiss Even Odds Trio June McDoom  
Darían Donovan Thomas Kahil El'Zabar's Ethnic Heritage Ensemble  
DARKSIDE Kalia Vandever  
David Grubbs  
Dawn Richard & Spencer Zahn





## ACROSS THE HORIZON

Curated by Bob Holmes and SUSS, *Across the Horizon* intersected Americana roots with ambient music. The unique program transported audiences into a sonic landscape that transcended genre.

## AGE OF REFLECTIONS

Big Ears partnered with *Age of Reflections* for an immersive residency. This curatorial platform transformed light, sound, and space, inviting audiences to connect with the sublime through music and visuals.

## BLACKTRONIKA

The 2025 King Britt-curated *Blacktronika* program delivered an electrifying mix of genre-bending brilliance. It featured Antipop Consortium and Free Form Funky Freqs, plus a special collaboration with Tyshawn Sorey, King Britt, Melz, and Meshell Ndegeocello.

## CARLOS NIÑO & FRIENDS

Carlos Niño's *Salons* offered a deeply spiritual journey. The event featured his *Subtle Movements Trio* and a transcendent first-time collaboration with Laraaji and Idris Ackamoor.

## EDWARD GOREY CENTENNIAL

Big Ears marked Edward Gorey's centennial with *26 Little Deaths*, Carla Kihlstedt's darkly whimsical song cycle performed with Milwaukee's *Present Music*. The program also featured adventurous works by Andy Akiho, Kamran Ince, and David Lang.

## JONNY GREENWOOD'S 133 YEARS OF REVERB

Master keyboardists James McVinnie and Eliza McCarthy gave the US premiere of Jonny Greenwood's eight-hour organ work in the historic St. John's Cathedral (built in 1892). The piece, which is titled to reflect the age of its venue, was billed as *133 Years of Reverb*. Inspired by the circular, gradual melodies of Indian Carnatic music, the composition aims for a sound that transcends the audible spectrum.



## 2025 ARTISTS

Kate Soper & Wet Ink  
Ensemble: *Ipsa Dixit*  
Kelly Moran  
Knoxville Opera  
Gospel Choir  
Knoxville Symphony  
Orchestra  
Kokayi  
Kramer  
Kris Davis Trio  
Lankum  
Lara Downes  
Lara Somogyi  
Laraaji  
Larry & Joe  
Les Claypool's Bastard Jazz  
Lia Kohl  
Lonnie Holley  
Luke Stewart Silt Trio  
Mabe Fratti  
Macie Stewart  
Magic Tuber Stringband  
Maria Chávez + Victoria  
Shen + Mariam Rezaei  
Marisa Anderson  
Marissa Nadler  
Mark Guiliana  
Maruja  
Mary Lattimore  
Melvin Gibbs  
Merce Lemon  
Meshell Ndegeocello  
Michael Hurley  
Michael Rother  
Mike Reed's  
Separatist Party  
Mivos Quartet  
Modney  
*Monochromatic Light*  
(*Afterlife*)  
more eaze  
múm  
Nanocluster  
(Immersion|SUSS)  
Nels Cline Consentrik  
Quartet  
Peni Candra Rini  
Phantom Orchard  
Phil Cook  
Philip Glass Ensemble:  
*Music in Twelve Parts*  
R.B. Morris &  
William Wright  
Rachika Nayar & Nina Keith  
Rich Ruth  
Rufus Wainwright  
Ryan Clackner's  
Existential Dread  
Sam Bush Band  
Sarah Rothenberg  
Shelley Hirsch  
SML  
Squanderers  
Steve Coleman and Five  
Elements  
Steve Lehman Trio + Mark  
Turner  
Steve Roach  
Steven Schick  
Still House Plants  
Sun Ra Arkestra  
Sunny War  
Susan Alcorn Tribute  
Swamp Dogg  
Sylvie Courvoisier:  
Chimaera  
Taj Mahal  
Tall Tall Trees  
Tarta Relena  
Tashi Wada  
Tessa Lark, Joshua Roman  
& Edgar Meyer  
The Nels Cline Singers  
Thor Harris  
Tigran Hamasyan  
Tilt  
Tindersticks  
Tortoise  
Tyshawn Sorey Trio  
Tyshawn Sorey, King Britt  
& Friends ft. Melz &  
Meshell Ndegeocello  
Username Password  
Wadada Leo Smith &  
Vijay Iyer  
Wadada Leo Smith: *CREATE*  
Water Damage  
Waxahatchee  
Wendy Eisenberg  
William Basinski  
William Tyler  
Wyatt Ellis  
Yaya Bey  
Yo La Tengo  
Zeena Parkins



### KATE SOPER'S *IPSA DIXIT*

Composer/soprano Kate Soper co-directed and performed with Wet Ink Ensemble. She presented *Ipsa Dixit*, an evening-length chamber music theater work exploring music, philosophy, language, and meaning.

### PHILIP GLASS: *MUSIC IN TWELVE PARTS*

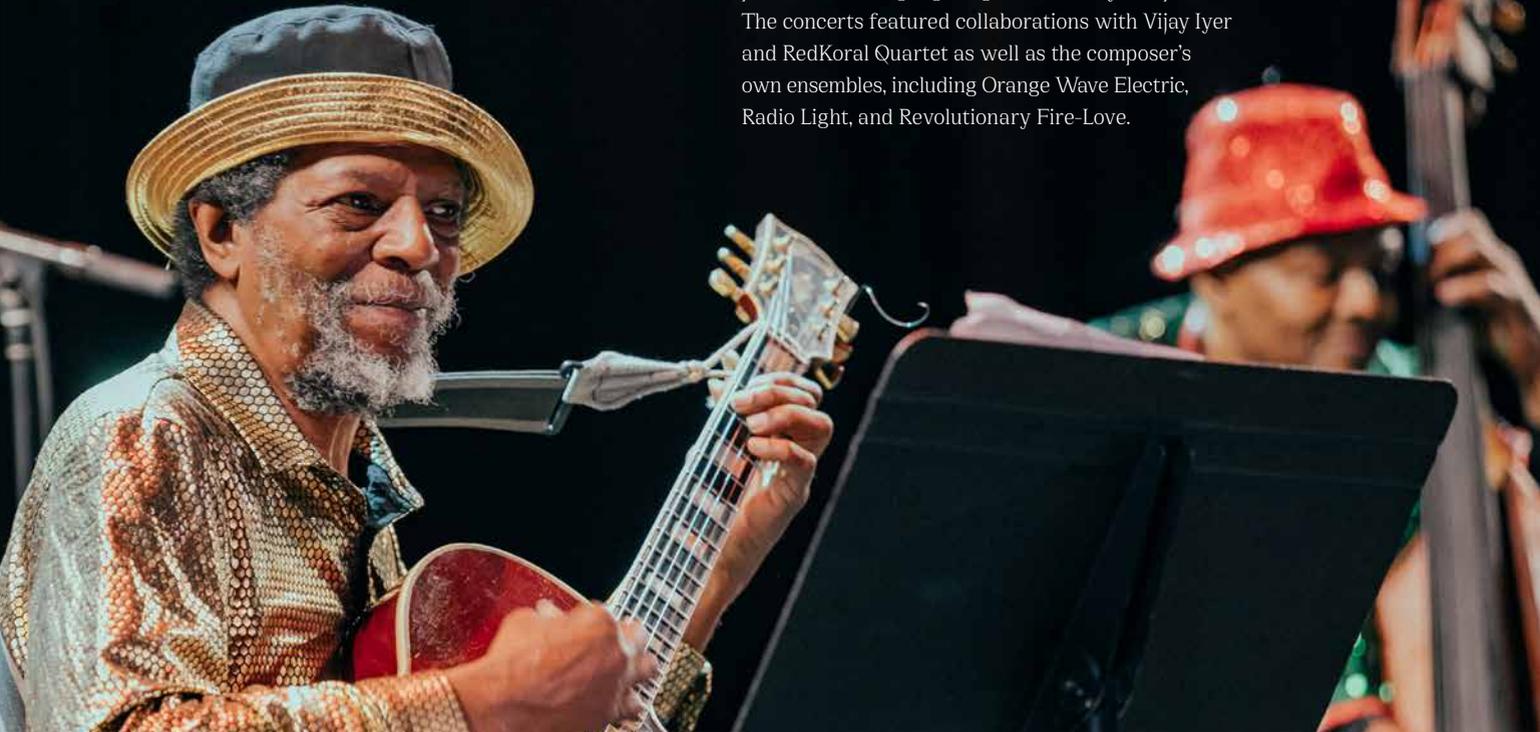
The Philip Glass Ensemble presented Philip Glass's seminal *Music in Twelve Parts* over two days. Composed between 1971 and 1974, this expansive work stood as an immersive theoretical and listening experience.

### TYSHAWN SOREY: ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

The musical universe of 2024 Pulitzer Prize-winner Tyshawn Sorey unfolded across seven performances. The Knoxville Symphony Orchestra performed *Adagio (for Wadada Leo Smith)*, and Sorey conducted two presentations of *Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)* with Kim Kashkashian, Sarah Rothenberg, Steven Schick, Davóne Tines, and the St. John's Cathedral Choir. He also presented his trio featuring Aaron Diehl and Harish Raghavan, as well as *Fieldwork* (with Vijay Iyer & Steve Lehman), a duo with Adam Rudolph, and a new collaboration with King Britt, Meshell Ndegeocello, and Melz.

### WADADA LEO SMITH: *CREATE*

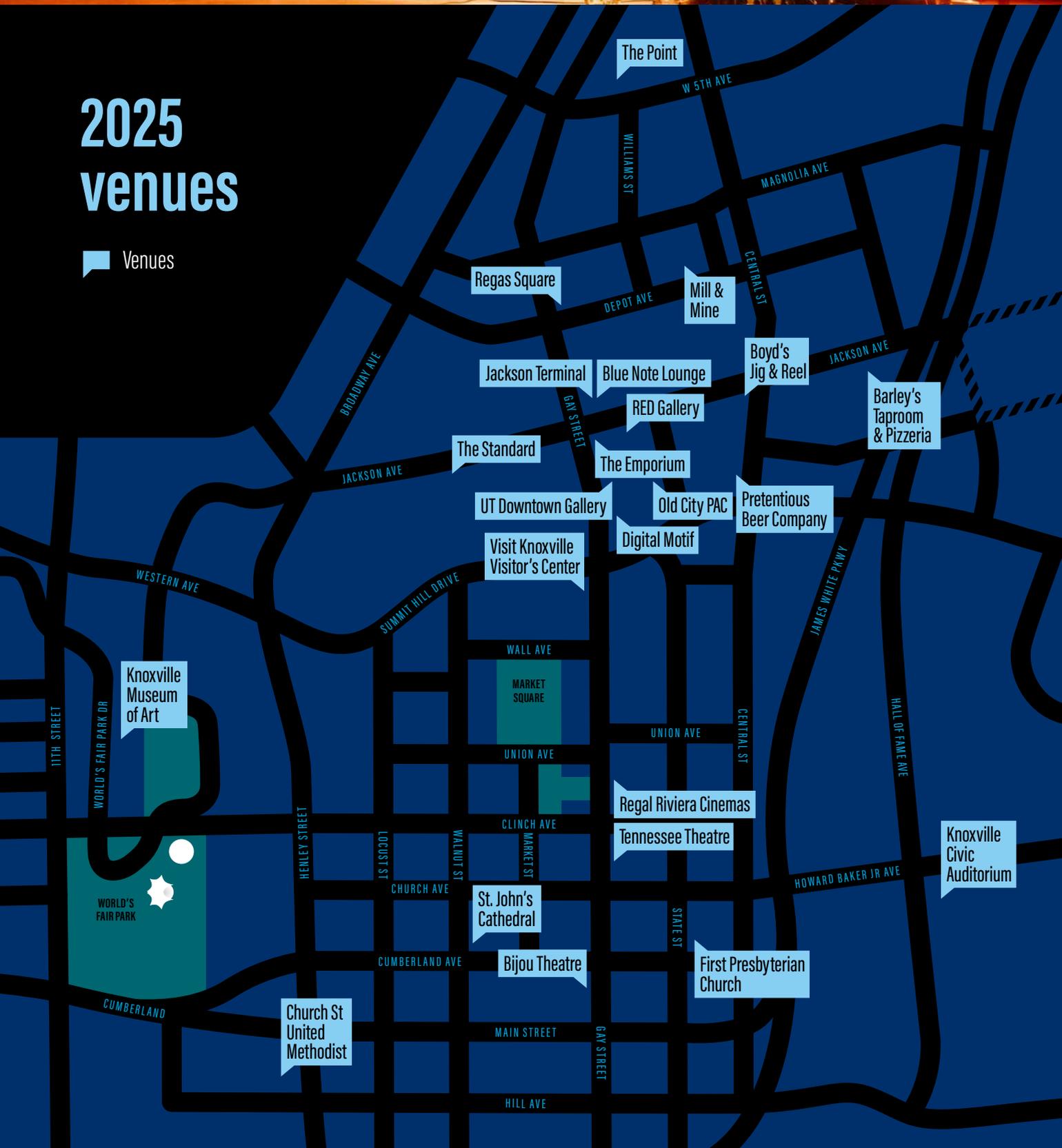
The legendary trumpeter, Wadada Leo Smith, presented the weekend-long *CREATE* program—a multi-faceted series of performances highlighting his visionary compositions. The concerts featured collaborations with Vijay Iyer and RedKoral Quartet as well as the composer's own ensembles, including Orange Wave Electric, Radio Light, and Revolutionary Fire-Love.





# 2025 venues

 Venues



## BIG EARS: CONVERSATIONS ABOUT MUSIC

This year, Big Ears debuted a new podcast, *Conversations About Music*. Seeking to highlight the artists, ideas, and spirit behind the festival, the podcast features conversations with artists about the creative process and the inspirations and influences behind their work, as well as offering behind-the-scenes insight and illuminating facets of the festival's programming. The initial episodes included guests Wadada Leo Smith, Tyshawn Sorey, Béla Fleck, Cassandra Jenkins, and Joe Boyd in conversations with leading writers and journalists like Nate Chinen and Ann Powers.

## BIG EARS FILM FESTIVAL

Filmmaker Lily Keber curated a vibrant, 16-film program that included *Eno*, Gary Hustwit's innovative, generative documentary about the legendary British musician; the riveting, award-winning *Soundtrack to a Coup d'Etat*, along with docs about one-of-a-kind artists Peaches, Fugazi, the post-Soviet punk scene, gospel traditions, and more. Guest curator Joe Boyd screened several films, including the Aretha Franklin documentary, *Amazing Grace*, along with creating a new audio-visual work specifically for the festival.

## BLUE NOTE RECORDS

Blue Note Records set up the Blue Note Lounge, which became a multifaceted hub and pop-up store designed to celebrate and bring the label's storied legacy to life. Throughout the festival weekend, the lounge hosted an engaging and active lineup of talks, panels, performances, and DJ sets, hosted by Blue Note president—and legendary musician and producer—Don Was.

## CHRYSANTHEMUM TEA WITH INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM

International Anthem celebrated its 11th anniversary with a daily residency at Boyd's Jig & Reel. Each day featured listening sessions, conversations, and surprise performances from the label's genre-defying artists.

## JOYFUL NOISE ALL-STARS

Joyful Noise injected a strong spirit of spontaneous adventure into Big Ears 2025 through distinct, boundary-pushing presentations. Most notably, the label curated a spectacular one-off improvised showcase featuring a diverse ensemble of its artists, including Wendy Eisenberg, Greg Saunier, and Thor Harris.







“...I really do think Big Ears is one of the best American festivals right now.”

**KATIE CRUTCHFIELD**, Waxahatchee

### WAYNE WHITE: *BIG WORDS*

Painter, puppeteer, animator, cartoonist, and Emmy Award-winning set designer Wayne White presented *BIG WORDS*, an exhibition of his word paintings at the Emporium Gallery. The three-dimensional texts imposed upon vintage landscapes often offered humorous and always thought-provoking commentary on vanity, ego, memories of the South, and the state of the world.

### PANGROK SULAP

The Borneo-based community arts collective Pangrok Sulap—meaning “punk rock hut”—joined forces with the University of Tennessee School of Art for printmaking workshops. The collaboration culminated in festival events featuring printmaking alongside live music.

### ROBERT LANGE & KRISTI SWORD: *KITE SYMPHONY & STAR SCORES*

*Kite Symphony*, a collaborative exhibition by Robert Lange (Helado Negro) and Kristi Sword at UT’s Downtown Gallery, featured a series of drawings, entitled *Radio Telescope*, a film documenting sculptural interventions in Marfa, Texas; and an experimental film, with live music performed by the artists and a rotating cast of Big Ears’ musicians.

### VIOLINS OF HOPE

The Violins of Hope: Strings of the Holocaust exhibition told the stories of the Jewish musicians and their violins that survived the Holocaust. Restored and preserved, these instruments now serve as powerful symbols of hope and survival.





COMMUNITY IMPACT

# Community Impact

ARTS, EDUCATION, AND ENGAGEMENT



In 2025, the Big Ears Festival deepened its commitment to making music, art, and culture accessible to a broader audience. By forging partnerships with public schools and local nonprofit organizations, Big Ears created unique avenues for youth and underserved communities to engage with the festival's diverse programming. These special initiatives—including hands-on workshops, free performances, and interactive art sessions—were specifically designed to inspire and involve new participants.

## FREE PROGRAMMING

To ensure the Big Ears experience is accessible to everyone, we offered a robust schedule of free programming beyond our ticketed events. In 2025, these complimentary concerts, panels, and interactive experiences—totaling over 40 unique programs—were held at three primary venues: the Knoxville Museum of Art, the Blue Note Lounge, and the Visit Knoxville Visitors Center. The free lineup showcased diverse talent like the Mivos Quartet, Larry & Joe, Laraaji, and Kalia Vandever, and featured compelling conversations with figures such as Fred Moten and Brandon Lopez, Charles Lloyd and Don Was, and Ambrose Akinmusire and Nate Chinen.

## BIG EARS SCHOLARSHIP

Big Ears is a vibrant center for creativity, community, and conversation. We believe this artistic dialogue should include as many people as possible. To foster creative growth and inspiration, we offer a scholarship program that provides free weekend passes to emerging artists and students. This year, we were proud to grant scholarships to thirty-three artists and students from across the country, with a special focus on supporting talent from right here in Tennessee.

This project was supported by Patti and John Haslett.

## VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are essential to the fabric of Big Ears Festival, serving as friendly faces who assist guests and artists alike while helping the festival run smoothly across every venue. In 2025, 138 volunteers donated an incredible 2,074 hours over the festival's four days, embodying the spirit of community that makes Big Ears possible.





## DEDICATED MEN OF ZION & KNOXVILLE OPERA GOSPEL CHOIR

A powerful musical partnership came to life when the Dedicated Men of Zion joined forces with the Knoxville Opera Gospel Choir. Supported in part by South Arts, this free, public performance brought the acclaimed North Carolina gospel quartet together with Knoxville's own ensemble, blending deep-rooted harmonies and soulful conviction with soaring choral power. After rehearsing together in the days leading up to the festival, the groups delivered a joyful, spirit-lifting event that brought audiences to their feet and embodied Big Ears' commitment to collaboration, community, and discovery.

## LARA DOWNES: THE DECLARATION PROJECT

Acclaimed pianist Lara Downes presented *The Declaration Project* at the festival, fostering community engagement through art and dialogue inspired by the nation's founding ideals: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. She visited the Boys and Girls Club, a YMCA after-school program, the Joy of Music School, and Metro Drug Coalition The Gateway to gather visual and written contributions. The residency concluded with a pop-up concert at the Blue Note Lounge featuring Big Ears artists and community members, showcasing student artwork. These contributions will be featured in a video installation at Lincoln Center in July 2026, celebrating the 250th Anniversary of the US.

## BIG EARS INTERNSHIP PROGRAMS

Big Ears maintains strong partnerships with the University of Tennessee (UT) and Pellissippi State Community College, offering students a chance to gain invaluable professional experience within a fast-paced festival environment. These internships allow students to apply their technical and problem-solving skills, helping to fast-track their careers.

### UT's School of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management

For the third consecutive year, a cohort of Hospitality Ambassadors from UT's School of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management supported the festival's artist relations team. These students ensured performers had the best experience possible, handling tasks that ranged from stocking green rooms to coordinating transportation to and from venues.

### Pellissippi State's Audio Production & Engineering Program

Media technologies students from Pellissippi State Community College's Audio Production & Engineering program joined professional staff in nearly every venue. Guided by department faculty, the students earned valuable firsthand experience in live-event audio engineering.



## BOUNDLESS: ARTISTS IN THE ARCHIVES

Each year, Big Ears collaborates with the UT Library Archives in selecting a musician to explore a facet of their collection. This year, renowned jazz pianist and composer Donald Brown drew inspiration from the papers of the great Knoxville-born painter, Beauford Delaney, composing an evocative suite premiered at the Knoxville Museum of Art as a prelude to the Big Ears weekend.

## BIG EARS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE

Professor Urmila Seshagiri of the Humanities Department at the University of Tennessee (UT) developed a unique course centered on Big Ears. Students took a deep dive into the artists performing at Big Ears 2025 in addition to studying the principles behind the festival and its cultural impact on Knoxville and the region. Special guests, including Big Ears staff and festival musicians like Lara Downes, add further dimension by offering insight into both the festival and the music business. Attending all four days of the festival is integral to the course, with students writing papers and making presentations afterwards about their observations and experiences. The course also nurtures synergy and interaction by bringing the students together with the Big Ears Scholarship participants during the festival weekend.



### 2025 COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Arts & Culture Alliance  
 Boys and Girls Club of the Tennessee Valley  
 Ijams Nature Center  
 Knoxville Community Media  
 Knoxville Museum of Art  
 Knoxville Opera  
 Metro Drug Coalition The Gateway  
 Pellissippi State Community College  
 RED Gallery  
 Rogers Memorial Baptist Church  
 Tennesseans for the Arts

The Joy of Music School  
 UT Downtown Gallery  
 UT Department of Humanities  
 UT Libraries  
 UT School of Art  
 UT School of Retail, Hospitality, and Tourism Management  
 Visit Knoxville  
 WDVX  
 YMCA of East Tennessee  
 YWCA of Knoxville and the Tennessee Valley





# Finances & Economic Impact

Big Ears attracts thousands of people to Knoxville from across the country and around the world. During the festival, attendees make downtown Knoxville and the surrounding neighborhoods their temporary home, supporting the local economy by filling hotels, dining at restaurants, and shopping at local businesses.

The 2025 Big Ears Festival experienced a significant rise in attendance, climbing by nearly 9.5% over the previous year.

## 2025 FINANCIALS



**TOTAL ASSETS**  
\$3,028,654

- Earned Income: \$3,009,494
- Foundation: \$860,140
- Individual: \$512,589
- Corporate: \$185,000
- Government: \$149,500

- Programming: \$3,949,906
- Administration & Development: \$778,347

## 2025 NONPROFIT DIRECT SUPPORT

Big Ears contributed **\$151,265** in fees and services to local nonprofit partners,

including the historic Tennessee and Bijou Theatres, the Knoxville Symphony Orchestra, Real Good Kitchen, numerous churches, and the Knoxville Opera.

Data is based on the 2025 fiscal year, which includes information captured from July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025.



## 2024 ECONOMIC IMPACT RESULTS

To quantify the festival's benefit to the community, Big Ears contracts Austin, TX-based AngelouEconomics to conduct an economic impact study every other year for the festival. The results provided below are based on the 2024 biannual economic impact report.

The next economic impact study will be conducted following the 2026 festival.

**\$69.8 million** was contributed to the Knoxville economy\*

**>\$24.4 million** in labor income was paid to Knoxville employees as a result of Big Ears\*

**567** full-time job equivalents were hired or sustained\*

\*Source: AngelouEconomics, Big Ears Festival 2024

"...definitely the single biggest weekend of the year, and among the most fun set of customers."

**SCOTT PARTIN**, The Tomato Head



"As always,  
it was dazzling  
in terms of its  
sheer dimension."

GOLDMINE MAGAZINE





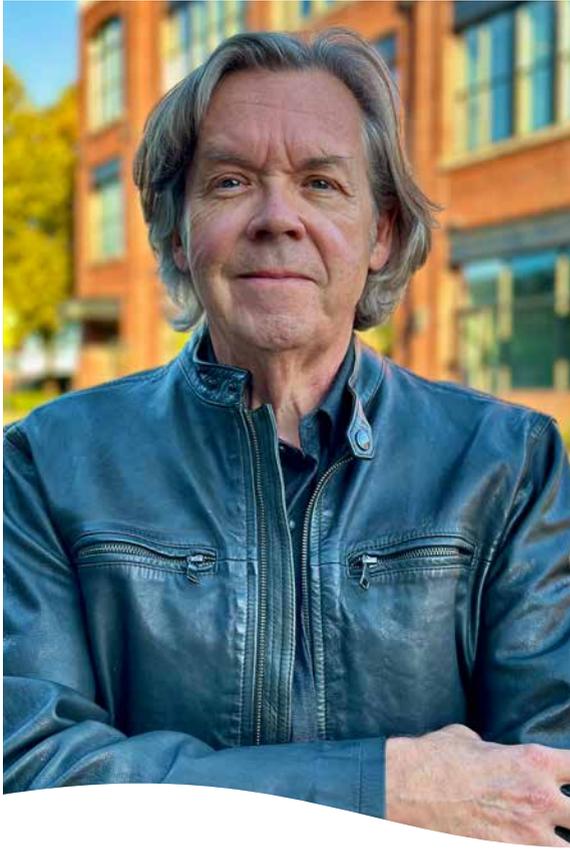
# A note from our Board Chair

The 2025 Big Ears Festival was yet another resounding success with over 250 performances in 25 venues centered around downtown Knoxville. Musicians, participants, and audience members came from 49 states and over 20 countries to this year's festival, reminding us again how Big Ears has evolved into an incomparable four-day event since its start in 2009.

Big Ears continues building on its mission to provide unforgettable experiences for artists and audiences alike. In the words of Big Ears' Founder and Executive & Artistic Director, Ashley Capps, "an extraordinary community has evolved around this festival, bound together by a shared curiosity, passion, and love for music and culture that defies boundaries and expands traditions—wild, tender, searching, and sublime."

In addition to Ashley, our dedicated staff and Board of Directors contribute to the success of each Big Ears Festival and associated events. As always, we are especially appreciative of our sponsors and donors who provide generous support, allowing us to continue forging community partnerships and reaching ever-widening Big Ears audiences. A key highlight was our community residency with renowned pianist Lara Downes. Through her *Declaration Project*, which commemorates the 250th anniversary of the United States, we engaged the community across multiple demographics in a meaningful exploration of our nation's founding promise: the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Although I have been a Big Ears Board Member since 2020 and a festival participant since the beginning, this is my first year as Chair of our mission-focused Board of Directors. Alongside Ashley, the Board, and our staff, I am truly honored to help guide Big Ears into an auspicious future full of excitement and possibilities.



Thank you for all of your contributions and support, which are so essential to our mission and successes. The 2026 Big Ears Festival is already shaping up to be another transcendent and enticing experience with new and returning artists, collaborations, and experiences. We are grateful for your continuing support of Big Ears and hope you will join us March 26-29, 2026, in Knoxville.

With gratitude,

Mark Grayson  
2024-2025 Chair  
Big Ears Festival Board of Directors



# Thank you to our donors

JULY 1, 2024 THRU JUNE 30, 2025

We have carefully reviewed the names that are listed. However, if you find an error or omission, please accept our apologies and contact us so we can correct our records.

✉ [development@bigearsfestival.org](mailto:development@bigearsfestival.org)

## \$10,000 AND GREATER

Alex Rigopulos & Sachi Sato  
Ann & Steve Bailey  
Anonymous  
Anthony B. Creamer III  
Ashley Capps & Birgit Clark  
Barbara Lewis  
Chuck & Anne Parrish  
Chuck & Robin Schlacter  
Jessica Haywood & Alex Smith  
John & Patti Haslett

## \$5,000 - \$9,999

Andrew Ari Clibanoff & Denise Beth Gotsdiner  
Brenda & Joseph Zanola  
Dave Lake & Linda Wright  
Deborah Franklin  
Dr. Jeffrey & Susan Aronowitz  
James & Pamela Given  
John Sanders & Gina Lisenby  
John Taunton  
Kathy Lindenmayer  
Ken Rees & Jeanne Gulner  
Marin VanHoy & Jamie Lewis  
Phillip Lawson  
R.J. Hinde & John T. Winemiller  
Randy Goodman  
Scott Partin  
Stephanie Bush & Jill Nilson  
Tom & Laurie Lee

## \$2,500 - \$4,999

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