



Trump plans to become chair of the Kennedy Center. Here are 3 things to know

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Bob Mondello



President Trump speaks to reporters at the White House on February 03, 2025, in Washington, D.C.

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[President Trump](#) plans to fire several Board members at Washington D.C.'s John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. And to the surprise of many in the arts world, on Friday, he said he would name himself chairman. Here's why any of that matters.

1. He wants to chair a board. Is that important?

Admittedly, this seems like small potatoes compared with the President's proposed annexing of [Greenland](#), the [Panama Canal](#), Canada and [Gaza](#), but in the years since the Kennedy Center was first proposed in the late 1950s, it has had an outsized impact on how the American public views culture. Besides being home to the National Symphony and the Washington Opera, not to mention Broadway touring companies, dance troupes, jazz, blues, and pop concerts, the Center is also a national monument — a white marble temple situated on the banks of the Potomac in the nation's capital.

That gives it unmatched cachet and international prominence. At the height of the Cold War, when the Center brought the Bolshoi Ballet and the Ballet Nacional de Cuba to the U.S. for the first time, that was a statement about the soft power of cultural diplomacy that President Kennedy had referenced at an early fundraiser for the Center in 1962.

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"Today, as always," he told a glittering crowd that included opera singer Marian Anderson and an eight-year-old cello prodigy named Yo-Yo Ma, "art knows no national boundaries. Genius can speak in any tongue, and the entire world will hear it. And listen."

For that reason, it has always striven to represent everyone — its board bipartisan, evenly split between Democratic and Republican members — and its programming broad, from bluegrass to hip-hop, drawing room comedy to avant-garde happening.

2. Why is President Trump taking control?

Trump has a tangled history with the Center. In his first term, he [skipped](#) the Kennedy Center Honors ceremony when some honorees declined to meet him for a reception at the White House. He ended up skipping all four years, the first President ever to do that. But his post on his social media platform, [Truth Social](#), doesn't mention that backstory. He says that he's firing the Board chairman [Carlyle Investment Group co-founder David Rubenstein] and other members who "do not share our vision for a Golden Age in Arts and Culture." He didn't specify who else he fired, but the membership includes singer Jon Batiste and *Grey's Anatomy* creator Shonda Rhimes. What the President *did* mention as a rationale was a claim that "Just last year, the Kennedy Center featured Drag Shows specifically targeting our youth — THIS WILL STOP."



PERFORMING ARTS

Trump plans to name himself chair of Kennedy Center, fire board members

I looked back through last year's bookings and there were a couple of drag brunches in the Center's rooftop restaurant, a lip-synched *Drag Salute to Divas* at its free Millennium stage, and a single full-fledged production: comedian Kris Andersson's silly solo show [Dixie's Tupperware Party](#). All those shows are aimed at adult crowds. But *Dixie's Tupperware Party* played at the Center's 324-seat Family Theater, so named to make it sound more inviting than the much larger Opera House and Concert Hall, each of which has more than 2000 seats. The theater's moniker is, for the record, just a name — I've caught lectures and films at the "Family" Theater, just as I've seen concerts and plays at the "Opera" House.



ANALYSIS

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3. Where do things go from here?

That's all President Trump has mentioned so far, but the Kennedy Center's top brass got a [letter](#) on Jan. 24, just four days into the new administration, from two Republican congressmen — Rep. Christopher Smith of New Jersey and Rep. John Moolenaar of Michigan — accusing the Center of "subsidizing Chinese Communist Party propaganda," by presenting a five-day run of performances by the National Ballet of China. So that might be a hint of things to come. It's sobering if you remember that at the height of the Cold War, the Center brought the Bolshoi Ballet from Russia, so it's kind of baked into its DNA.

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president trump

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national symphony orchestra



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