

THE VILLAGE TRIP™

A FESTIVAL OF ARTS AND ACTIVISM

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NEW YORK, NY - SEPTEMBER 15, 2026 — The Village Trip Festival celebrates Paul Robeson – Artist, Activist, Renaissance Man

“As an artist I come to sing, but as a citizen, I will always speak for peace, and no one can silence me in this.” — Paul Robeson

By the time he died, in January 1976, Paul Robeson had been all but invisible for a couple of decades, persecuted and isolated by a government that weaponized fear to suppress free speech and civil rights. A dark time to which we thought we would never return. Yet fifty years on, our times are even darker as government forces – their powers made more dangerous and wide-ranging by technologies we can’t fully comprehend – seek to intimidate all who dissent from its views.

Paul Robeson was a true renaissance man. A professional football player and lawyer as well as an actor and singer, he used his great voice to speak out against injustice wherever he saw it, and to sing out for the dispossessed, whatever the personal cost. “Artists are the gatekeepers of truth,” he once said. “We are civilization’s radical voice.” A giant of a man, literally and metaphorically, he refused to be intimidated, and he stands today as an example to us all of courage amid the greatest adversity.

The Village Trip, the annual festival celebrating arts and activism across Greenwich Village and the East Village/Lower East Side, will honor Paul Robeson as one of its “Revolutionary Voices” with a special concert on Sunday September 27 at St. Mark’s Church-in-the-Bowery, an institution which has long been a beacon of justice and civil rights. **Let Freedom Sing: Paul Robeson – His Words, His Music: A Tribute** features acclaimed baritone James C Martin and pianist Lynn Raley. The special concert will also feature a world première of settings by Village Trip Artist Emeritus David Amram and other composers, including Augusta Read Thomas, Chen Shih-hui, Erik Santos, Robert Wellington Pound, and Maria Thompson Corley of words by Robeson’s great friend and fellow activist, the poet Langston Hughes, leader of the Harlem Renaissance.

Said James Martin: “My mother brought Paul Robeson into my world when I was in sixth grade. I couldn’t know then how important his legacy would be for me as a performer, and as an advocate for equality and human rights. Somehow he was able to traverse beyond just white and black spaces. In the middle of Jim Crow, Paul Robeson was an international superstar performing to sold-out audiences in the finest houses around the world. His admirers ranged from field hands to African kings. That was what so impressed and inspired me. Here was a black man who seemed in control of his own destiny and there was no one who could meet him at his level. You had to step correct to even think about approaching this giant among men, and he was my role model.”

Paul Robeson’s rise to stardom is rooted in the avant-garde and bohemian culture of 1920s Greenwich Village. In 1924, he was cast as the lead in Eugene O’Neill’s *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* at the Provincetown Playhouse, a performance that launched his illustrious theatrical career. In 1925, he gave the first concert dedicated to African-American songs at the Greenwich Village Theater on West 4th Street, George Gershwin among the audience. And in 1926, he posed nude for sculptor Antonio Salemme in his studio on Washington Square North. Robeson was a frequent patron and intellectual presence at Café Society on Sheridan Square, America’s first racially integrated nightclub where Billie Holiday premièred “Strange Fruit.” Café Society was a hub for radical politics and music, aligning with Robeson’s lifelong commitments.

The day following the concert, Monday September 28, James Martin and Lynn Raley will be part of a public conversation exploring Robeson’s impact as artist and activist.

This Hammer Can’t Kill Me: Paul Robeson, His Music and His Story will be hosted by HB Studio, artistic home to Uta Hagen, who played Desdemona to Paul Robeson’s *Othello* on Broadway.

The Village Trip’s 2026 theme, Revolutionary Voices, comes at a particularly fraught moment. As the United States celebrates the 250th anniversary of its founding, the festival looks both backward and forward—to the voices that challenged the status quo in generations past and to the artists and activists continuing to ask difficult questions, create new forms, and imagine a better world.

The Village Trip 2026 runs September 25 through October 4 across Greenwich Village, the East Village, and the Lower East Side. A full list of events, schedules, venues, and ticket information is available at the festival’s official website:

<https://www.thevillagetrip.com/>

ABOUT THE VILLAGE TRIP

The Village Trip is a 501(c)(3) non-profit festival where arts and activism meet. Each autumn, it brings the songs, diverse voices, and stages of past and present Greenwich Village and the East Village together again – for New Yorkers who call these streets home, and for anyone who's looking for a place where a better world gets a fresh start. A full list of board and advisory board members is available at:
<https://www.thevillagetrip.com/the-village-trip-board-of-directors>

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