

SHOWCASE



HOUSE OF COMMON

Actor-rapper teaming with orchestra for a Millennium Park 'experience'

Common strikes a pose at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion, where he says he and the Grant Park Orchestra will be making "our own musical movie in a way." PAT NABONG/SUN-TIMES

BY ERICA THOMPSON, STAFF REPORTER
ethompson@suntimes.com | [@miss_ethompson](https://twitter.com/miss_ethompson)

For this week's Millennium Park 20th anniversary celebration, Common and the city's cultural planners are putting together what could be a quintessentially Chicago moment.

Just imagine the sound of a live orchestra swelling behind the Chicago-born artist as he raps a line from his song "The Corner": "These are the stories told by Stony and Cottage Grove."

"We will be creating our own musical movie in a way," Common said. "The corners I'm talking about are not far from where we are. I think we're creating an experience."

Backed by the Grant Park Orchestra, Common will take the Jay Pritzker Pavilion stage on July 20 to perform a free show as

part of the four-day celebration of the park's anniversary. Though the artist will revisit past hits at the concert, he is not resting on the laurels of his decadeslong career. Given his new album with producer Pete Rock, acting stint on the Apple TV+ sci-fi drama "Silo," and aspirations to do more theater, Common is as active and motivated as ever. He said he found inspiration in the energy and performances tied to the 50th anniversary of hip-hop last year.

"It kind of brought that joy back to me," Common said in an interview last month at the Jay Pritzker Pavilion. "And I think that's what you hear in the music that Pete Rock and I created with this album. The spirit of it is like the '90s, but it sounds new. And I do believe in creating new classics."

Released Friday, "The Auditorium Vol.

1" has generated four singles — "Wise Up," "Dreamin'," "All Kind of Ideas" and "Fortunate" — that feature Common's trademark witty wordplay over Rock's vibrant, throw-back beats.

"Pete told me that he had always wanted to do more than just one song with me," Common said. "And I always revered him as one of the greatest producers to come out of hip-hop."

The project also includes appearances from Bilal, PJ, De La Soul's Posdnuos and Common's girlfriend, Jennifer Hudson.

Common said working with Hudson was "organic," and he praised her performance on the soulful song called "A God (There Is)."

The couple hinted at their relationship when Common appeared on Hudson's talk show in January.

COMMON WITH THE GRANT PARK ORCHESTRA

When: 7:30 p.m. Saturday

Where: Jay Pritzker Pavilion, 201 E. Randolph St.

Admission: Free

Info: millenniumpark.org

"We had been asked about things and I felt like her show was the best place to talk about it," he said. "If we're gonna talk about it, it's in a space that is our space. And we could talk about it and not talk about it again. We tried to just be ourselves and be true and enjoy the moment."

"It had an approach that was a little bit '70s, like in the vibe of Aretha Franklin," Common said. "When I heard the sample we had, I was like, 'Man, Jennifer would sound great singing on this.' And she just elevated the song."

Common also praised Hudson's decision to purchase and restore the Ramova Theatre with partners Chance the Rapper and Quincy Jones.

"All three of them have meant so much to the city, and they continue to do things for our city, and that is just another testament to their love for Chicago," he said.

But did he feel left out of the trio's plans? "I can't be a part of everything," he said, laughing. "I definitely believe in coming to Chicago and rethinking things, renewing things, and just creating elevated experiences and opportunities for people. So, I could see myself doing something [similar]."

Common said he could also see himself acting in theater productions based in Chicago venues like the Steppenwolf Theatre — something he has yet to do. But he said he did strengthen his acting chops when he made his Broadway debut in "Between Riverside and Crazy" in 2022.

"It was life-changing and life-enhancing," he said. "It was truly like a dream. I was like, 'Can I do this?' And I felt like I walked on water in a way, meaning I just went out on my faith and had one of the greatest creative experiences I ever had."

Given that transformative experience, is there now a part of him that wants to win a Tony Award so he can achieve EGOT (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony) status?

"All of me, not part of me," he said, laughing, before expounding.

"Nothing in my career has been about chasing an award," he said. "Now, after I create the project, if it feels like it's resonating in that way, then, yes, I want that [award]. ... To get acknowledged for the work you do in that way would be amazing. I just want to keep putting my heart and soul into the work that I do and let God handle it."