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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
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**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**TRANSCRIPT: MAYOR DE BLASIO, COMMISSIONER CASALS ANNOUNCE OPEN CULTURE PROGRAM**

**Mayor Bill de Blasio:** All right. Well, it is cold outside, but our hearts are warm. Isn't that right, Commissioner? All right. So, everybody look -- talked about it in the State of the City, and I talk about it everywhere I go, we need a recovery for all of us. We need a recovery that brings back the life and the heart and the energy of this city, and that everyone gets to be a part of. And we're going to do that. We're going to really bring back the heart and soul of New York City, we need arts and culture back, and we need people to see it and feel it, to participate in it, to know that that essence of New York City has not been defeated by the coronavirus, but will come back strong in 2021. That's what we're here talking about today, how we bring back arts and culture, how the creativity of New York City comes to life again. This morning, we talked about Curtains Up NYC, an effort to make sure our arts and cultural institutions get the federal support they deserve as they revive. Now, we talk about the Open Culture Program, Open Culture, bringing culture to the people in the streets of the city. Month after month in 2021, as you see the city come back to life, culture will lead the way. And we know that even the worst, toughest moments of this last year, our cultural community helped us sustain our hope. They found new ways to express life in the city, help us to reflect, help us to find a path forward. That's what we depend on. Our cultural communities is our conscience, our cultural community is our hope and our identity as New Yorkers. And now we will be bringing our cultural community back to the greatest stage in the world, the streets of New York City. Here to tell you all about it, our Commissioner for the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and someone who believes in culture for the people, Commissioner Gonzalo Casals.

**Commissioner Gonzalo Casals, Department of Cultural Affairs:** Muchas gracias, Mr. Mayor. How's everybody doing? Yes, warm hearts, that's what we want to hear. As the Mayor said, New York City is not New York without arts and culture. Arts programming brings people together, it's strengthens our community, and puts people to work, which is very important. Although culture never really closed, you know, cultural organizations continue to engage New Yorkers online through senior centers and public schools and helping every family in New York City to make sense of the changes brought by the pandemic. But at the same time, they expanded the role in their mission in our communities. They became sites for food pantries, vaccination centers, and early voting locations. But many, many venues continue to remain closed, and we want to help them thrive and we want to help them, you know, support our artists. So today, we are here to announce Open Culture.

Open Culture is another step towards our recovery for our city. We are launching with 115 street locations in all five boroughs, and it brings stages to our neighborhoods and culture to the heart of our neighbors and give artists cultural institutions and creatives a place to showcase their talents as they recover from the pandemic. This is a free permit, and the city has dedicated a team to help organizations with application process and connect them to resources. I want to thank

Executive Director Ellyn Canfield from the Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management and her team for the steadfast work to implement this program. I also want to thank Commissioner Castillo from the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment for her ongoing partnership with us. For any other questions, the details that you want to learn about this amazing program, you can go to [nyc.gov/openculture](http://nyc.gov/openculture). Thank you.

**Mayor:** Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Commissioner, and everyone, the idea is to make this simple, to make an accessible, to bring cultural institutions of all kinds, of all communities, out into the streets to engage people, give them energy, give them hope, and as the Commissioner says, for that to work, we have to clear the way, we have to cut the red tape and make it simple. I want to thank all my colleagues in government who are doing that. Of course, Commissioner Casals and Commissioner del Castillo, who joined me this morning, and Executive Director for our Citywide Events Office, Ellyn Canfield, thank you, Ellyn. And our Nightlife Czar, or Czarina, Ariel Palitz, who hates red tape, helps cut through it all the time. Thank you for all you do. Everyone, we're going to make this work. We saw with Open Restaurants, we cut the red tape, we made it simple, if you build it, they will come. 10,000 restaurants took advantage and took street space and sidewalk space and made it something beautiful. This is going to be the cultural equivalent, bring culture out into the streets of the city for all to enjoy for free. And with that, someone who fought for the idea of bringing back culture strong, and he is the chair – the energetic chair of the Cultural Affairs Committee in the City Council, Council Member, Jimmy Van Bramer.

[...]

Thank you, Council Member, and I loved your word choice of among culture breaking out all over the streets, what a perfect segue, an amazing dance company in Harlem that believes in bringing culture to the people and believes in representing the culture of this whole city and including all the people of the city, the Elisa Monte Dance Company of Harlem, and here to tell you about this extraordinary organization and the performance they're going to provide to us today, my pleasure to introduce leader of this great organization, Daniela Funicello.

[...]

Well, just to conclude, that is just beautiful and isn't that amazing? Give them another round of applause. We thank them. Just a small sampling of what it's going to be like to have culture out in the streets of this city, giving us hope, giving us energy, bringing back to life in New York City, and this is going to be a recovery for all of us. You'll watch and see in the weeks and months to come something beautiful happen in New York City. Thank you, everybody.

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