

# NEVER TURN BACK

## ECHOES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC



John Coltrane  
Photo by Lee Friedlander

# SYNOPSIS

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## NEVER TURN BACK: ECHOES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MUSIC

The enduring strength of gospel, blues, jazz, and soul musicians is captured through a photographic lens, illuminating their cultural and musical impact in *Never Turn Back: Echoes of African American Music*. *Never Turn Back: Echoes of African American Music* focuses on the profound and resilient musical expressions of African American Gospel, Blues, Jazz, and Soul musicians through photography. The title, *Never Turn Back*, draws from the Negro Spiritual “I’ll Never Turn Back No More” by Mahalia Jackson.

The exhibition navigates through the foundations of Gospel music and the origins of Blues in the Mississippi Delta, highlighting the resilience and storytelling embedded in early African American musical traditions. It features evocative photographs that capture the raw emotions, struggles, and triumphs of artists, while spotlighting iconic moments from the lives and careers of musicians who leave an indelible mark on American music. The exhibition’s graphic design blends vibrant visuals, era-specific listening stations, and immersive lighting, with each section reflecting the genre’s cultural spirit through music, fashion, stage aesthetics, collaborations, and historic music spaces. Photographs and ephemera together create a rich visual narrative of these vibrant music scenes. Select artifacts, such as instruments and costumes, further weave a holistic story of historic moments that continue to shape modern African American music.

*Never Turn Back* embodies the spirit of artists who use their music and lives to push forward against the challenges and determination they face as African Americans. The exhibition captures their soulful narratives, musical innovations, and the cultural impact that continues to resonate through time.

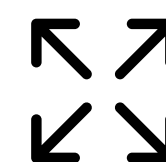



Louis Armstrong and Velma Middleton  
Credit - Photograph by Lee Friedlander

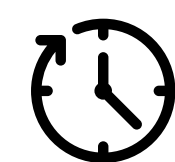
# EXHIBITION OVERVIEW




Eartha Kitt and Dizzy Gillespie  
Credit - Photograph by Lee Friedlander

 3,500-7,500 square feet of gallery space required

 Available:  
After March 30, 2027

 Rental Period:  
Minimum of 13 weeks

 Language: English +  
Various digital guides  
(See Overview of Specs slide)

## TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience of *Never Turn Back* is not only people who already have familiarity with these musical genres, but also those interested in learning more about African American music history. This exhibition also provides an overview of blues, jazz, soul, and gospel history, making it interesting for those still unfamiliar with the genres.

## LIST OF EXHIBITION ELEMENTS

### ARTIFACT HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

- Performance images of artists such as Aretha Franklin, John Lee Hooker, Etta James, Willie Mae Thornton, Buddy Guy, and many more!
- Displays of prominent and rare Gospel, Jazz, Blues, and Soul albums.
- Booklets and sheet music from early 20th century artists.
- Two vintage juke boxes, blues club sign, a Michael Jackson Stage-Worn costume, and other 2D + 3D artifacts from the MOPOP permanent collection.
- Five interactive listening + sampling stations that highlight each genre within the exhibition.





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**NEVER TURN BACK EMBODIES THE SPIRIT OF THESE ARTISTS WHO USED THEIR MUSIC AND LIVES TO FORGE AHEAD OF THE CHALLENGES AND DETERMINATION THEY FACED AS AFRICAN AMERICANS.**

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# OVERVIEW OF SPECS

## SPACE REQUIREMENTS

(ceiling height, minimum access dims, environment)

- Ceiling height is a minimum of 10ft (size of the tallest exhibit component).
- Empty crates and shipping blankets required 400 sq.ft of clean, dry storage.
- A space between 3,500 -7,500 sq ft required

## SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

- During opening hours, trained museum security staff, professional guards, and/or monitored cameras must be present.
- Alarm system, cameras and/or guards are required during closed hours.

## SHIPPING

One truck - Hosting institution is responsible for providing Certificate of Insurance prior to shipping.

## INSTALLATION TIME

MOPOP recommends 10-14 days for installing this exhibition. 5-7 days are required for deinstall.



VIEW OF NTB AT MOPOP

# OVERVIEW OF SPECS (CONT.)

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## POWER AND LIGHTING

- A minimum of 10 dedicated circuits at 20 amps, 120 volt circuits, and a minimum of 10 dimmable circuits for the house artifact lighting (hosting venue to provide lighting fixtures)
- Dedicated full-power circuits for exhibit casework and AV hardware
- Sufficient outlets and/or power supplies to distribute exhibit circuits to components within exhibit
- Sufficient lighting fixtures, with UV filters and a variety of lamps, lenses, and filters to adjust the beam spread and intensity
- Light fixtures require UV filters and a compliment of lamps, lenses and filters to adjust the beam spread. Non-artifact items can have slightly higher light levels.
- A MOPOP technician/registrar will establish light levels. Hosting venue is responsible for maintaining and monitoring light levels.

## INCLUDED/ NOT INCLUDED

### INCLUDED:

- 2D and 3D artifacts from MOPOP's permanent collection.
- All exhibition didactics.
- Select screens for films and interactives.
- Interactive listening stations for each exhibition section.
- Hip-Hop sampling station interactive.
- Large format film containing multiple sections from MOPOP's Oral History collection
- 3 GOBOs

### NOT INCLUDED:

- Artifacts on loan from other museums.
- Certain mounts.
- Large-scale wall graphics.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### EXHIBIT ELEMENTS:

- (1) Oral history film featuring prominent artists from MoPoP's personal collection.
- Exhibit Soundtrack available via Spotify

### 3D GALLERY TOUR

Inquire to request a link to the 3D gallery tour of the exhibit.

### LANGUAGES

English.

Large print and digital guides available in both English and Neutral Spanish.

### AVAILABILITY

After March 30, 2027

# CREDITS

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## PHOTO CREDITS

1. Otis Spann, Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, Muddy Waters, James Cotton, Luther "Georgia Boy" Johnson, Francis Clay and Samuel Lawhorn - Photograph by Jim Marshall
2. Billy Eckstine, Joe Newman and Eddie Jones in performance - Photograph by Lee Friedlander
3. Aretha Franklin - Photograph by Lee Friedlander
4. Otis Redding - Photograph by Jim Marshall
5. Mahalia Jackson - Photograph by Lee Friedlander
6. Quincy Jones - Courtesy of Quincy Jones





# CONTACT US

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[mopop.org/traveling-exhibitions](https://mopop.org/traveling-exhibitions)

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