

The Perry Mansion Cultural Center

The Blending of Cultures Through Art

"Without art, the crudeness of reality would make the world unbearable."
~George Bernard Shaw

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THE WALLS THAT BUILT COMMUNITY: THE PERRY MANSION CULTURAL CENTER STANDS STRONG

Chicago, IL – April 15, 2025

Event Details:
The Perry Mansion Cultural Center will host a **Reopening Celebration** on **May 17th, 2025, from 5pm to 11pm**, featuring a headline performance by **Sir Kahil El'Zabar**, world-renowned multi-percussionist, composer, and jazz visionary.

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On Chicago's South Side on South Perry Avenue stands a house that refuses to be forgotten. Tall, proud, and full of life, the Perry Mansion has lived many lives. Some too heavy to bear, some too beautiful to lose.

It has seen the best and worst of Englewood. Once the largest drug den in the neighborhood, it was burned out, boarded up, and left to rot… a wound in plain sight. But even at its lowest, something about it lingered. Something that told Sam Smith, a lifelong believer in the power of community, that this house still mattered.

In 2005, Smith decided to act. Not because it was easy, or because anyone asked him to, but because he believed Englewood deserved better. He poured in time, resources, and hope—until broken walls began to hold something new: life.

The Perry Mansion became the Perry Mansion Cultural Center, a space where art, history, and community could find a home. It wasn't just about restoring a structure. It was about creating something that belonged to the people.

The mansion has hosted jazz brunches, open mic nights, and youth programs that made it more than just a venue. Inside, poets have spoken truth, children have danced and painted their way into possibility, and exhibits like *Tortured Souls* have opened powerful conversations about the legacy of the slave trade.

Then came the silence.

The pandemic shuttered the center. The voices, music, and laughter fell quiet. But if you've ever been inside the Perry Mansion, you know this place doesn't go still easily. Even in darkness, its spirit stayed awake.

Now, the silence is breaking.

On May 17th, from 5pm to 11pm, the Perry Mansion Cultural Center will reopen its doors, and it won't whisper its return. It will sing.

Headlining the celebration is Sir Kahil El'Zabar, a frequent collaborator with fellow legends like Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, and Paul Simon. El'Zabar has performed on the world's biggest stages for over six decades. But on this night, he'll perform in an intimate space that, like his music, carries memory, rhythm, and spirit. His ancestral sound will awaken something sacred inside these walls. The very same walls that have held

pain, joy, and everything in between. His performance will mark not just a homecoming, but a reawakening.

Because on May 17th, these walls will talk. They will echo every note and hum every horn. They will say: *we're still here. We're still standing. And we're not done dreaming*.

This isn't just a reopening. It's a return. A revival. A reminder of everything this space has been and everything it's still becoming.

