



For Immediate Release

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GRAMMY-NOMINATED, MILWAUKEE-BASED CELLIST MALIK JOHNSON TO RETURN AS THE 2026 BETTY BRINN CHILDREN'S MUSEUM ARTIST-IN-RESIDENCE

MILWAUKEE, WI (January 7, 2026) – The Betty Brinn Children's Museum is excited to welcome back Milwaukee-born musician and music educator Malik Johnson as its 2026 Artist-in-Residence. Johnson will provide three types of in-Museum programming during his 2026 residency:

- **Performances:** Sit back and listen or get up and dance along during one of Malik Johnson's 30-minute cello performances.
- **Toddler Talkbacks:** These community conversations for parents and kids are designed to explore social-emotional learning areas like positive self-expression and dreaming big dreams. Led by Malik Johnson in partnership with other community leaders.
- **Making Music Series:** You don't need fancy instruments to make music as a family. Join Malik Johnson for hands-on programs to learn how to use common home materials to create unique DIY instruments.

Johnson's first performance will take place on Wednesday, January 7 at 10 a.m., and programs will take place throughout all of 2026. Dates and times for upcoming Artist-in-Residence programs can be found at <https://bbcmkids.org/artist-in-residence/>.

The 2026 Betty Brinn Children's Museum Artist-in-Residence is sponsored by Dr. Michael & Susan Goldstone. Thanks to their investment, the Artist-in-Residence programs are included in general Museum admission, so there is no additional cost to Museum visitors to participate.

Now in its second year, the Museum's Artist-in-Residence Program is a powerful tool to amplify the impacts of play-based learning. Music is proven to help strengthen cognitive abilities, enhance fine and gross motor skills, foster emotional and social growth, and build family connections. Through singing, dancing and playing instruments, children engage multiple brain areas and develop crucial skills for later life, including: memory and problem-solving skills, language acquisition, literacy and numeracy skills, hand-eye coordination, emotional regulation, social skills, and creativity.

"We are thrilled to welcome Malik back to the Betty Brinn Children's Museum in 2026," said Tina Quealy, CEO of the Betty Brinn Children's Museum. "During his first year as our Artist-in-Residence, Malik created moments of joy, connection, and confidence for children and families through music. Watching kids light up as they moved, listened, and expressed themselves was a powerful reminder of how deeply music supports early learning, emotional growth, and family connection. Malik's work embodies the kind of intentional, educational experiences we strive to create at the Museum, and we're excited to build on that impact in the year ahead."

During his 2025 residency, Malik Johnson shared nearly 10 hours of live cello performance with Museum guests; hosted four hours of Toddler Talkbacks alongside guest panelists including children's author Dionne Grayson, author and literacy expert Maya Smart, Milwaukee-based actor N'Jameh Camara, and Pink Umbrella Theater Executive Director Katie Cummings; and led three social-emotional learning sessions. All of these experiences culminated with the composition of an original song titled "Ready to Go (to Betty Brinn)."

About Malik Johnson

Malik Johnson, a.k.a. "99TheProducer," is a Grammy-nominated classically trained cellist, composer and music producer based in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Malik has been passionately teaching music to youth across Illinois and Southeastern Wisconsin to help them discover the transformative power of music. He has had the honor of performing alongside artists like Stevie Wonder, John Legend and PJ Morton. Malik continues to produce for various artists, blending his classical training with modern sounds to create music that inspires and connects with audiences of all ages.

About Betty Brinn Children's Museum

Through the power of play, the Betty Brinn Children's Museum (BBCM) fosters joy, confidence and curiosity in children and families, inspiring a journey of lifelong learning. BBCM is dedicated to ensuring that all children have access to its immersive, educational exhibits and programs designed to promote the social, emotional and intellectual growth of children from birth through age 10. The Museum opened in 1995 and serves nearly 175,000 visitors each year at its downtown Milwaukee location.

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