Music Theatre Program Events

In 2020-21, the music theatre program is hosting several events with leading theatre artists of color who have expertise in musicals.

To learn more about how you can be involved in upcoming events, including how to RSVP for the Info Session about these programs on Thu 10/1 at 5pm, view this flyer.

Michael R. Jackson Residency

Winner of the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his musical *A Strange Loop*, writer/composer Michael R. Jackson will visit the week of February 15, 2021 as the Hope Abelson Artist-in-Residence. The virtual residency will include visits to classes, a public Q&A, workshops for performers, dramatists, composers, and lyricists, and more.

Kelsey Pharr, Jr. Speaker Series

This new series brings leading musical theatre artists from diverse backgrounds to speak directly with students about a life in the theatre. The 2020-21 series will be held virtually, and will feature leading directors Lili-Anne Brown (*School Girls, The Color Purple*) and Jess McLeod (resident director, Chicago company of *Hamilton*), as well as Jeff Award winning writer and performer Brian Quijada (*Where Did We Sit On The Bus?*). Scroll down for speaker bios.

Schedule:

- Lili-Anne Brown - Oct 16 @ 5pm
- Jess McLeod - Winter TBD
- Brian Quijada - Spring TBD
About Kelsey Pharr, Jr.

Kelsey Pharr, Jr. with Louise Foster in *Don’t Look Now*, The Waa-Mu Show (1937)  
with the Delta Rhythm Boys

The Kelsey Pharr, Jr. Speaker Series is named in honor of one of Northwestern’s earliest Black alums who went on to success in musical theatre. Kelsey Pharr, Jr. (1917-1961) starred in the Waa-Mu Show in 1937 and 1939 and then performed in four Broadway shows and toured the world as a member of the vocal group the Delta Rhythm Boys.

The Kelsey Pharr, Jr. Speaker Series and Michael R. Jackson’s Abelson Residency are curated by professors Masi Asare and Roger Ellis.

2020-21 Pharr Series: Speaker Biographies

**LILI-ANNE BROWN**, a native Chicagoan, works as a director, actor and educator, and has performed in, directed and produced many award-winning shows, both local and regional. She is the former Artistic Director of Bailiwick Chicago, where she focused programming on Chicago-premiere musicals and new play development with resident playwrights. Recent credits include *School Girls, or The African Mean Girls Play* and the world premiere of Ike Holter’s *Lottery Day* at Goodman Theatre, and *The Color Purple* at Drury Lane Theatre. She is a member of SDC, AEA, and SAG-AFTRA, a graduate of Northwestern University, and represented by William Morris.
Endeavor. Check her out at [www.liibrownchicago.com](http://www.liibrownchicago.com).

**JESS MCLEOD** specializes in new work about American otherness and recently served as Resident Director for the three-year run of *Hamilton* Chicago. Regional credits include *There’s Always the Hudson* (Woolly Mammoth**paused for COVID), *Pride and Prejudice* (Long Wharf) and *Hype Man* (Actors Theatre of Louisville). Chicago credits include *Wolf Play*, *Hang Man* (The Gift); *Venus* (Steppenwolf Next Up!); *Do You Feel Anger?, Fulfillment Center* (A Red Orchid, Ensemble Member); *Landladies* (Northlight); *How We Got On* (Haven), SS! *Midsummer* (CST), *L-Vis Live!* (Victory Gardens), and *Marry Me A Little* (Porchlight Music Theatre). NY credits include work by Joyce Carol Oates and *The Unauthorized Musicology of Ben Folds* (NYMF Director of Programming, 2005-08). Jess was the Goodman’s 2017 Michael Maggio Directing Fellow and a 2018 Artistic Fellow at Victory Gardens. She has created operas with Chicago community groups (Lyric Opera) and musicals with incarcerated teens through Storycatchers Theatre, and is currently developing *Mill Girls* (by Diana Lawrence & Samantha Beach) and the multi-disciplinary *Redline Project*. MFA, Northwestern. [www.jess-mcleod.com](http://www.jess-mcleod.com)

**BRIAN QUIJADA** is actor, playwright, composer, and Artistic Director of The Wild Wind Performance Lab for New Play Development at Texas Tech University. Quijada has spent most of his career acting in Off-Broadway and Regional Theaters including The Public Theater, Roundabout Theatre Company, Playwright’s Realm, Ensemble Studio Theatre, Victory Gardens, and Actors Theatre of Louisville. As a playwright/composer, Brian’s plays and musicals have been developed at Pittsburgh CLO’s Spark Festival, Victory
Garden’s Ignition Festival, Ars Nova’s Ant Fest, New York Stage and Film’s Powerhouse Festival, The Kennedy Center’s Page-to-Stage, and The O’Neill’s National Musical Theatre Conference. Commissioning institutions include Seattle Repertory Theater, A.R.T., 1st Stage, and The Kennedy Center. His play Kid Prince and Pablo, recently received its World Premiere at The Kennedy Center Fall of 2019. His critically-acclaimed multi Jeff award-winning, multi Drama Desk nominated show Where Did We Sit in the Bus? has toured all over the country.

As an educator, Quijada has taught solo performance, social justice, verse writing, digital music, and devised theatrical looping master classes at Carnegie Mellon University, Point Park University, University of New Mexico, Western Washington University, Hunter College, Carlow College, Slippery Rock University, Los Medanos College, and KC ACTF Region 7 and Region 3.

Brian is a proud member of The Ensemble Studio Theatre. www.brianquijada.com