

HICKORY
COMMUNITY **THEATRE**



MEMPHIS
A NEW MUSICAL

BOOK AND LYRICS BY JOE DIPIETRO • BOOK AND LYRICS BY DAVID BRYAN • BASED ON A CONCEPT BY GEORGE W. GEORGE

BEHIND / BEYOND
THE SCENES / THE STAGE

AUDIENCE ENLIGHTENMENT GUIDE

THE REAL LIFE INFLUENCES IN MEMPHIS

MEMPHIS is a musical with music by David Bryan, lyrics by Bryan and Joe DiPietro, and a book by DiPietro. The show is loosely based on the story of Memphis disc jockey Dewey Phillips, one of the first white DJs to play black music in the 1950s. It played on Broadway from October 19, 2009 to August 5, 2012, winning four Tony Awards, including Best Musical.

MEMPHIS is set in the places where rock and roll was born in the 1950s: the seedy nightclubs, radio stations and recording studios of the musically-rich Tennessee city. With an original score, it tells the fictional story of DJ Huey Calhoun, a good ole' local boy with a passion for R&B music and Felicia Farrell, an up-and-coming black singer that he meets one fateful night on Beale Street. Despite the objections of their loved ones (Huey's close-minded mama and Felicia's cautious brother, a club owner), they embark on a dangerous affair. As their careers rise, the relationship is challenged by personal ambition and the pressures of an outside world unable to accept their love. Although MEMPHIS is a fictional story, it is influenced by several real issues, both past and present.

At the time the show takes place, Huey and Felicia's budding romance is against the law and dangerous. Tennessee, and 25 other states, had anti-miscegenation laws that enforced segregation by criminalizing both interracial intimate relationships and marriages. In 1963, in an article by Robert E. Lee (not that one, a different one) with the North Carolina state bar association, it stated, "Six states, including North Carolina, have regarded the matter of such importance they have by constitutional provisions prohibited their legislatures from passing any law legalizing marriages between Negroes and white persons. The present Constitution of North Carolina says such marriages 'are forever prohibited.'" While still too late, it was only another 4 years that this law remained in effect, because of the landmark Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia*. The plaintiffs in the case were Richard and Mildred Loving, a white man and black woman who had gotten married in Washington, DC but faced trouble when they returned to their home state of Virginia. Their marriage was deemed illegal according to Virginia state law. With the help of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the Lovings appealed to the U.S. Supreme

Court, which ruled unanimously that so-called "anti-miscegenation" statutes were unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment. The decision is often cited as a watershed moment in the dismantling of 'Jim Crow' race laws.

Memphis in the 1950s was, for the most part, two distinct cities: Black Memphis and White Memphis. Subject to the humiliation of Jim Crowism, blacks in Memphis were forced to create their own community, with its symbolic capital as Beale Street. When they dared to enter White Memphis, blacks were met with a world that deemed them inferior, exposing them to segregated facilities and a nearly zero chance of employment opportunities above the level of janitor. In the 1950s, most black males worked as operatives, laborers, and service workers, while black females worked mostly as domestics. During this period, the NAACP actively fought to desegregate the city's highly segregated institutions. Suits were filed in 1956 and 1957 to open up the city's buses and libraries to persons of all races but progress was slow. The *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision by the U.S. Supreme court to desegregate was handed down in 1954, but Memphis City School Board officials took over 6 years before the first integrated classes met in 1961.

MEMPHIS is loosely based on the story of Memphis disc jockey Dewey Phillips, one of the first white DJs to play black music in the 1950s. He was also the first DJ to play Elvis' debut single "It's Alright" and is credited by some as being the one to discover the man who would become a legend. In this guide, Brian Daye - director of MEMPHIS at HCT - will enlighten you about the true roots of the music.

In MEMPHIS, Delray tells Huey, "It ain't the music of your soul, baby. It's the music of my soul. And my soul don't want your soul stealin' none of my music." Later, Delray further explains to Huey, "But you ain't lived this music! You ain't made this music! It ain't your music to take!" The show raises serious questions about the line between borrowing and stealing from another culture. Today these same questions exist in music, fashion, hairstyles, and even slang. So, what is cultural appropriation, and how do we know if we're crossing the line? Check out Dr. Tiffany Christian's article in this guide for some answers.

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN INFLUENCE IN POPULAR MUSIC



by Brian Daye - Director of MEMPHIS

Without sounding too arrogant, there is no Popular Music without African-American influences. Or Latino influences, or some kind of cultural infusion to “make the musical example a little sweeter”. One can easily look at Popular Music without the African-American influence as a meal without

ANY seasonings or flavor. Totally bland and tasteless - devoid of any kind of heft or definition. Now that doesn't at all diminish the power, influence and imprimatur of the African-American influence and Spirit that pervades Popular Music. Again, the meal without the seasonings. Some may call the influence, the meal itself. That statement can be left for greater minds than ours. Potentially. Nevertheless, the greater question needs to be asked – What IS Popular Music?

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines “Popular Music” as “Music written and marketed with the intention of achieving mass distribution and sales now principally in the form of recordings.” Oxford Languages defines “Popular Music” as “Music appealing to the popular taste, including rock and pop, “soul”, country, reggae, rap and dance music.” The characteristics of “Popular Music”, still from Oxford Languages, are “having a good rhythm and a catchy melody that is easy to remember and sing along to. There is usually a chorus that's repeated several times with two or more verses. Most pop songs are between two and five minutes long, and the lyrics are usually about the joys and problems of love and relationships”.

Now, that's how the “standard-bearers” deemed “Popular Music”. The late host Dick Clark on *American Bandstand* asked certain dancers on the show what they thought about any newly released song he would showcase before it was released nationally. That segment was called “Rate-A-

Record”. Overwhelmingly, the dancers said the song they heard was “catchy and had a nice beat”. Merriam-Webster, Oxford Languages and Dick Clark seemed to have been strange bedfellows.

Conversely, Don Cornelius from Chicago created alternative programming that ultimately eclipsed *American Bandstand's* prominence and completely provided a platform for all African-American artists looking to create a space for themselves. The program was named *Soul Train* and every Saturday morning (at least in my neighborhood) new and established acts performed – and lip-synced on stage in front of The Soul Train Dancers and America.

That said, the American appetite for Popular Music has been consistently evolving, fluid and ever-changing.

The African-American Influence on Popular Music has been a natural anchor for the ebb and flow of not just cute and catchy songs, but it has also been a natural barometer for the nation. Whether we created and enjoyed it freely OR whether it was stolen from us. From the enslavement of Africans in the United States IF and after we survived the Middle Passage, the one thing we kept intact with each other despite the horrors of chattel slavery was our sense of communication with one another. If it was the drum, or the banjo, or the kalimba or the fiddle or our mother tongue being forced to adapt to this strange and unfamiliar land, we used these instruments and our wits to simply survive. Survival lent itself to a behavior. Behavior lent itself to familiarity. Familiarity lent itself to adaptation. Adaptation lent itself to the beginnings of the creation of a narrative. The creation of a narrative lent itself to building – or revising – a way to communicate and speak intrinsically with and



to each other. Those ways ultimately included a creative form of music that spoke not only from the motherland but a bastardized acclimation to plantation life. This creativity, for all intents and purposes, saved our lives while experiencing the most horrifying time in American History. Period.

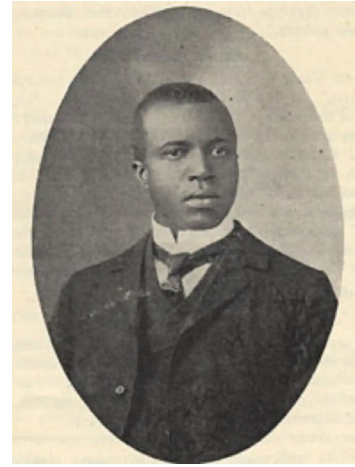
What began as initial machinations and social gatherings on plantations grew to in some instances a form of entertainment, which made plantation and slave owners take notice. A misguided thought pattern of “happy darkies” also made entertainers and entertainment promoters take notice and ultimately create America’s first form of entertainment – the Minstrel Show. This was the first real “family-friendly” form of cultural enjoyment for Americans. At the expense of enslaved Africans. As early as the mid nineteenth century, the Minstrel show struck an entertainable and enterprising nerve with the American conscience. Traveling and touring White Minstrel acting companies mimicked African-American plantation life and wore burnt cork on their bodies while exaggerating “Slave” behavior on stage. In addition, Thomas “Daddy” Rice gained worldwide acclaim creating the Minstrel character, “Jump Jim Crow”, which signified the Minstrelsy genre and transmogrified



American Influence on Music AND Culture took shape, and we had no control over it whatsoever at the time – even through our continued enslavement.

Minstrelsy continued – as a practice, as mainstream entertainment and part of American culture – through the ending of the Industrial Revolution, the Dred Scott decision, the Emancipation Proclamation, Juneteenth, Lincoln’s Assassination, Reconstruction, Plessy v. Ferguson, the infancy of the Film industry and ultimately giving birth to a child named Vaudeville in and around 1910. It must be noted there were a very small handful of African-American owned Minstrel shows that

toured fairly extensively throughout the South during the turn of the last century. Despite the reality of minstrelsy, African-Americans began to take



shape individually in the budding entertainment industry – albeit in a hardscrabble manner. Interestingly, songwriters began gaining a foothold in getting their own types of entertainment recognized by way of sheet music being sold to venues and music halls. The sheet music business opened the

door ultimately for the record business. By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the music form known as Ragtime began to take shape and Scott Joplin, an African-American composer of ragtime songs literally had his musical hand on the pulse of American musical tastes. Scott Joplin’s music was actively being sold and legendary songs like “Maple Leaf Rag” were enjoyed by White and Black Americans. Ragtime was scoffed at in many circles – particularly by affluent African-Americans who were overly conscious of the music “hindering the race”. Scott Joplin died in 1917, but his music clearly started the ball rolling.

Quoting from Nelson George’s, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues*, the term “SELLING RACE” was active and sheet music companies fully recognized how much money they could and would make by catering to “a new business model”. RACE MUSIC became the defining term for our music at the time. Another example of this was the massive hit, “The Saint Louis Blues”, written by New Orleans composer W. C. Handy in 1914 and performed by the legendary blues singer Bessie Smith. St. Louis Blues was so popular it was made into a 1929 short film starring Ms. Smith. She too lived a short life, but she clearly is one of the greatest singers who ever lived. Her life drove the discussion of the power of the Black presence in Popular Music.

When we talk about African-Americans who influenced Popular Music, the most significant

transcendent figure throughout the first seven decades of the 20th Century is unquestionably Louis Daniel Armstrong.



Louis Armstrong was a WORLD figure. His connection to the American Musical Soul is undeniable. From beginning his career at the end of the Ragtime era, to the beginnings of American Classical Music (i.e., Jazz), to his presence lasting between two World Wars, the Korean War and the beginnings of the Vietnam War, to his own “Hot Fives” and “Hot Seven” bands and him revolutionizing the idiom known as Jazz, to his pivotal entrances into film and television, to him singlehandedly evolving the American Musical Palette where “swing” and “rhythm” were required parts of Popular Music. Whether you called him “Pops” or “Satchmo” or “Louie”, an argument can easily be made that Louis Armstrong WAS Popular Music.

Two women who were pivotal in how Black women were eventually received, recorded and centered in American Popular Music are Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday (born Eleanora Fagin). Between the late 1930s through the early 1990s, both women held the ear of American Popular Music. Ella on



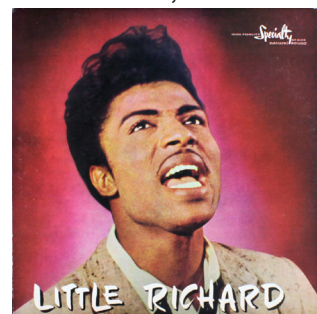
more than one occasion had the Great American Songbook as her musical palette and was christened “The First Lady

of Song”. Billie was deemed one of the greatest songstresses of the 20th Century and was simply named “Lady Day”. Where Ella “scatted” her way to immortality, Billie gave new meaning and illustration to what became known as a “Torch Song” - slow, deliberate and intentional in its beauty and delivery. Both women were pure and true artists with nothing (not even a terrible heroin addiction that afflicted Billie) standing in the way of their individual crafts. Another argument can be made that Billie and Ella made America listen to a

woman’s interpretation of how to sing a song.

As the United States had won World War II and soldiers had come home from fighting for “Democracy”, tastes and morays had changed and the after-effects of the war left a lasting impression on American culture. The changing climate became younger and more restless – and portable, to an extent. Transistor radios became wildly popular with young people and more and more homes had Televisions in them, especially after the enormous success of NBC’s *Milton Berle Show*. The connection to seeing talent on a regular basis and connecting that talent to music that spoke to a younger generation made an enormous change in American Musical tastes. During the mid-1950s African-Americans were still battling racism from every facet of American life, but there were incidents that led Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Thurgood Marshall, Rev. Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. and Dr. Martin Luther King to begin resisting the racist climate that had been endured for so long by their predecessors and adopting activism to move themselves and our people forward. The changing tide of resistance was also reflected in American Popular Music.

Richard Penniman, aka Little Richard, Chuck Berry, Jackie Wilson, The Platters and other similar acts electrified young White and Black America – largely to their parents’ chagrin in the 1950s. Billboard Magazine was and still is the recording industry bible and the truth of Popular Music tastes and trends are always found on the weekly Hot 100 chart. Plus, every one of these artists had multiple hits reflected on the Pop Charts and the Rhythm and Blues/R&B Charts. (Another note: Elvis Presley was called “The King of Rock and Roll”, but had Big Mama Thornton not recorded and released “Hound Dog”, his worldwide ascendance based on his own recording of that song may not have come to pass at all.) Another artist, nowhere near as radical who still made history with every record he made and song he sang was Nat “King” Cole – a brilliantly talented jazz pianist and leader of the King Cole Trio whose silken voice



and smooth appearance gave America a reason to follow his music. Even if Advertising companies refused to advertise on his one season long TV show. “The Christmas Song” recorded by Cole is the universal anthem to celebrate Christmas annually to this day. A legendary artist influenced by Nat “King” Cole in his own way took the baton from Louis Armstrong symbolically for the second half of the 20th Century and gave American Popular Music an entirely new way to hear an existing genre. His beginnings were enormously challenged, however. Going blind from glaucoma at age seven, Ray Charles gave the world Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, Gospel from his heart, blazed trails in each genre he touched and further continued the argument on the power and influence of African-Americans in Popular Music. But in 1962, Ray Charles recorded two albums that single-handedly changed the industry – *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music, Volumes One and Two*. Country Music had never been given the breath, depth and technological advancement that these two albums had. “Brother Ray” had completely opened a new door for Country Music to be heard and experienced, further cementing the presence of African-Americans foothold in Popular Music. More building blocks supporting the argument.

The 1960s meant upheaval for the United States in so many ways – American Popular Music was no different. Just as Black men were making their mark in the music industry, Black women were making their own strides with added sexism and racism in their collective faces. John Hammond, an influential talent scout and record producer for Columbia Records was on track to making his second major influential discovery (Billie Holiday was his first). An 18-year-old enormously talented Gospel singer from Memphis by way of

Detroit was brought to his attention. Aretha Franklin already had an influential background by way of her father, Rev. Cecil Franklin, whose sermons were broadcast nationally and he was named “The man with the

Million Dollar Voice”. (He had his own following and led a path for Aretha to, at the very least, watch and learn from.) Aretha’s voice helped lift Rev. Franklin’s presence even higher and drew attention to John Hammond. She didn’t have real success at Columbia however – when she left and signed with Atlantic Records, her success took off and America returned the favor in the form of “RESPECT” and numerous additional songs. Aretha at the height of her success was given the title of “The Queen of Soul” and was one of the world’s best-selling artists. Her impact on American Popular Music was undeniable.



James Brown, born in South Carolina and moved to Augusta, Georgia at age five literally and figuratively exploded on the music scene in no uncertain terms. His funk laden,

horn-heavy, powerful and rich songs became anthems for the Black community and his fierce, uncompromising stage presence gave him the permanent titles ‘Mr. Dynamite’, “Soul Brother No. 1” and the “Godfather of Soul”. By him saying it loud that he was Black and proud, James Brown’s presence and style of R&B and Funk opened yet another door musically for himself and culturally for African-Americans and socially conscious “mainstream” Americans. His style of music became a ‘BIG TENT’ presence for the recording industry, which I’ll explain further on.

Probably the most monumental and permanent presence during the 1960s wasn’t so much a person as it was a label, which became an ideal and a state of mind. Berry Gordy, a Detroit native and former professional boxer was also a budding songwriter and record producer. After a string of local and national hits, most notably “Lonely Teardrops” for Jackie Wilson, Gordy borrowed \$800 from his family to create and build a record company. The result became Motown Record Corporation – incorporated on April 14, 1960. Berry Gordy established a partnership and relationship





with fellow songwriter and producer William “Smokey” Robinson, who founded his own group, the Miracles while on the label and set his own mark on American Popular Music. Motown

(short for Motor Town) not only introduced a bevy of new artists and groups to the American Music scene, but each of these acts presented themselves in a professional, highly cultivated and crisp manner – more than likely to be palatable to American audiences. Motown soon became known as simply “The Motown Sound” because of how immediately recognizable the music was and how instantaneous the good feeling was when the music was played. And - Motown was also identified as “The Sound of Young America”. Totally indicative of where the label was culturally for American Popular Music tastes and particularly for Young American teenagers. Specifically, young White teenagers. The marketing from Berry Gordy’s perspective was brilliant. Lastly, Motown formulated a "BIG TENT" presence for the Recording Industry whose performers retain legendary status and moved the label into the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. The following artists illustrate that fact

Martha Reeves and the Vandellas

Smokey Robinson and The Miracles

The Four Tops

Jr. Walker and the All-Stars

Stevie Wonder

The Temptations

Diana Ross and the Supremes (her career exploded after she left the Supremes to forge her solo career while still on the Motown label)

Mary Wells

The Commodores (lead singer Lionel Richie left the group in 1982 to forge his own successful solo career while still on Motown)

Marvin Gaye (his career with Tammi Terrell was

cut short due to her death. Her death, along with his depression over her death and his growing dissatisfaction with America’s involvement with the Vietnam War in the 1970s co-created the classic album “What’s Going On” – despite Berry Gordy’s initial misgivings about the album narrative)

The Jackson Five (Michael Jackson with his brothers left Motown for CBS Records. He forged one of the most successful, herculean and earth-shattering solo recording careers ever known. His solo album *Thriller* was released in 1982 and produced by the legendary and prolific music producer Quincy Jones. *Thriller* became the best-selling album of all time with worldwide sales of 70 million copies and won eight Grammy Awards in 1984. Michael Jackson became synonymous with the American Musical Conscience. Period. He became ingrained into American Culture and was given the title, “King of Pop. The title lasted until his death in 2009).



With James Brown being mentioned earlier in this piece, his BIG TENT presence led to another music genre altogether – from the streets of New York – starting in the mid-to-late 1970s. Young African-American teenagers within the five boroughs of New York City were thoroughly engaged in buying and listening to Black Music, yet the neighborhood DJ’s running the parties were experimenting with enhancing those parties to build up the crowd’s excitement. A very interesting convergence took place – DJ’s from the Bronx, Harlem, Southeast



Queens and Brooklyn began taking parts of records and mixing them with parts of other records, thereby creating a new song with a unique beat based on the combination of the songs played on the DJ's turntables. This practice included what was called "scratching and mixing". In large measure, parts of James Brown's prior records were played outright along with parts of other songs. What became of that literally and figuratively created a new genre and a new generation of listeners who would have been completely ignored by mainstream America and, truthfully, upscale Black listeners who initially rejected this style of music and behavior. Rap and Hip-Hop music grew like wildfire from coast to coast. The culture in some sad instances bred violence and drug-based lifestyles, but Rap & Hip-Hop changed the recording industry permanently. Lifting artists like Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five, The Sugarhill Gang, The Sequence, Salt 'N' Pepa, Roxanne Shante', Run-DMC, NWA, Busta Rhymes, Nas, Fat Joe, Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G, LL Cool J, Queen Latifah, Queen Pen, Public Enemy, Full Force, The Fresh Prince and countless other acts out of obscurity and into...the American Popular Music conscience. Inclusive of myriad detractors to this day, yet if you walk or ride past young people's cars, they are hands down listening to Rap and Hip-Hop. That supersedes race, culture and class – to this very hour. Billboard and other trade publications reflect that fact outright.

EPILOGUE

The century we live in continues to be fluid and everchanging. Musical tastes are no different. The American Musical Palette is the same. As the artists reflected in this article changed their own lives and the lives of the music buying public as well as the country where this music was produced, we need to have an open mind about how what we listen to is truthfully reflective of who we are as human beings. Ultimately, generationally and historically, the song remains the same.

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Samuel Floyd, Jr's *The Power of Black Music*

MEET BRIAN DAYE



MEMPHIS is the HCT directing debut of Brian Daye, a Charlotte-based theatre professional who has been working in the industry for over 35 years. He is an experienced theatrical director and writer of new works and established plays since

2007. Over the course of his career, Daye has directed several productions, including: *FENCES* by August Wilson, *TUESDAYS WITH MORRIE* by Mitch Albom and his original play *VOICES FROM THE MARGIN* at the Lee Street Theatre; *DAUGHTERS OF THE MOON* by Reginald Edmund for the Actor's Theatre of Charlotte NuVoices New Play Festival; *HOME* by Samm-Art Williams and *TRIBE* by Nichole Gause for OnQ Productions; and *NEWS OF THE DAY/MIDDLE AGE CARELESSNESS* at Theatre Charlotte. He has written, produced and directed four productions of his own original play *ONE IN THE SPIRIT* - centered on three African-American couples living in the Southeast US - at the Warehouse Performing Arts Center in 2009, Story Slam Charlotte in 2010, Sensoria Arts Festival in 2011 and the Atlanta Black Theatre Festival in 2012.

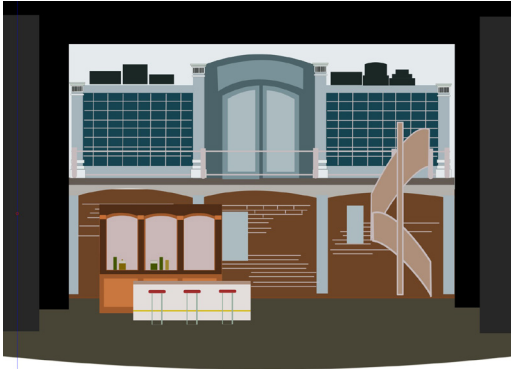
His work as an actor includes the roles of Hoke in *DRIVING MISS DAISY*, Sheriff Atkins in *BOOK OF DAYS*, Mr. Atkins in *SEVEN BRIDES FOR SEVEN BROTHERS* and George Murchison in *A RAISIN IN THE SUN*.

His film and television credits include: *Drop Dead Diva*, *Prisoners*, and *Why Did I Get Married Too?*, as well as local independent films like *Ebbing* and *A Social Love Affair*. He has appeared in commercials and industrial videos, as an actor or voice actor for Colonia Life, Home Depot, Lowe's Home Improvement and Wachovia.

He holds both a Bachelor of Science Degree in Corporate Communications and Bachelor of Arts in Theatre from Southern Connecticut State University. He now lives in Charlotte with his wife Val Brown-Daye.

CHECK OUT THE SET FOR MEMPHIS

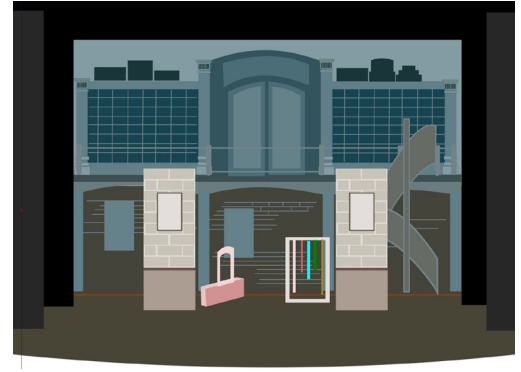
Designed by Clay James



Delray's Juke Joint Interior



Delray's Exterior



Backstage at Delray's

MEET SOME OF THE CAST



Joey Moray as Huey Calhoun and Kayla Ferguson as Felicia Farrell

Memphis tells the story of Huey Calhoun (loosely based on real-life Memphis DJ Dewey Phillips) and Felicia Farrell as they embark on a journey of love and music while facing prejudice in 1950's Memphis. Felicia's brother Delray is protective, not only of Felicia but also his mute friend Gator who tends bar at his nightclub.

Moray is a newcomer to HCT, but no stranger to the stage. Since receiving his BFA in Acting from the Shenandoah Conservatory, he has played over two dozen roles at theatres from Pennsylvania to Virginia to North Carolina. Originally from Virginia Beach, Virginia, Moray and his wife Simmon relocated to Troutman three years ago for new jobs in Huntersville. This is his second time playing the role of Huey. "MEMPHIS is my favorite musical of all time," he said. "I saw it on Broadway in 2010 and played Huey at the Genesis Theatre [in Reading, PA] in 2018. HCT always does a few shows that challenge the audience to think about things in new and different ways."

Ferguson is an HCT veteran who was just on stage there in January as Nettie in *THE COLOR PURPLE*. She first came to HCT in 2018, as Sarah in *RAGTIME*, for which she received a Kay Award as Outstanding Supporting Actress. Since then she's played Deena Jones in *DREAMGIRLS* and Dionne in *HAIR*. Originally from Brooklyn, NY, Ferguson relocated to Charlotte in 2012, where her theatre credits include Adele in *DIE FLEDERMOUS* with the Little Opera Company and Eponine in *LES MISERABLES* at Central Piedmont Community College. Just like with *THE COLOR PURPLE*, she says she doesn't mind the commute. "I wanted to perform in this show and I always enjoy the environment here at HCT. I love the people."

In *MEMPHIS*, Dontel Mills plays Felicia's brother, Delray Farrell and Robert "Tatum" Terry plays his friend Gator. Mills and Terry first met on the set of *DREAMGIRLS* in 2018. They subsequently appeared together in *HAIR* in 2019 and again in *A RAISIN IN THE SUN* in 2020.

Born in Seattle, Washington, Mills relocated to the Hickory area as a child. He holds a Bachelor's Degree in business from the University of North Carolina-Charlotte and is

currently a marketing consultant for South Key in Charlotte. His favorite thing about Hickory Community Theatre is the inclusion and he says he was drawn to audition for *MEMPHIS* by the music selection. "Growing up," he says, "music and theatre were my way to stand out against nine siblings."



Dontel Mills as Delray Farrell and Robert "Tatum" Terry as Gator

MEMPHIS is Terry's fifth outing at HCT and he has also performed at several other, local theatres, including *The Green Room* and *Old Colony Players*. "I have loved this show for years," he says. "After years of YouTube videos, I knew I had to be a part of this performance. Gator is stand out character without saying a word until he feels it necessary. His reasoning for being silent is something so powerful and real."

Along with Moray, *MEMPHIS* features three other newcomers ensemble roles.



Zakiyah, Janice Brown and Josh Hughes, all newcomers to Hickory Community Theatre

Janice Brown, who plays Clara and White Mother, is a retired air traffic controller from South Euclid, Ohio. She has only been in Hickory for year and relocated to be closer to her family. She say she auditioned for *MEMPHIS* because, "It has great music and these characters are totally different from me."

Josh Hughes, who is in the youth ensemble, is a Hickory native and a 10th grade student at Hickory Career and Arts Magnet School (HCAM). He says he's enjoying his experience with *MEMPHIS* because, "I like being able to dance and having such talented cast mates."

Zakiyah Williams is making her stage debut in *MEMPHIS*. Originally from Charlotte, she has been in Hickory for 15 years now. It was the music of *MEMPHIS* that drew her to the show. "I have a deep admiration," she said, "for music and for stories set in older time periods. I like the amount of singing and dancing that comes with the role."

CULTURAL APPROPRIATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

"While people want to participate in the 'culture', they never want the responsibility and suffering that comes with being black. To put it simply, they want our rhythm but not our blues."

~Wanna Thompson

We have heard the stories of Elvis stealing his music from Big Mama Thornton. We have seen the scenes in movies like *Dreamgirls* where music is stolen and whitewashed to make the White artists rich. We have even questioned the validity of 80's rappers like Vanilla Ice and Eminem. This age of enlightenment has caused race-based mascots to fall out of favor. We are more careful in our choices of Halloween costumes, realizing that gypsies and geishas play into biased stereotypes we ought not promulgate. But have we fully explored the extent to which we, as a culture, engage in appropriation and how we can continue to combat its destructive legacy?



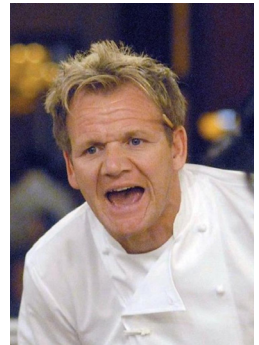
Good Housekeeping explores this in an October 2021 article in which they outline several contemporary examples of people walking the line between appreciation and appropriation, including such icons as Gordon Ramsey, Lizzo, Madonna, and Karlie Kloss.



Lizzo is questioned about the appropriateness of wearing an east Asian headdress on the cover of *Rolling Stone* magazine. Madonna was criticized for performing in traditional North African attire. Chef Gordon Ramsey was questioned for failing to respect the distinctions between Japanese and Chinese cuisine in his Asian-inspired restaurant. Model Karlie Kloss wore a Native American headdress in a Victoria's Secret runway show. All



of these examples highlight the "borrowing" of a cultural element without giving it the proper context and respect its original cultural feels it deserves. And in the case of Gordon Ramsey, an outright dismissal of the need to do so.



What is cultural appropriation? Arizona State University Project Humanities defines it as "the taking of intellectual property, cultural expressions, or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge from a culture that is not one's own." While imitation is the highest form of flattery, when done without consideration of the impact for the culture being portrayed or proper acknowledgement of its contribution, it becomes mockery, a figurative blackface. That is when the line gets crossed, and appreciation become appropriation.



While appropriation isn't always a matter of Whites "borrowing" Black culture (as illustrated by the *Good Housekeeping* examples), the trendiness of Blackness makes it more prevalent. In her book, *White Negroes*, Lauren Michele Jackson provides examples from music to food to fashion. In most cases, capitalism fuels the desire to take a trend and monetize it, with the non-minority culture having the capital to do so but taking no consideration of what it is "stealing" from the minority culture. She acknowledges that, while appropriation makes "good business sense," the nature of capitalism, the unequal distribution of wealth, and the power differentials involved often "kills the very things that inspired." Arri Grewal describes

Juneteenth Soul Food Festival and Market

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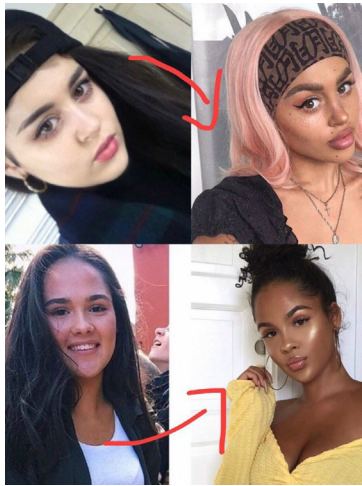
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a phrase coined in the social media world, “blackfishing”, a phenomenon in which influencers intentionally present themselves as racially ambiguous to increase their following among minority groups for same type of financial gain.



The central question is not whether we should celebrate, engage in, and uplift the practices of other cultures. America, the great melting pot, is a nation of immigrants who have come together with the expressed goal of creating something new and greater. The challenge arises when those practices, trends, customs and expressions are taken over by a more empowered culture without proper acknowledgement, with no accountability of historical interactions between the cultures, and lacking compensation for the source material.

The question becomes how do we appreciate another culture without crossing the line into appropriation. Chef Michael W. Twitty explains, “It is not enough to know the past of the people you interpret. You must know your own past.” Until you are able to reflect on your own identity and cultural baggage, you cannot properly determine whether or not your celebration is in fact appropriation.

How can we avoid appropriation in our artistic endeavors? Here are a few key questions to ask yourself when reflecting on the best way to celebrate and uplift traditions and expressions outside of your own.

- 1) Does the tradition/expression come from a culture/tradition outside of your own identity and/or experience?
- 2) Are those who regularly practice the tradition/ expression part of your homage?
- 3) Have you done the work of learning the history/ roots of the tradition/ expression and how your own culture/history may intersect with it?

4) Have you given proper acknowledgment to the tradition/ expression’s origin, in a public and gracious manner?

5) If financial gain is involved, how are you properly compensating those who are part of the tradition/ expression that inspired and informed you?

To boil it down to the simplest, the ABCs of respectful appreciation are:

- A- Acknowledge the cultural source
- B- Be accountable for your history
- C- Compensate your inspiration

As complex people living in a world of intersecting identities, we absolutely should celebrate those things that inspire us from other cultures. But we must endeavor to do it a way that uplifts and enlightens us all.



Dr. Tiffany Christian has taught cultural competence and intercultural communication at the collegiate level and continues to do diversity and inclusion workshops throughout the community.

Christian received her Bachelor’s degree in English and French from the College of Charleston, holds dual degrees (Master of Education and Education Specialist) from the University of Florida, and a Master of Arts in Theology from Liberty University, as well as a Master’s and PhD in Social Work from UNC Chapel Hill. She was an Assistant Professor at Appalachian State University, teaching social work for 15 years.

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