

the check-in.

CLASS NOTES

Check in to the tv debuts, premieres, and new endeavors of our alumni

INTERLUDE

This month's playlist is a compilation of some of our favorite Ashley Tamar Davis tracks and interviews

IN MEMORIAM

We remember the life and legacy of Nicole Hurst (Vocal '00)

HER NAME IS ASHLEY

In this issue, we highlight the transformative journey of Ashley Tamar Davis that led to the making of her fourth independent album, *My Name Is Ashley*

inside.

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This Edition's Contributing Writers

Gabby Byrd

Denise Ward

Taylor Scott



ON THE COVER

Ashley Tamar Davis (Vocal '98).

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WHO WE ARE

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WRITE: Share your thoughts on this issue and anything else PVA-related at hspvablackalumninetwork@gmail.com

Friends,

If you're reading this, you're probably already a member of the HSPVA Black Alumni Network, a part of the #TamFam tribe, or just an alum looking to see what folks are up to these days. Regardless of why you're here, welcome!

When I joined the Creative Team around this time last year, I didn't realize the positive impact it would have on my sense of community—something I'll admit was not an area of focus or concern when I was in high school, or even shortly thereafter. Now, at such a starkly polarizing time in our history, the need for supportive and enriching relationships (for me, anyway) seems to grow with each passing day.

Since becoming BAN Secretary in January and publishing the first issue of *The Check-In* in February, it has been my immense pleasure to learn about and share the successes of those that came before and after my time at PVA because it has helped me really come to know the extent of our reach and the absolute wonder of our legacy. It is truly an honor to continue this work and to perform this small labor of love.

If you are interested in becoming an active member, serving as a mentor, or being a part of our 50th Anniversary Celebration Planning Committee, please reach out to us via email at hspvablackalumninetwork@gmail.com.

Similarly, if you have any feedback about our newsletters, online presence, or efforts to support and collaborate with current PVA students, our DMs are open.

UNTIL NEXT TIME,

Gabby Byrd

SECRETARY, HSPVA BLACK ALUMNI NETWORK



**a note
from the
editor**

the commons.

hspvablackalumni.com



Coming soon September 2021



The purpose of the HSPVA Black Alumni Network is to connect Black alumni of The High School for Performing and Visual Arts, to foster relationships, support current students & alumni endeavors, & champion the next generation of HSPVA artists & professionals.

ban
HSPVA BLACK ALUMNI NETWORK

Your new source for events, alumni news, archives, newsletters, and much more! Coming soon September 2021.

By Taylor Scott

Yes, vegetables are important! This recipe for stuffed bell peppers is good, especially for college students, because it forces you to incorporate a vegetable into your meal.

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. ground turkey (or ground beef)
- 1 cup of rice
- 8 bell peppers (any color)
- heavy whipping cream
- 1 can of diced tomatoes and green chiles (Rotel)
- shredded Mexican style cheese (or another cheese of choice)
- Seasonings (Lawry's seasoned salt, Tony's, garlic pepper, lemon pepper, oregano, paprika)
- Mexican cornbread + ingredients listed on the packaging (optional)
- Breadcrumbs or tortilla chips (optional)

Recipe:

- Wash the bell peppers and remove the insides. Green bell peppers are the cheapest, but I prefer the yellow bell peppers for flavor and size.
- Boil water in a pot large enough to hold all of the bell peppers.
- While the water is boiling, brown the meat of choice in a skillet. Once the meat is cooked, season as desired.
- Follow package instructions for 1 cup of cooked rice.
- Boil the bell peppers for 10 minutes, then replace the boiling water with cold water to cool the peppers.
- In a separate skillet, dump one can of Rotel and add the heavy whipping cream. Sprinkle in as much cheese as desired.
- Finally, combine the rice, meat, and heavy cream sauce into one skillet. Stuff the bell peppers with this mixture.
- Sprinkle the breadcrumbs on top of the bell peppers. If using sliced bread to make breadcrumbs, dip the bread in melted butter before tearing it apart. If using tortilla chips, crush them before sprinkling onto the bell peppers. For an extra kick, I added hot sauce on top.
- Bake in the oven at 350°F for 20 minutes and, if desired, serve with Mexican cornbread.





The **James Francies (Jazz '13)** Trio, made up of Francies on piano, **Jeremy Dutton (Jazz '12)** on drums, and **Burniss Earl Travis (Jazz '05)** on bass will play two nights, two sets each, at the Blue Note Jazz Club in NYC on September 7th and 8th.

Purchase tickets online at bluenotejazz.com or at the door.

Dominique Hammons (Instrumental '11) will be opening for jazz vocalist, Gregory Porter, at the Arena Theatre in Houston on September 30th. He is featured on Chiyanti's new single entitled "Big Ole Wagon" and his album *Soul Capsule, Vol. 1* is available to purchase and stream.



As part of Kennedy Center's 2021-2022 Hip Hop Season, **Robert Glasper (Jazz '97)**, Terrace Martin, and friends will present "Dinner Party x Black Radio," a two-week residency at the Club at Studio K. from September 9th-19th.

Starting on October 7th, Glasper returns for another residency at the Blue Note Jazz Club in NYC.



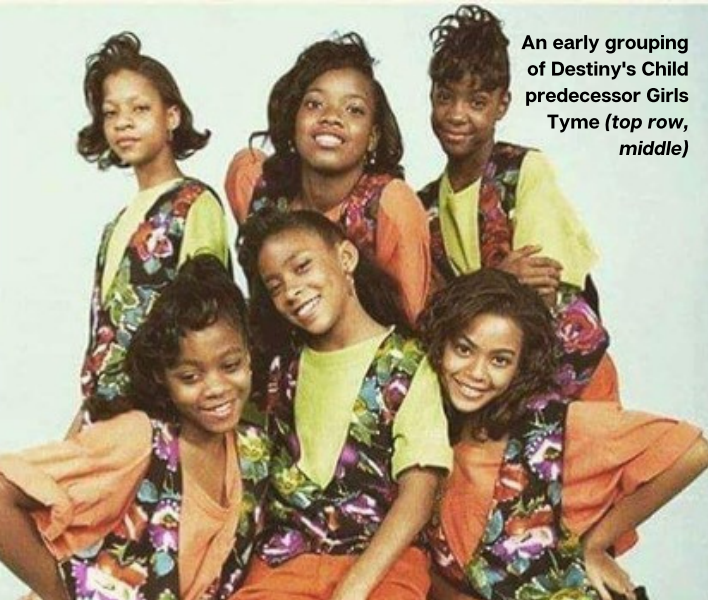
happenings.



Her Name is Ashley

By Gabby Byrd

The Stylistics taught us a long time ago that “it’s never too late to stop, look, listen to your heart, hear what it’s saying,” and, for much of the country, the 2020 lockdowns gave us more than enough time to do just that. The events of the last year and a half have encouraged many to realign with their purpose, recommit to their passions, reconsider with whom their time is spent, and reassess what it means to be an ally or a friend or an artist. For an artist like **Ashley Tamar Davis (Vocal ‘98)**, whose original music has been caught in a legal crossfire and tied up in the estate of her former mentor, Prince, her fourth independent album, *My Name Is Ashley*, is a step towards reclaiming her selfhood and what Davis calls “an ode to perseverance.”



An early grouping of Destiny's Child predecessor Girls Tyme (top row, middle)



Ashley performing alongside her mentor, Prince, at the 2006 BET Awards

Our story begins in 1993 when Beyoncé, LaTavia, Nina, Nikki, Kelly, and Ashley [competed on *Star Search*](#) as “the hip hop rappin’ Girls Tyme,” which, after several personnel changes over the years, eventually evolved into the R&B sensation we now recognize as Destiny’s Child. Tyme’s loss that night—which continues to baffle even those outside the Beyhive—was, by then, the culmination of at least a three-year effort to secure a record deal. With time ticking away for the Girls and with their daughter’s best interests in mind and at heart, Mr. and Mrs. Davis opted to leave that chapter behind and make room for other opportunities.

As an underclassman at HSPVA, her demo in the hands of Morris Hayes (keyboardist and music director for Prince and New Power Generation) afforded her an opportunity to visit and record at Paisley Park, Prince’s Minnesota home and studio. Though the trip appeared to be unfruitful at the time, she later learned that it was necessary to “plant the seed.”

After graduating from PVA in 1998, Davis moved to Los Angeles to study music business at the University of Southern California (USC) where she started performing at various on-campus functions and eventually landed a job singing background vocals for Marva King—yet another Prince-affiliated artist. As it happens, one thing led to another and, in 2004, Davis started singing background vocals for Tamia’s special guest performances on the Verizon Ladies First Tour co-headlined by Alicia Keys, Missy Elliot, and Beyoncé. During that tour, she befriended dancer and creative director, [Fatima Robinson](#), whose long list of choreography credits includes several music videos for Aaliyah, Backstreet Boys, Meghan Trainor, and Michael Jackson’s “Remember the Time.”

The following year, when Davis accepted Robinson’s mysterious invitation to a video shoot for an undisclosed artist—The Purple One—she had no idea how monumentally life changing it would be.

My fellow millennials and I are too young to remember when Prince famously wrote “slave” on his cheek and changed his name to the unpronounceable “Love Symbol” during his mid-’90s legal battle with Warner Bros., but the *why* is just as relevant today as it was then. In addition to being your favorite musician’s favorite musician, Prince is widely regarded as the no-man who predicted several significant changes to the industry, fought to protect his intellectual property from exploitation, and paved the way for generations of independent artists.

In conversation with Anthony Boggess-Glover (Vocal ‘87) on his *E-Talk* podcast, Davis explains that Prince was a genius who “understood the value of what musicians and artists bring to any table, any phone device, any live entertainment,” and recalls that when she accompanied him in negotiating rooms, he “didn’t just complain. He always had a solution, not just for him but for everybody.” Unfortunately, when he and Universal Music Group disagreed over how and when to release Davis’s debut album, *Milk and Honey*—which was supposed to share a release with Prince’s *3121* album—his solution involved them both leaving the label.

However frustrating the situation was, after all they had poured into *Milk and Honey*, and after all that Prince fought for [in the years leading up to](#) 2006, the spiritual bond she shared with protective cousin-uncle-brother Prince never died.

When reflecting on her training at HSPVA, Davis says it was “truly foundational to everything I attribute to my career today. The professionalism and impact of knowing your craft has led to many open doors,” some of which include her time spent as a cast member for [various Tyler Perry productions](#) like *The Marriage Counselor*, her performances with Kanye West’s Sunday Service Choir, her roles as Aretha Franklin and Nina Simone in the critically-acclaimed Broadway show, *A Night with Janis Joplin*, her time competing on Season 10 of NBC’s *The Voice*, and, currently, her performances with the Stewart Copeland: Police Deranged for Orchestra Tour that began earlier this month. She credits PVA not only with teaching her to be versatile and adaptable but also with giving her “the confidence to try everything.” While at USC, she started learning about the many different careers within the entertainment industry and came to further realize the value of community and the power of creative collaboration.

My Name Is Ashley is a testament to that power. She knew it was time to focus on an album when Michael Nocy, a Polish producer who discovered her on Instagram, couldn’t contain his excitement while listening to “What Is This Feeling.” To begin the song, which was ultimately chosen as the album single, Davis cleverly utilizes unusually-sized phrases to create a sense of anticipation I’ve never (well... rarely) felt before. To end the song, fellow rock enthusiast, Jellybean Johnson, offers an electrifying guitar solo that mimics the energy of Janet Jackson’s edgy 1990 single entitled “Black Cat” (which he co-produced). “Boyfriend,” Nocy’s other contribution to the album, is a playful 80’s bop that was so perfectly paired with MonoNeon’s funky style and personality on bass, it seems to have been written just for him.

To breathe new life into “#latdgb,” a reinvention of the *Milk and Honey* track entitled “All Eye Want Is U,” Davis enlisted HSPVA alumni, Jason Moran on keys (Jazz ‘93), Eric Harland on drums (Jazz ‘94), and Mark Kelley on bass (Jazz ‘98). She wasn’t sure if they’d agree to record but, not only did they agree, they filmed the session in New York during the pandemic. Admittedly, after getting lost in Harland’s mantra-like drum groove and Davis’s dreamy riffs, having to recollect myself over a fade out of Moran’s beautifully meditative solo was a feat, to say the least. However, considering that Prince encouraged her to make every live show an experience, perhaps Davis thought it best to preserve the magic for the performance hall.

Knowing that she wanted to celebrate the 10-year anniversary of *My Name Is Támar* but would have to work around Prince’s estate in order to do so, she took advantage of the opportunity to rearrange songs like “Heartbeat”—including lyrics co-written by HSPVA alum and Girls Tyme veteran, Judith Franklin (Vocal ‘97)—“Kind Words,” and “Love Speaks” in a way that better reflects her true musical interests. When talking about some of her biggest influences, she mentions that seeing old footage of interviews with Sarah Vaughan gave her the confidence to “write the music she writes now and not try to make it sound commercial.” In doing this, she hopes to encourage her fans and other independent artists to “stick with what gives you peace and joy.” To Davis, the songs on *My Name Is Ashley* mean “confidence, faith, and resilience,” and those sentiments shine through as clear as day.

Davis recently discovered a new creative avenue that gives her joy: music supervision. After months of training, Davis was hired as Music Supervisor for the highly anticipated HBO Max show, [That Damn Michael Che](#), which just got approved for a second season. Although she strives to live in the moment, she looks forward to performing the remainder of the Stewart Copeland Orchestra tour, headlining the Rice Harvest Festival in Katy, TX on October 9th, filming the pilot for her *Támar Talks* podcast in the fall, publishing “A Syren on the Damascus Road: A Memoir” sometime next year, and continuing to create open opportunities for artists with her live entertainment production company, Syren Entertainment + Media Group ([SE+MG](#)), and other community outreach projects.



Ashley was a contestant on NBC’s *The Voice* competition and a member of Christina Aguilera’s team.



Ashley and the cast of “Where Were You in ‘65”, the 1996 HSPVA Black History production.

When reflecting on her training at HSPVA, Davis says it was “truly foundational to everything I attribute to my career today.”

interlude.

In addition to *My Name is Ashley*, this month's playlist includes more of our favorite tracks from her previous releases and more conversation.



My Name Is Ashley (2021)

Eye Feel Good
Listen 2 My Heartbeat
Kind Wordz
Boyfriend ft. MonoNeon
Luv Speaks ft. Stephanie Ferrett
#latdgb ft. Jason Moran, Eric Harland, and Mark Kelley
What Is This Feeling ft. Jellybean Johnson
You Are God

"Imagination" ft. Jellybean Johnson (2020)

I Am the Storm (2016)

Apple Tree
New Day

"Rise Up" from *The Voice, Season 10 (2016)*

My Name Is Tamar - Tamar Davis (2011)

Juz Do It
I've Been Waiting


3121 - Prince (2006)


Beautiful, Loved and Blessed
The Dance


"The Lessons Learned Along the Way w/
Ashley Davis" **E-Talk Podcast, Ep. 16 (2021)**

SCAN PLAYLIST



 @AshleyTamarMusic

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call board.

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WRITE TO US
 We want to hear what you've been up to! Send us your stories and photos, and we'll share the highlights here. Email us at hspvablackalumninetwork@gmail.com

a.cknowledgements

Robert Gibson (Vocal '07)

Performed his Missouri Choral Directors Association 2021 Opus Award-winning arrangement of "We Shall Overcome" with the All-State Festival Choir at the state's bicentennial celebration. Gibson made the front page of Jefferson City's *News Tribune* and was personally congratulated by Governor Mike Parson for his soloist performance. *(right)*



Tyler Atkins (Instrumental '15)

Made his conducting debut with AFA (American Festival for the Arts) as the Assistant Conductor for the Winds, Brass, and Percussion session during the 25th Encore Anniversary Summer Music Festival at HSPVA.

Gregory McDaniel (Vocal '05)

Was a conducting fellow in the Boise Baroque Orchestra Intensive Conductor Workshop this summer.



Ashley Sutton (Vocal '04)

Her aspirational greeting card company, Hustle and Hope, was awarded \$10k as a first prize winner of Ally's Daring to Disrupt Contest. *(left)*

a.ppearances



Nicole Dele (Theatre '09)

Catch Dele in Season 3 of *Good Trouble* on Freeform, Wednesday nights @ 9pm CT and on Hulu.



Courtney Sauls (Theatre '00), Justin Simien (Theatre '01), & Jamila Glass (Vocal '01)

Season 4 trailer for Simien's show, *Dear White People*, was recently released in anticipation of its September 22nd Netflix air date. According to *Entertainment Weekly*, it will reportedly take the characters beyond the global pandemic and have them reflect on "the most formative (and theatrical) year of their lives."



Zoe Cagan (Instrumental '15)

Featured in the Spring 2021 issue of *New England Conservatory Magazine* where she shares what the past year taught her.

a.ppearances (continued)

Robert Glasper (Jazz '97)

Scored the Kennedy Center's *Untitled Dave Chappelle Documentary* which aired on Aug. 1.

Paul Cornish (Jazz '14)

Made his debut tv performance on Aug. 10 when he music directed, programmed, and played keys with Snoh Aalegra on *The Tonight Show*



a.lbums and other music

Mathias Lattin (Jazz '20)

His debut EP, *Let's Start Here*, was released earlier this month on August 13th.



Ebrin R. Stanley (Theatre '13)

His third album, *Sad Summer*, was released on July 12th.

Peyton Booker (Vocal '15)

Her 3rd album, *PSA*, was released on July 23rd. Starting with an August 26th show in Oakland, CA, Booker will be supporting Theophilus London on his 2021 US tour.



Jaylon Black (Instrumental '16)

Recorded strings on gospel artist Travis Greene's album, *Oil and Water*, released earlier this month on August 19th..

James Francies (Jazz '13)

Produced Childish Gambino's cover of Brittany Howard's "Stay High" and co-wrote YEBBA's latest single "Louie Bag" featuring Smino.



Asa Davis (Instrumental '12)

His NRX Mix was released for Night Ride Experience's Mosh series on August 4th.

Find it on [soundcloud.com](https://www.soundcloud.com)

Looking for more ways to support our musical family?

Consider purchasing their music on the next Bandcamp Friday, September 3! When you do, an average of 93% of your money reaches the artist/label.

in memoriam.



Nicole "Nikki" Hurst

(August 21, 1982 - August 4, 2021)

We are deeply saddened to report that our beloved Nicole (Vocal '00) has passed away after her years-long battle with breast cancer. In addition to her work with Justin Timberlake, Kelly Clarkson, Janet Jackson, Bruno Mars, Alicia Keys—just to name a few—she performed during major events like the Super Bowl half-time show, the Academy Awards and the Grammys. We offer our sincerest condolences to her family and loved ones. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that memorial gifts be made to The Nicole Hurst Music Fund at HSPVA Friends, which will benefit future generations of music students at Nicole's alma mater, Houston's High School for the Performing and Visual Arts.

Visit hspvafriends.org/nicolehurst for more information.



who we are.

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creative team



DENISE WARD
Chair
Vocal '12



CAPRA FELLOWS
Vice-Chair
Theatre '11



GABBY BYRD
Secretary
Vocal '11



KIERRA MARTIN
Treasurer
Dance '13



HENRY ELLIS DAVIS
Treasurer
Theatre '09



DABRINA SANDIFER
Scholarship Co-Chair
Theatre '06



TAYLAR LEWIS
Scholarship Co-Chair
Theatre '11



CHRISTIAN WARNER
Dance '12



MALCOLM JACKSON
Instrumental '10



ALDARIAN MAYES
Jazz '10



TAYLOR SCOTT
Theatre '19



EDWARD BELL
Vocal '10



DJ CARR
Vocal '18

how you can help

Serve on the Creative Team

The Creative Team is a collective of HSPVA alumni who coordinate events, programming, and fundraising on behalf of the network.

Perform or support one of our Alumni events

We host the Holiday Jam Social every December, an Alumni Happening in the summer, and we currently have additional performance opportunities and collaborations in the works.

Contribute to our scholarship fund

Support our 2021-2022 vision as we seek to increase our monetary giving and award at least (10) students with scholarships or grants.