

MAY 2022 | ISSUE NO. 8

the check-in.

SERVICING THE CRAFT

In this issue, we talk with Devyn Tyler (Theatre '09) about what keeps her coming back to acting.

inside.

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This Edition's Contributing Writers

Gabby Byrd

Denise Ward

Chelsey Cartwright



ON THE COVER

Devyn Tyler posing at the season 5 premiere of FX Network's *Snowfall*.



A NOTE FROM
CHELS



RESOURCE GUIDE



THE COMMONS



HAPPENINGS



CONVERSATION:
SERVICING THE
CRAFT



CALL BOARD



CLASS NOTES



WHO WE ARE

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

Friends,

This year, the 2022 midterm elections are going to be big and have serious consequences. The Texas primary was a first look at just how important it is to mobilize and use your vote as your voice. The fight against voter suppression is in full swing and we've got to take steps to crush any threat toward a voting and thriving democracy.



Aside from voting in local elections, it's critical to take action in your local community--whether that's volunteering with your local community group, protesting and using your voice as a means for change, or mobilizing your family, friends, and loved ones to vote. **It all starts with you!** No action is too big or too small. It's all about moving forward to spark change and finding the methods that speak to you. Activism has a place for all. In the words of the mighty Fannie Lou Hamer, "When I liberate myself, I liberate others." Use this as a rallying cry to be the change you wish to see in this world.

The HSPVA Black Alumni Network cultivates community and, as part of that legacy, we stand up for our values and what matters most to us. Let's take up the mantle and be part of reimagining what's possible in our democracy.

In the tradition of Ella Baker, "In order to see where we are going, we not only must remember where we have been, but we must *understand* where we have been. We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes."

ONWARD,

Chels

P.S. Check out my resource guide on the next page!

**a note
from
chels**

Resource Guide

Compiled by
Chelsey Cartwright

PODCASTS

Brown Girls Guide to Politics with Ashanti F. Golar
Undistracted with Brittany Packnett Cunningham
Intersectionality with Kimberlee Crenshaw
Lady Don't Take No with Alicia Garza
Sunstorm with Alicia Garza and Aijen Poo
Still Processing with Wesley Morris and Jenna Wortham
Voting While Black Podcast with Rashad Robinson

ORGANIZATIONS

Democratic Party

www.harrisdemocrats.org/action-center

4619 Lyons Ave, Houston, TX 77020

(713) 802-0085

Texas Organizing Project

www.organizetexas.org/take-action/volunteer/

(832) 582-0061

NAACP Houston Branch

www.naacphouston.org/join/

2002 Wheeler Ave, Houston, TX 77004

(713) 526-3389

Houston Area Urban League

www.haul.org/get-involved/

1301 Texas Avenue Houston, TX 77002

(713) 393-8700

Black Lives Matter Houston

www.blmhouston.com/

blmhou@gmail.com

HOUSTON JUSTICE COALITION

www.houstonjustice.org/join

MOVE Texas

www.movetexas.org/volunteer/



the commons.

WE'RE A NON-PROFIT!

We are proud to announce that the HSPVA Black Alumni Network is now a 501(c)(3) tax exempt organization. Special thanks to our Treasurer, Kierra Martin (Dance '13), for piloting us through this endeavor and to our Advisory Collective for their support!



We invite you to join our fun-filled weekend where we will not only celebrate the school's 50th Anniversary, but also commemorate our unity and achievements of the last 50 years and work to pave the way forward for those who follow in our footsteps. Our theme for the celebration is ***"Homecoming: Celebrating the Gold Standard."***

Our weekend will begin on **Friday, August 5, 2022** with a 21+ evening reception, followed by an "Edutainment Series" comprised of talkbacks, panels, and interviews on Saturday afternoon, an elevated nostalgic Happening performance that evening, and a Sunday farewell gathering to close out our weekend. These events will be open to the public but, ultimately, our goal is to celebrate alumni, applaud our collective accomplishments, and display our appreciation for the undeniable and unshakable foundation that prepared us to successfully make a mark in our respective careers.

We are closely watching the number of COVID cases and continue to place everyone's health as a priority. Out of an abundance of caution, please consider getting tested prior to attending, especially if you are unvaccinated. Masks are highly encouraged.

happenings.

houston.

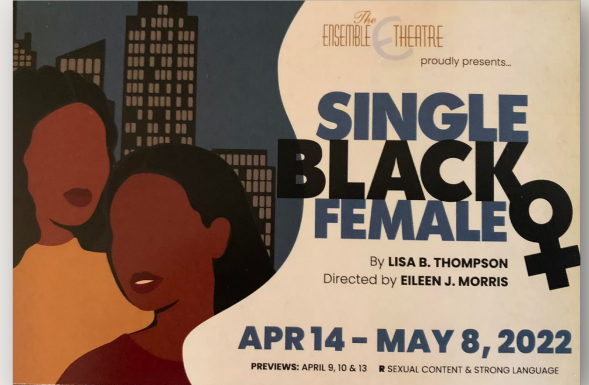


Adam DeWalt (Jazz '13) and his trio will be performing every Friday night from 7-9:30pm as part of the Live Music May Series at Mo' Better Brews, one of Houston's finest vegan eating establishments. Check them out at 1201 Southmore Blvd. Houston, TX 77004.

abroad.



Interested in traveling to Europe this summer? Consider catching **Chris Walker (Vocal '86)** perform with legendary vocalist and guitarist,, George Benson, in England, Wales, Scotland,, France, Austria, or the Netherlands.



Be sure to catch **Dequina Moore (Theatre '98)** starring in the Ensemble Theater's production of *Single Black Female* before closing night on May 8th. Supporting her as Movement Director is **Monica Josette Hatter-Mayes (Dance '00)**. Tickets are available for purchase at the box office or online at ensemblehouston.com

GOT SOMETHING HAPPENING SOON?

Let us know and we'll help spread the word!
Email us at hspvablackalumninetwork@gmail.com or send us a DM on Instagram.

virtual.



On Friday, May 6th, **Tikia Hudson (Theatre '12)** will release the first episode of her new podcast, *Black and Beyond America*, designed to connect Black global expats through their experiences living abroad. Tune in!



Servicing the Craft

By Gabby Byrd

Last year, you may have seen her in the CBS drama, *Clarice*, named after the FBI agent who earned Hannibal Lecter's respect in the psychological horror classic, "The Silence of the Lambs." This year, as the lead character's love interest in the fifth season of *Snowfall*, a FX network fan favorite, we seem to be witnessing her drift even closer into the spotlight.

Whether it's on tv shows like *NCIS: New Orleans*, *Feat the Walking Dead*, *The Purge*, Amazon's *Underground*, or HBO's *Watchmen* (starring Regina King); on the big screen in films like *12 Years a Slave* (directed by Steve McQueen) or *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* (starring Brad Pitt); or, even on-stage as part of the New Orleans Shakespeare Festival, **Devyn Tyler (Theatre '09)** is an example of someone who truly devotes themselves to the process of nurturing their craft.



Photo by Nkechi Chibueze



Devyn with her parents, Kevin and Deneen Tyler



With former principal, Dr. Scott Allen, and former Theatre faculty, Cynthia Ogden



With her mother at a red carpet event



At the 2014 Kinder HSPVA ground-breaking ceremony

"Is this normal?" Surprised to find a sizable array of snacks at her disposal, this is what a young Devyn Tyler asked her mother while accompanying her on set one day. "Is this how it happens on all sets? Is this something I can experience?" At this particular moment in time, before even reaching double digits in age, Tyler had been considering a retirement from her acting career which, to date, had mostly consisted of commercials and some voice acting. She had resolved to make different changes in her life and move on, but when her mother assured her that, yes, this was a regular occurrence on set, there was suddenly more information to digest. "I'm not going to say specifically that that was a very, very important reason for me wanting to start acting again... but I will say that it was quite important" (*laughs*). After all, what kid doesn't get excited about snacks?

Tyler's initial excitement and interest in acting also came as no surprise, thanks to her mother, Deneen Tyler, a veteran actress boasting over 80 film and television credits (not including her theater or voiceover work). "My mom, she's been acting for as long as I've been alive. We usually say that her career, if it had an age, it would be mine [...] She was my first example of a teacher and a voiceover artist and an actress and a theatre performer. And so, I think that I was probably soaking in a lot of information whether or not I wanted to." It's important to note, though, that Mrs. Tyler wasn't

one of those toxic stage moms that push their children into the public eye and emotionally scar them for life. Tyler explains,

"It wasn't something that I was pressed to do. Like, I was clearly trying to follow my mother's footsteps..."

She's just so consistent and she's always really really loved to work, so it was just always something I got to witness." Although they've never had a chance to be on screen together, they have been able to work on several of the same projects, many of which have been based in, or filmed in close proximity to Devyn's hometown, New Orleans.

Fortunate to grow up in such a culturally rich and diverse city—not unlike that of Houston—Tyler often took advantage of the many programs and workshops for young artists in New Orleans. In the summer of 2005, barely a week into Devyn's freshman year at Benjamin Franklin High School, misfortune struck, and the Tyler family became one of the hundreds of thousands that were forced to relocate in the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Some might call it kismet; if it were up to Drake, it might go down as G-O-D. Either way you look at it, they found themselves in Houston, and Devyn found herself in the Theatre program at HSPVA.

In addition to the emotional toll brought on by that experience, and at such a tender age, Tyler shares that "it was hard to be a good actress and be a good student because I wanted to work and couldn't be in school, but I really, really loved school and PVA is a gem, so I really wanted to prioritize that." Considering that she was a 2009 Presidential Scholar in the Arts, a YoungArts Gold Winner in Theatre, and had landed roles in 5 different films before graduation (including *The Great Debaters*, an award-winning film starring Denzel Washington and Forest Whitaker), it's safe to say her balancing efforts were largely successful. Multitasking is quite the task, especially when your interests are varied like Tyler's. She reflects, "I find that acting is one thing where actors don't necessarily expire. We can act our whole lives. So, it's not something that I've necessarily had anxiety about putting down because I think one can always pick it back up again..."

It's kind of been a dance I've been dancing. I don't know what phase of the dance I'm in right now, but I still learn things all the time and it's still something that I really like to do. I still like the process of it, you know?"

After high school, Tyler attended Columbia University in New York and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in French and Francophone Studies. As somewhat of a Francophile myself who also has roots in New Orleans—*her old neighborhood is, coincidentally, about a five-minute drive from my maternal grandmother's house*—I wondered if her interest in French culture was attributable to her childhood surroundings. Although my hypothesis was ultimately disproved, Tyler recalled that the obsession began during her middle school French class. "If I'm being totally honest, it doesn't make a lot of sense. I don't speak [French] to anyone in my family and it's not like I use it to reconnect with anyone. It was really just, 'I really like how this sounds,' and then it became, 'I really want to be able to speak another language'. I really like the idea of being able to add that to my tool set [...] So it's kind of been this vehicle I've been able to use to stretch my brain, find different ways to communicate, and also learn, unexpectedly, about myself and the world." Of course, the roles she has played have done much to that effect as well.

Tyler denies having any favorite roles but does note that she enjoys working on pieces that are historical in nature and interacting with characters who share her love for books. "I really try to respect and empathize with every character that I play," she explains. "Things that get difficult usually are difficult because they have a really heavy emotional toll [...] But I find that there's always something that challenges me and there's always something that I can grow from." One could also argue that in order to maintain a certain level of mental



As Melibea in the 2016 New Orleans Shakespeare Festival production of *The Illusion*



As Ardelia Mapp in CBS's *Clarice*.
(Photo by Brooke Palmer/CBS Broadcasting Inc.)



As Veronique in FX's *Snowfall* (Photo by FX Productions, LLC)

stability as an artist of any kind, it's important to find value in the opportunities that simply find their way to you. "It gets kind of heavy because, you know, art is something that kind of lands in our body, we have to figure out what to do with it, and then [...] we kind of hold it out in our hands and we say 'look what I made,' and if it becomes about approval, it gets really, really hard to hold out something so personal and to have it rejected, or turned down all the time, or not appreciated. I think that's why it's important to know what you want and what keeps you going, because when it gets really difficult, that's what we hold on to. That's all we have." In discussing some of the ways in which the industry has changed in the last few years, Tyler explains that the introduction of social media has drastically changed the types of projects that are available, where those projects appear, and the amount of content that's being produced. "There are so many projects that are being written, and there's so much material that's out there, and I feel like there are a lot of voices. Everything feels quite large [...] it's a wonderful thing because it kind of decentralizes everything to where we don't have to necessarily be in New York or Los Angeles in order to say that there's a career or in order to find work, but it also means that the playing field is so great, and that everyone is quite visible." Although the world is in a constant state of change, there are several things that help Tyler keep her footing.

"I find that the thing that keeps me most grounded, is that I really, really just love the work [...] I really think that loving the process is important. And I also find that I do my very best to use the tools that I've picked up in my life and I try to do the best work that I possibly can because, with all of these unknowns [in the industry], the one thing that I can be sure of is that I did my best..."



Devyn as Kate in the 2017 New Orleans Shakespeare Festival production of *Taming of the Shrew*.

The one thing that I can be sure of is that I'm doing my best to take care of myself, that I'm doing my best to pick roles that align with me and who I want to see myself as an artist [...] there's this level of self awareness and understanding of exactly I want, understanding exactly what makes me happy, and making sure that I can make good healthy choices for myself. And then also, you know, my mother has been in the industry for a long time, so I've seen her deal with no's, and I've seen her deal with all of these things, and she always taught me that what's for you is for you. It's really for you, and that's not something that anyone can change. So, I usually hold on to things like that. Also, time. I think anything that's really beautiful takes a bit of work and it's probably going to take a bit of time. So, putting a lot of time into what I do, knowing the amount of time that I have put into what I do, I kind of just sit on all of that [...] and I do my best to put my best foot forward. Then I take things one day at a time!"

Like the food at a craft service table, learning a language, reading a book, empathizing with the spirit of another, or even having a short conversation with someone whose work you admire: these are some of the things that service your craft and feed the soul. For many of us, HSPVA is what brought us to that table, and maybe even made us feel like we had a seat there. If you find that you're hungry for something else, pick it up. It's all yours for the taking.

call board.

Houston's Ensemble Theatre is inviting youth ages 6 to 17 to participate in the Young Performer's Program. Families have the option to register for one of the virtual or live and in-person sessions:

- Session I: **June 6-10**, virtual
- Session II: **June 13 - July 1**, in person
- Session III: **July 5 - 23**, in person
- Session IV: **July 25 - 29**, virtual

Learn more at ensemblehouston.com

LA Phil
GUSTAVO DUDAMEL
 MUSIC & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Announces auditions for:

ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL TIMPANI/ SECTION PERCUSSION

Audition to be held July 11-13, 2022

The Los Angeles Philharmonic will be conducting auditions on July 11-13, 2022 to fill the role of an Assistant Principal Timpani/Section Percussionist. Think you've got what it takes? Submit their resume form by the May 8th deadline.

Resumes due May 8th.

Learn more at laphil.com/auditions

Artists Simply Human (ASH) will feature **Matthew Smith (Dance '15)** as a Faculty/Company member for its 12th Season. The regional tour consists of three days of workshop classes as well as a performance showcase. The showcase is an opportunity for dancers to perform their pieces in a supportive and non-competitive environment while receiving video critiques and awards from the ASH Faculty.

Registration opens June 1st.

Learn more at www.ASHDance.com

ORLANDO, FL OCT 21ST-23RD, 2022	MYRTLE BEACH, SC FEB 17TH-19TH, 2023
AUSTIN, TX NOV 11TH-13TH, 2022	TYSONS CORNER, VA FEB 24TH-26TH, 2023
CLEVELAND, OH NOV 18TH-20TH, 2022	CHICAGO, IL #1 MAR 3RD-5TH, 2023
TAMPA, FL DEC 9TH-11TH, 2022	ATLANTA, GA MAR 10TH-12TH, 2023
NASHVILLE, TN JAN 6TH-8TH, 2023	ATLANTIC CITY, NJ MAR 17TH-19TH, 2023
BOSTON, MA JAN 13TH-15TH, 2023	GREENVILLE, SC MAR 31ST-APR 2ND, 2023
PHILADELPHIA, PA JAN 20TH-22ND, 2023	CHICAGO, IL #2 APR 14TH-16TH, 2023
PROVO, UT JAN 26TH-28TH, 2023	DENVER, CO APR 21ST-23RD, 2023
HOUSTON, TX FEB 3RD-5TH, 2023	DAYTONA BEACH, FL APR 28TH-30TH, 2023
NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ FEB 10TH-12TH, 2023	

**NATIONALS
ORLANDO, FL
JUNE 30TH-JULY 5TH, 2023**

class notes.

straight A's



a.cknowledgements

Dr. Jacqueline Chambers (Vocal '74)
Was honored with the "Living Legend Award" presented by the Texas Gospel Music Excellence Award (*top*).

Dr. Seth Parker Woods (Instrumental '03)
Joined the faculty as both Assistant Professor of Practice for Cello and as the Head of Chamber Music for the University of Southern California's Thornton School of Music (*middle*).

Reshard Baham (Jazz '08) and Ashley Tamar Davis (Vocal '98)
Both performed at the Houston Rodeo last month on March 11th. Baham performed in Bun B's H-Town Takeover, Davis sang the national anthem (*far left and middle, respectively*).

Paul Cornish (Jazz '14)
Selected as a finalist for the 2023 American Pianists Awards.

Jamie Perry (Instrumental '14)
Honored as Grammy Week Houston's 2022 Instrumentalist of the Year (*right*).

Brandon Lee (Jazz '01)
Played trumpet in the Christian McBride Big Band's Grammy-winning album, *For Jimmy, Wes and Oliver* (*far left*).

Lisa E. Harris (Vocal '98) and Autumn Knight (Theatre '98)
Recognized as 2022 Guggenheim Fellows in the Creative Arts (*middle and right, respectively*).

Robert Gibson (Vocal '07)
Recognized as one of *Springfield Business Journal's* "40 Under 40" (*middle*).

a.lbums and other music

Vince Greer (Jazz '08)
His debut EP, *Genesis*, is streaming now (*right*).

Eric Harland (Jazz '94)
Released a trio album with pianist Aaron Parks and bassist Matt Brewer entitled *Volume One*.

a.ppearances

Jarvis B. Manning Jr. (Vocal '05)
Made his television debut guest starring as Andre Walker in season 21, episode 6 of NBC tv show, *Law and Order* (*far left*).

Brie Eley (Theatre '99)
Cast as Regan in The Wallis Production of *King Lear*. The show opens May 14 and runs through June 5 in The Wallis' Bram Goldsmith Theatre in California (*middle*).

Cameron Edwards (Dance '17)
Dancer in Houston Grand Opera's production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Performances run May 1, 7, and 11 (*far left-bottom*).

Samantha Williams (Theatre '15)
Recently cast alongside Paul Alexander Nolan in the Goodman Theatre production of Broadway's *Life After*. The Chicago premiere runs June 11–July 17. Opening night set for June 22 (*bottom*).

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

who we are.

The purpose of the HSPVA Black Alumni Network is to connect Black alumni of The High School for Performing and Visual Arts, support alumni and current students' endeavors, and provide resources, scholarships, and networking opportunities to champion the next generation of HSPVA artists and professionals.

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
Technology Chair
Theatre '09



DABRINA SANDIFER
Scholarship Co-Chair
Theatre '06



TAYLAR LEWIS
Scholarship Co-Chair
Theatre '11



EDWARD BELL
Engagement Co-Chair
Vocal '10



MALCOLM JACKSON
Engagement Co-Chair
Instrumental '10



ALDARIAN MAYES
Jazz '10



TAYLOR SCOTT
Theatre '19



DJ CARR
Vocal '18



CHRISTIAN WARNER
Dance '12



STEPHEN HUDSON
Vocal '03

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.

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.