



**Dr. Roosevelt Griffin III—Principal Leader of Program Development**

Dr. Griffin founded the Griffin Institute of Performing Arts NFP in 2017, an institution that harnesses the transformative power of the arts to elevate the lives of students and families across southern Cook County and beyond. He also occupies the Walter Dyett Chair for Jazz Studies, Diversity, and Inclusion at VanderCook College of Music, is the owner and operator of GI Music LLC., and serves as the Youth Ensemble Director for the Chicago Jazz Philharmonic.

Dr. Roosevelt Griffin III is a highly esteemed scholar and practitioner in the field of music education. In his instructional methodology, Dr. Griffin emphasizes intentionality, care, and love, with a commitment to promoting musical excellence as well as unity and diversity. Dr. Griffin's student-centered approach to music education has been widely lauded and adopted by educators around the globe.

Dr. Griffin earned his Bachelor of Music in Music Performance and Illinois Teaching Certificate K-12 (Music) from Northern Illinois University, followed by a Master of Arts in School Leadership and Type 75 Certificate from Concordia-Chicago. He also holds an EdD in Organizational Leadership from Argosy University in Chicago, and was awarded a sabbatical at Northwestern University in Evanston from the Golden Apple Foundation.



**Lynn Colbert-Jones—Interim Managing Director for Black Voices in Cabaret**

Lynn Colbert-Jones is an award-winning, multifaceted talent in the music industry, known for her elegant songwriting, warm-hearted personality, and passion for music. Over three decades, Lynn has established herself as a creative force in the industry. Born and raised in Chicago, she has collaborated with many talented musicians, songwriters, and producers such as Howard Sandifer, Keith Henderson, Jamie Foxx, Carmen Stokes, Russell Hall. As impresario, people-connector, promoter of artists, artist manager, host, and curator, she brings together vocalists, musicians, producers, and music lovers. Since 2020, she has created and hosts the Friday night “Good Hearts Club Music Jam” and the monthly “Composer’s Café” to spotlight lyricists, songwriters, and composers.

Lynn is a 2023 JEXA (Jazz Excellence) Award Recipient, member of BMI, has served as an Associate Member of the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences and has served on the Michael Jordan Foundation committee. She studied business and marketing at Illinois State University and Northwestern University and has spent more than 25 years in Corporate America, serving as contract negotiator, account executive, regional sales manager, director of business development and consultant.

Uplifting Diverse Voices Personnel 2024



**Roxane Assaf-Lynn**

In her final teen year Roxane lived in Paris, took up pen and picket in 1999 to live a year under Israeli occupation in precisely the cities of her paternal Palestinian heritage — Jerusalem and Bethlehem. While reporting for a DC-based magazine, Roxane Assaf developed a new identity as both Arabist and activist for the causes of fact, freedom, justice and peace. Roxane's maternal Costa Rican line of Catholics were originally Jews from Spain. With a BA in journalism and broadcast production aside, Roxane couldn't resist sharing an infatuation with the Great American Songbook. She completed a master's from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern, interned at the Capitol Hill television and print newsroom. She was cast in the flagship performance of *Precious Stones*, of the now venerable Chicago theatre Silk Road Rising. For the Chicago Humanities Festival she presented an original performative monologue entitled *Now that I'm an Arab*. Co-author of a Lonely Planet edition of *Israel and the Palestinian Territories*. She has taught media literacy and criticism, including 17 years at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC).



**Jessie Bolger**

Jessie has been a passionate musician for 25 years. She majored in both chemistry and voice/opera performance at Northwestern University in Chicago, where she had the pleasure to perform in many operatic and choral productions. Jessie has performed at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. to the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville; and in national classical and jazz choirs. She recently launched Operapirate Productions, a podcast project that modernizes the media in which opera is created.



**Cynthia Clarey**

Cynthia Clarey joined the cabaret world in Chicago after 35 years as an international opera singer. She can be seen on film in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* with the Glyndebourne Festival Opera and in the award-nominated *Porgy and Bess* directed by Trevor Nunn. She came to Chicago to teach at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University, retiring in 2022. She is a member of Chicago Cabaret Professionals and has performed at several venues in Chicago and beyond. Her show *Bridge over Muddied Waters* launched the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's new programming for the African-American Network.

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**Jeanne Franks**

A Chicago native, Jeanne Franks received her BA in Political Science and Spanish from Knox College and an MBA from Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. She served for many years as interior designer and director of marketing for Brook Architecture, Inc, of Chicago. Jeanne Franks has been a co-host of “DCB Jazz” (WDCB-90.9 FM radio) for 20 years. Music has always been an important part of her life. As a kid she listened to her father’s jazz combo rehearse the popular tunes of the day. After one of those rehearsals, the 5-year old informed her dad that she wanted to play the piano. He took her seriously, bought her a piano and she’s been playing music ever since.

She played the flute in her school bands and studied classical and jazz piano. She currently performs as a jazz vocalist for corporate and private functions. She serves on the Board of Working In Concert.



**Susie Lewis-Friedman**

Susie served as cantor at Temple Jeremiah in Northfield, IL for five years. She has been seen on the stages of musical theater, regional opera, and in symphonic concerts throughout the U.S. She played leading roles in the Broadway National Tour of *Cats*, regional productions of *The Producers*, *Barnum*, *Swingtime Canteen*, and *Sweeney Todd*, to name a few. She has sung roles with Des Moines Metro Opera, Nevada Opera, Phoenix Symphony, American Symphony Orchestra, and Brooklyn Philharmonic. She is a composer/arranger of Jewish music and recently released an album of her original songs entitled *Sing, Pray, Repeat!* She also performed in a concert of music by composers of the Theresienstadt ghetto in a benefit for the Virginia Holocaust Museum.



**Carla Gordon**

Singer, songwriter, producer, and director Carla Gordon holds Chicago Cabaret Professional's coveted Gold Coast Award. Her original songs are performed nationwide.

Gordon's appearances include The Palace in Ft. Lauderdale, Acorn in Three Oaks, Michigan, St. Louis's Sheldon Theater, Pangea, Club 42 and Metropolitan Room in NYC. *Blacklisted—Songs McCarthy Didn't Want Us to Hear* earned critical acclaim. She will represent Chicago at the 25th Anniversary celebration for *Cabaret Scene's* editor, Frank Dain.



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**Sean Harris**

Chicago “born and bred,” Sean graduated from James H. Bowen High School and the University of Illinois at Chicago (music performance). His repertoire includes rhythm and blues, jazz, French cabaret and Italian Neapolitans, opera and oratorio, art songs and Broadway. Sean has been featured with the Dave Green Trio, at the Green Mill Jazz Club, was a regular at the Drake Hotel Coq d’Or, has performed at the Civic Opera House, Auditorium Theater, the Chicago Cultural Center and others. Blind since age 14, he serves as an inspiration to visually-impaired youth and adults.



**Rae-Myra Hilliard**

Rae-Myra Hilliard is equally at home in operatic, solo concert, and choral singing. Rae-Myra, as an active recitalist, regularly programs works featuring Black-American composers/lyricists or works written for a classical singer of color. Rae-Myra teaches at the University of St. Francis, the Music Institute of Chicago, and Evanston Township High School. In addition to her performing and teaching, Rae-Myra is the Music Director at St. James Lutheran Church in Lake Forest, IL. She holds her MM from the University of Northern Iowa and is a member of NATS, AGMA, and the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM) through the R. Nathaniel Dett Club.



**Kimberly Jones**

Soprano Kimberly Jones is an alum of the Ryan Opera Center with the prestigious Lyric Opera of Chicago. She has performed with opera companies and orchestras worldwide, including Chicago Opera Theater, Haymarket Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Connecticut Opera, and in Germany, France, Italy, and Singapore, and is on the voice faculty at Roosevelt University and DePaul University.



**Lynne Jordan**

The late Chicago film critic Roger Ebert declared her his “favorite diva.” Backed by her sizzling band The Shivers, Jordan developed into a Chicago institution, playing jazz and blues clubs, The Chicago Bluesfest, swanky lounges and the charity circuit throughout the country. Lynne came to Northwestern University to study journalism only to change majors to theater and has been performing nonstop ever since. She has represented Chicago as an Arts Ambassador to Moscow and Kyiv, has graced stages throughout Europe and South America. She has brought her special brand of storytelling, raw humor, and performance to Chicago, New York, and Atlanta with her sold-out show, *A Musical Tribute to Nina Simone*. Singing in any genre or language, Lynne says, “It’s the song and the story that matters.”

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**Anita Kallen**

Anita is both a cabaret singer and theater actor. In the summer of 2010, she was one of 38 students from around the world selected to attend the International Cabaret Conference at Yale University and work with Broadway veterans like Faith Prince and Tovah Feldshuh, as well as cabaret legend Julie Wilson. Since then, Anita and Yale colleague Catherine Thomson have produced three successful two-woman shows: *Dangerous Women*; *HERstory: The 19th Amendment and the Power of the Vote*, and *HERstory: Trailblazing Female Firsts* and coming 2024: *HERstory: A Century of Songwriting Sisters*. All the *HERstory* shows are meticulously researched and crafted, as a form of musical storytelling that takes their audiences on a journey to entertain, educate, move, and inspire.



**Beckie Menzie**

An award-winning concert artist, Beckie has appeared at some of the nation's top nightclubs and concert venues including the legendary Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center and Birdland in New York, Chicago's Auditorium Theatre, The Ravinia Festival and Park West, as well as at concert halls and art series across the country. Hailed by Chicago's WGN Radio as "one of the city's finest cabaret performers," Beckie is a three-time winner of Chicago's After Dark Award for Outstanding Cabaret Artist. A staple of the Windy City music scene, Beckie has performed at Davenport's, The Auditorium Theatre, The Ravinia Festival and Feinstein's at The Carmichael. Lending her musical stylings and theatrical skills to Chicago area theaters, Beckie is a sought-after musical director.



**Madeline Morgan**

Madeline Morgan got her music education the old fashioned way—from a family who believed in performance and were performers themselves. Her style is laid-back and her musical preference is jazz. She has sung in church choirs, community choirs and the Sounds Good seniors choir. She has performed at Davenport's Cabaret several times, produced and directed projects *Ella* and *Sarah* with Judy Narcisse, at Infinity and her Luncheon Jazz series.



**Howard Pfiefer**

Howard has worked extensively as a pianist, composer, arranger and musical director with 40 years in the fields of television commercials, feature films, variety shows, TV series and record albums. He has served as keyboardist and pianist for major Broadway touring shows including *Hamilton*, *Beautiful*, *A Chorus Line*, *West Side Story*, *Sound of Music*, and *Billy Elliot*. In recent years, he has been involved with Chicago's cabaret community where he mentors career singers. He has helped develop cabaret shows for the Boomer Babes and served as principal pianist for SongShop Live.



**Lou Ella Rose**

Lou Ella Rose is the lead singer and founder of Filipino folk-fusion band, SamaSama Project. A musical theater actress for Repertory Philippines and Tanghalang Pilipino in Manila and Theaterworks in Singapore, she dabbled in Philippine Television acting in soap operas, the Knowledge Channel, and ABS-CBN's Wansapantaym. Lou is a newscaster for Chicago Philippine Reports on Cable TV throughout Chicago and writes for Via Times News Magazine on happenings, celebrity features, Filipino culture, food, and travel. As an active community leader, Lou is an alumni and President Elect of Filipino Young Leaders Program (FYLPRO). She is passionate about sharing Filipino culture in the modern world and supports all outstanding Filipinos around the globe.



**Robert Sims**

Robert Sims, Gold Medal winner of the American Traditions Competition, has been hailed by critics for his rich tone, energetic performances, and convincing stage presence. Since his solo debut at Carnegie Hall in 2005, Sims has made several appearances at that venue performing the spirituals of Jacqueline B. Hairston, and most notably as a featured soloist in the 2009 series, *Honor! A Celebration of the African American Cultural Legacy*. He has been presented in concert by Friends of Negro Spirituals and has premiered Lena McLin's *I'm a Soldier* with the Chicago Sinfonietta among other orchestras throughout the United States. After winning the Friedrich Schorr Competition, Mr. Sims appeared in Massenet's *Cendrillon*, which won the National Opera America Award. He is the recipient of the Living Heritage Foundation Lifetime Achievement Award and the Friends of Negro Spirituals Heritage Keeper's Award. Sims is an alumnus of Oberlin Conservatory, SUNY Binghamton, Northwestern University, and Music Academy of the West.



**Patricia Tyson**

Patricia is a composer, choral director, vocalist and classical concert pianist. While she works as a registered nurse in hospice, her life's passion is music. "Music is healing for the body, soul and spirit." Patricia majored in music education/choral and voice at Chicago Music College of Roosevelt University. She taught private piano and voice and was a choir director and minister of music for various churches across the country. Patricia is an ordained minister; also serving as a Builder and active member of the Jewish progressive Mishkan Synagogue in Chicago.



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### **Kevin Wood**

For many years the music director of St. Martha's Shrine of All Saints in Morton Grove, Kevin's background includes a variety of musical styles. Kevin blends his classical training with the honesty and vulnerability of the storytelling found in cabaret as well as the strong characterizations of the musical theater stage. Performing credits include regional opera and musical theater, the concert stage, straight theater and most recently, the cabaret. He is the American Songbook Association's Midwest representative, spearheading its education program in Chicago to become a catalyst for students in building confidence, expanding their vocabulary, and discovering their own unique voice. Whatever genre Kevin performs, "he will connect with the audience - with his voice and, especially, his heart."