



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

FYI: Timestamps listed here are not correct, but know that all of the content from the interview is here.

00:00.00

BRIAN

Hello everyone I am really just delighted about this conversation that we're gonna have today with Michael McElroy and Michael there's an intro already so we don't even need to do that part. So let's jump into the conversation. Just thank you so much for being here on the podcast and.

00:12.10

Michael

Ah, it's my pleasure. Thanks Brian for having me.

00:17.30

BRIAN

You know I fell in love with you I would say I don't I'm not going to age either of us. But let's say I was younger. When I came to see the Broadway inspirational voices in New York city and

00:21.28

Michael

Please don't ah.

00:31.67

BRIAN

Fall in love and was like this is why we do theater and this is why we exist and this is why we work on our talents and I would just love to hand you the microphone just give a little you know, share your story with the listeners here so they have a chance to get to know you a little bit as we go through this conversation today.

00:48.50

Michael

Wow. Well thank you? Um Michael McElroy my pronouns he him his just in the habit of saying that and um I grew up in Ohio with a really interesting mixture of experiences you know? ah. I was the grandson of a minister who started our church so that was in downtown Cleveland in a very um and a marginalized community. Um, and but I grew up in the suburbs. So I had access to arts and I grew up at a time I don't want to date myself either. Where. Arts education was an integral part of you know education. So you know there were you know dance classes and music classes and band and theater that were an important part of our our class day and so I grew up with these 2 different experiences of the suburbs. And then the music all of my family are are musicians my grandmother plays the piano. My mom at 82 still plays every Sunday my brother my sister and my uncle all my nieces and nephews play now. Um, and so I grew up with that music also with great. Arts



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

training in high school and junior high school. So the love of theater of the love. The arts was kind of you know, just a part of my existence and we used to go downtown to see shows in elementary school I think the first show I saw was Porgy and Bess. National tour in fourth grade and I looked on that stage and saw people who looked like me and I went that's something I want to do that's something I can do so I always loved it and when it came time to go to college I got into Carnegie Mellon and went there and got my degree. And then moved to New York and I moved to New York right at the height of the AIDS epidemic in 1990 and it was right as Broadway Cares and Equity Fights AIDS were created and then eventually came together and you know. As people in the theater community. We know how to come together for a cause when it really is you know to help each other and so many people were doing cabarets at that time to raise money for Barbara Carere Equity Fights AIDS and I did 2 years of cabaret and then I said you know I want to do something with gospel music because I knew. Getting through this time of seeing friends and then the next day they're gone that though we were fundraising and figuring out how to take care of their day-to-day needs. What were we taking care of in terms of ourselves in terms of our spirit in terms of our hearts.

03:38.14

Michael

Um, and so I wanted to do something with gospel music that brought together a diverse group of singers to just create a space where we could share the music not any kind of religious dogma but just the power of the music which is so healing and transformative and that was in 1994 and twenty seven years later still going strong now at five hundred one C three with outreach programs longstanding programs around a McDonald house and covenant house and I stepped down actually in June of what is it 2021 as I stepped into a new position of leadership at the department of Musical Theater University of Michigan as chair of the department.

04:17.00

BRIAN

Yeah, right and accepted a Tony award of Excellence for the Broadway's Ratio Voices too. Let's just not yeah, let's just not hide any of that good stuff right? Yeah yeah.

04:23.14

Michael

Um, well there was that yeah and 2019 I think we were awarded Tony for excellence in theater which was pretty amazing.

04:36.23

BRIAN

I I just I want to as a gay man I wanted to just respectfully. Ah thank you for acknowledging that part of the history that you shared because I think that it is a part of the history that is we need to speak out about it often.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

04:53.20

BRIAN

As a way that we remember and it's not of just remembrance but also of ah the lack of support or the the mystery behind what was happening at that time and I will say that and this is jumping now to the first time I walked into a Broadway inspiration inspirational voices concert I think it was on the upper west side. Um, and I was like why this is like a secret that no one should that. Ah, we're the only ones who know about like we we are in something that is incredible that people does everyone know this is happening. Why is everyone in the everyone should be here right now and to to. That was probably 9098 I would imagine and so to know to then also hear that the Tony just happened so recently just that a bigger stage and that it's had more and more of an impact is just I think really powerful to think in so I just want to thank you about behalf of myself and also for what I know that you're doing in that work there just it.

05:28.11

Michael

Oh.

05:43.55

BRIAN

It really does have all the power you just described of all the healing and what you said about not making the the religious Dogma was not what you were trying to communicate in that time I'm a nondenominational reverend so that very much aligns with kind of the conversations that I'm having and I think that you know at its highest level theater is meant to be a spiritual experience and so I just appreciate you.

06:00.21

Michael

I agree. Yeah and also I go ahead.

06:03.52

BRIAN

Saying that and no, you're here to be on my show make you talk.

06:08.64

Michael

Ah, no well I was just gonna say that it was important to me that the choir reflect back the audience in terms of identity and lived experiences and so diversity was always a part of it though. The music was birthed in a specific lived experience. I believed and still believe that the power of the music transcends that and if we come to it respectfully honoring what it is that we all can find our way in and I think that even today bib stands as. And is an example of what can happen the power of what can happen in many different lived experiences religious experiences identities sexualities come together through the power of music it it means something especially today as we see so many. Messagings that come that are about being divisive that are trying to



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

divide us that are trying to so to make us fearful of what is different from us to have viv stand as this example of no this is what is possible when many people.

07:09.16

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah.

07:18.97

Michael

Ah, many different backgrounds lived experiences come together. This is what is possible and that also is one of the reasons that um black theater United has been doing the work that it's doing and nice segway to get that seggue because thank you? But it's the same thing. It's like.

07:30.88

BRIAN

Yeah I got it but well done. Thank you for saving me. Good job.

07:38.90

Michael

Look at diversity and the way it's messaged sometimes is as if someone is getting something it means that it's taking something away from someone else and what we stand for what I believe in as an artist. What I did with Biv and what I do as a founding member and we do as members Of. United is say no, let's make the table bigger because the more experience is the more diversity. The more lived experiences that we have at the table. Oh my gosh What possibilities does that hold for the future of our industry for the to the future of art making right.

08:17.41

Michael

There are things that we haven't even thought of right that or could experience and how in the ways that we can innovate our our art form If more people are at the table and it's not just the same people making the same decisions for our industry.

08:33.83

BRIAN

Yeah, so much So and also and I think Also what do we want the theater. What do we want the art to be that question that begs this question of do we want it to be not who we are do it in for so long. It has not been who we who the who the world is who it's not been represented.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

08:51.74

Michael
Um, right.

08:53.58

BRIAN

And can you tell so tell us a little bit more about black theater United right? that I you know I've read all the press. How did it come to be. You've got some really fancy Fabulous people who are super supportive of this. So the the message is getting out but I wanted to hear from you a little bit more about how it started and where you are right now.

09:09.16

Michael

Um, I think the black here united stands as one of many examples during the pandemic during shutdown of taking what is could be centered in a place of pain. And transforming it to power. Um I remember this so clearly I was talking about this Audra came and was a guest at um university in Michigan and I remember we had been in shutdown for about three months and the only place I had gone was either to the grocery store or to stand in line to hopefully get you know some paper towels at right 8 that was it. Um and I just as an aside, if someone had said a year before that that that would be our existence for a year nobody would have believed it. But that's another thing.

10:02.59

BRIAN

No way Jose yeah yeah, no.

10:06.41

Michael

You would ever believe it? Um, and so I the first time I went out. It was July and it was a friend's birthday and we had decided that we were going to get some to go food and just sit in the park over by the river and I was sitting there on the grass. We're all in masks and sitting there and my phone rings. And it's Audre and she's like this is what's happening in our world. This is what's happening in our industry and I want to bring together lashan and I were talking and we want to bring some like-minded folks together just to talk about what we can do not only for our industry but for our people and. Use our political our our personal, our professional currency to try to make a difference both within our industry and in the world and that started with every Sunday zoom meetings 2 and 3 hour meetings

10:49.89

BRIAN

It is it is.

11:01.77



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

Michael

And we started to form what it is that we wanted to do and to really center it starting with our industry because at that time our industry was in a place of turmoil.

11:15.99

BRIAN

Um, yeah.

11:17.95

Michael

Um, and there was a kind of reckoning that what we were seeing happen being across our country was actually being mirrored within our industry and when we don't know what to do Sometimes we can be paralyzed and be to you like many of the other organizations formed and had had been formed during that time. Was about partnering with advocating for looking for solutions and ways to move the conversation forward So that this time where we could not work was not dead time but time to plant new seeds time to till the ground time to. Ah, be in community in ways that sometimes our business does not allow us to do and and we just started to become very clear about what it is. We wanted to do with our political personal and professional currency and we've been. Meeting ever since and working ever since.

12:12.95

BRIAN

Yeah, and and I can just say when you when you say this these of of to go from pain or to choose from power that that's very clear and what you when you look at your materials and what you share and this fellowship program that you've just created that is about training other. And it sounds like it's about Can you speak a little bit about that because that was to me that was I was very galvanized when I saw that on the side I was like oh everyone needs to apply please rotten do not walk. Yeah I mean I know that at the point that when you're all listening to this this is it's passed for this year but I think it's important that they know the kind of actions that Btu is taking and creating.

12:48.29

Michael

That's great I'm actually on the mentorship committee we're called Btu Rise because it's really about uplifting and one of the things in our um, new deal was that we wanted to make sure that there are Act. There's access and Pipelines. You know it's sometimes you know for example with internships and mentornships mentorships. They're unpaid. So if you need to have a certain level of privilege and access in order to be able to do a free.

13:22.95

BRIAN

Ah.

13:24.30



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

Michael

Mentorship So we in our new deal which is something we came into agreement with across all parts of our industry from theater owners to producers to creatives. Um to say no more unpaid internships because just and right right? and so and so ah.

13:36.48

BRIAN

Praise be praise. Be yes.

13:43.88

Michael

This one that we created is also about looking at the spaces within our industry where there is no diversity where there has not been access where there haven't been pipelines and so one that we looked at and or that wanted to partner with us some individuals in our.

13:49.78

BRIAN

Ah.

14:01.63

Michael

Advertising Broadway advertising and marketing companies and so we are in the process now of looking for applications. We just opened up our applications for the Broadway Marketing internship program which is partnering with 4 of the 5 major advertising and marketing firms for Broadway. For a summer internship. It's paid. You have a home again. S serene coin right sereal coin a k a rpm and situation and ah.

14:22.65

BRIAN

Ah, so sereno coins on the list right? Sereno coin is on a sereno coin on the list. My first job out of college. My first job out of college was it Serena that's all, yes, right? awesome.

14:39.38

Michael

So we are accepting. We're partnering with cuny right now to accept applications for any students who want to apply and then we're gonna choose I think it's 10 students and they will be with them all summer and it's about investing long term so they can see um what that.

14:52.38

BRIAN

Sure yeah.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

14:58.13

Michael

Process is from the inside and hopefully spark a desire to want to become a part of that industry so that it diversifies those people who are actually the movers and shakers in that part of our industry.

15:08.10

BRIAN

Totally and I can just remember when I was there. It was a primarily white spaces when I was it when I was there that was and so that I understand we've had a couple conversations on this podcast around the Pipeline. We had this woman who is a lawyer who is helping. A pipeline for having black publicists and black managers and black lawyers and be part of it and so what you say is so I think integral into what what you've described is we can't just be like let's fix everything right? This second is like where we what is the what is that What is the next Piece. What is the neck. How do we continue to fulfill this vision we want to see so if. And I'm sure there's people listening right? are like so right now you know the moment that happened in in 2020 and some people woke up who weren't woke up already or started listening. Maybe who weren't listening already um in this beautiful beginning that you described which sounds like it started from a place of power. It sounds like that phone call was a place of we need to we want to do something we want to. We want to move forward from this even if if it was even if it was birth of pain and that we want to move forth. This was there any part of you or in these conversations where are we allowed to do this. Are we going to get in trouble is someone going to get weird. Like I just I Um wonder what? that was like in terms of you are a professional actor. You have a reputation people understand like you have no business like like people like calling people out that kind and and I Just wonder what that was like for you as a performer if you're willing to share.

16:33.84

Michael

Well, you know that's a great question. There was I didn't have any fear um because for us the way that Btu has tried to move through the space is not so much in calling people out but rather calling them in to conversation right um. And so for us it was never about shaming or belittling it was about here's a moment where you there is no work to be had here's a moment of absolute stasis. Not just within our industry but in the world. And I have to say it was a I don't know if these opportunities would have happened if it hadn't been all the things that were happening at the same time. The pandemic George Floyd you know Breonna Taylor Ammaud aubrey all of these things that were happening where people could not escape but they had no other.

17:31.82

BRIAN

Yeah.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

17:32.40

Michael

Course but to watch what was happening. Ah I think all of that together made it so that we couldn't turn away you there was no job to go to. There was no money coming in and right and so.

17:38.74

BRIAN

Yeah, there's no eight shows a week to go run to and yeah, yes, ah ah, right? Yeah yeah.

17:47.87

Michael

I think it put people in a space of humility. It put people who were not used to being powerless in a space where they had no power it. It. It put a light quite brightly on issues and it also gave people for the first time. Um, the opportunity to have a voice and to say and speak their truth without any repercussion because the world was looking at our industry you know in the harsh white light ah in that moment. So there was no spin that could be put on it.

18:17.80

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah.

18:25.91

Michael

And people were so paralyzed that there needed to be organizations and we've all there are many organizations that formed during that time have all done our work in different ways. There's not 1 way to the mountaintop as a friend of mine would say so. It took all of us working in our own individual ways and then sometimes in concert to actually begin to move things forward I'm one and I think be to you we are we say all the time proceed at the speed of wisdom. So I as a person as an artist am a process- driven person. So I don't care about the immediate result I want to know that by the time I get to whatever that result is that the roots are deep and and strong. So we have always proceeded with.

19:22.85

Michael

Calling people into conversation while still making them accountable but partnering with them on the journey. Um and doing it in a way that is strong but caring and empathetic and.

19:38.37

BRIAN

Yeah.

19:42.17



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

Michael

Just think that sometimes people don't have those tools and so we can either be angry at them. But if you've never had this happen to you. You've never had this experience I'm going to show you where the information is and partner with you to get there but I'm also going to hold you accountable for it right? And so we're really about.

19:55.96

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah.

20:00.66

Michael

Making long-term change is that will affect our industry 5 10 15 twenty thirty fifty years from now.

20:08.86

BRIAN

Ah, we it's it's really reassuring to hear you say this? We had a meeting yesterday as a team. My team with our DEI inclusion expert who comes in. We're working with them and really trying to get clear on. We're primarily a white team and so we're trying to work on that ourselves and make do better right? And so. She said to us and this really landed phrase is it is slow work in an urgent situation and I was like ah I and it's pisses me off so much but I understand like I want like let can we do and that's not actually so what you just said just reassures again. My. The the wisdom that I want to tap into that. You've just described or the wisdom that I'm trying to gain in this moment. So I appreciate you sharing that? yeah.

20:48.24

Michael

And it's scary. It's scary to be vulnerable in these ways you know a friend of mine always talks about we are conditioned in this country not to talk about Race. It's always uncomfortable and so in this moment Black Theater United is saying this is. What would happen if diversity was our superpower instead of that thing that we have to do or we're being pressured to do or you know? Okay I'll do what everybody says right now and then I'll go back to what it was before when things you know, but really. Deeply embedded in every aspect of our industry. What would that do? How would it change. How would it transform for the better and so that's what excites me about the work that we do and trying to do it with.

21:41.42

BRIAN

Yeah.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

21:46.12

Michael

With care with empathy but holding people's feet to the fire.

21:47.14

BRIAN

Yeah, as and as you said that it's a process and it it is a journey is there. 1 thing that you can think of so far that's like 1 of things you're most proud of that's happened already that you could say look at that smile.

21:56.88

Michael

Well, there are a couple. Well there are a couple things. Um, you know the new deal that we put out in in concert with all the different industry leaders something I'm very proud of because that was a lot of work over.

22:05.43

BRIAN

Right.

22:16.00

Michael

Six-month period of time meeting regularly to come to an agreement with different facets of our organization of our industry that have never come together ever before um to have all representatives of of the unions in a room together. Have creatives and theater owners and producers and in a room together that had never happened before and so to have that happen was a great accomplishment I think also having the theater just named after James Earl Jones was in the new deal. That's one of the things that we talked about.

22:36.43

BRIAN

Yeah.

22:50.23

Michael

Having unpaid ah no more unpaid internships and that is something that is. We're seeing happening that we're a part of and we're seeing happening across our industry that diversity work is being taken seriously with chief diversity officers in different shows and in different with the Broadway League you know.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

23:09.64

Michael

Those kinds of changes and even you know that there were so many shows celebrating the black experience with black directors and black writers on Broadway in the fall I love that but I'm much more interested and excited about who's making those decisions behind those doors. Those are the spaces that I want to see more change right? And right? yeah right? Yeah and see more diversity because that's going to start to shift our industry in ways that we can't even imagine that are exciting.

23:31.42

BRIAN

That's the pipeline that you're talking about that's the place where you're saying we need. That's where we need to see the colors change for like of a better phrase. Yeah yeah.

23:46.38

BRIAN

Yeah, and I love the way you say this Michael is there's this because the way that you said like inserted diversity versus what the ways we can't imagine if this was our superpower. It's such a. It's a totally different way to think about this and I love the way you've described that is there. So in all this you know I'm noticing a trend of.

23:47.44

Michael

You know.

24:05.57

BRIAN

And kind of what you've explained is you seem to have a very clear focus on youth or the people coming up on the like you said interns and you've worked at and Nyu and now you're at Michigan where does that come from for you do you think

24:18.48

Michael

Well, it was the Ray I was raised. You know I would not be where I am right now without the teachers family members mentors that you know saw something in me. And made the choice to foster it to challenge me to care for me to mentor me right? because it is a choice and ah all of those mentors who invested time and energy in me. They're the reason that I'm able to. Have the life and the career and the experiences that I have today now at some point I had to take that over but for me as being a you know, growing up in the church. The thing that we used to always say is give of your time tithes and talent and it was you know. Idea of service and I look at what we do as artists as being in service. It's either as an individual artist I'm in service to the character you know, but I'm in service in some way whether it's telling stories and so for me service mentorship



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

giving back all of that. It's just the way I was raised. It was a part of something that was embedded deep inside of me and we're only as good as the the folks that are coming up behind us right? And how are we like we stood on shoulders how were we now allowing them to stand on our shoulders. And so that goes back to the mentors and teachers that I had and it goes all the way back to all of the the generations that came before me that made sacrifices that dealt with things that I could not even possibly dream of knowing that there was a future where they were hoping that that wouldn't be the case. That stuff lives in my Dna and I think is important that we pay it forward.

26:15.64

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah, how are you Michael how you doing.

26:20.61

Michael

I am okay, you know, um, there's a lot going on and you know it's a I that's such an interesting question. Because sometimes I'm so I am so busy doing that I have to remind myself to take a breath to enjoy and be present. Um for the moment. Um, it's just been a busy time. Ah. And going on what four weeks without a day off, but that's okay I got a Sunday coming up where I'm going to yes, but you know I I don't want to see it that way but I can rest I'll get I'll get an opportunity to rest on the other side beyond the river.

26:58.44

BRIAN

Okay, ah praised me for that Sunday. Ah.

27:14.93

Michael

Right? I want to so I want to make sure I'm saying naming self-care is important and that sometimes I can go a little too far in my crazy work. You know I just love to work and to do do do but I'm learning as I get older that my body goes No no, no, no, no so I am slowing down a little bit.

27:18.46

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

27:34.87

Michael

But just that idea of work and giving back and creating and innovating and being in service because I believe art makes the world better and making sure that we have artists who carry that Torch forward is important to me, especially in this time that we're in. We're seeing so much divisiveness and so much it feels like the powers of darkness are winning a lot of the time. Um, but I feel it is our responsibility as artists to keep pouring light into the world and sometimes it does.

28:00.27

BRIAN

The effect.

28:12.96

Michael

Take its toll. Um, but I I want to keep doing it I have to keep doing it and being a part of that change and making mistakes and getting up and asking for forgiveness and trying to do better and all of those things. It's like you know I don't want to you know, paint myself as The. You know or some angel because I'm not I make mistakes I make huge mistakes and have to find and ask for forgiveness and then attempt to make it better and do better but I learn and I grow and um and believe in you know what. But the calling on my life is and why I was put on this earth. It has changed and has shifted from performer to a ranger to composer to Artistic director to factor you know teacher to chair all those things but they're all the same right.

29:03.40

BRIAN

Um, yeah.

29:07.17

Michael

It's all about service. It's all about service through art Artistic expression artistic training creating art innovating art. So I just try to be open and prepared.

29:15.51

BRIAN

Yeah, that Michael I'm noticing in you. Yeah I will just say that it is. It's such a delight to be in your space and there is a dogged certainty around what I am doing is is of service. What I'm doing so that that the the flavored might change.

29:31.56

Michael

Yeah.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

29:32.99

BRIAN

Like you said I'm being an arranger I'm sing on it but that you the adherence to I'm I believe that this is going to make change that this is making in differences is it. It seems like and you can correct me here. It gives you a sense of my days are full. My I'm doing the right thing with my time.

29:47.27

Michael

Um, ah yes, yes, yes.

29:50.72

BRIAN

I Mean obviously your days probably are full. But I mean like that your days are full and I mean fulfilled or maybe a better way to say that do you feel fulfilled in this work and in the work that you do yeah.

29:57.63

Michael

Yes, yes, I want to be more intentional about I was just talking to my best friend today about what I say yes to because so much of our and I and wonder if you agree with this our industry our art form. It. Breeds a certain kind of lack right? like there's only so many jobs. It's only right? So when things come along I'm I still need to learn that no is a position of power right? and that I don't have to say yes to everything because someone asked me right? and so.

30:32.82

BRIAN

Oh hell yes.

30:36.29

Michael

Still have a problem saying no when it's an amazing opportunity. But then when you look at it What can happen is if you have too many amazing opportunities at the same time then they become things you have to do instead of things that you want to do and then you lose the joy of the doing and so at my seasoned age.

30:46.28

BRIAN

Ah.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

30:55.37

Michael

I am trying to learn balance self-care and the beauty and the power of the word. No.

31:01.37

BRIAN

Oh god yes god I well I will just I I don't know who said this but someone said the most attractive word in the english language is no I was like oh yeah, cause you attract the other things and when you say no, you're saying yes to something else and it just is such a it. I so agree with what youre just and also I can I just say in this moment just how delighted I am that you said yes to being with us today because I feel very we feel very lucky to have you here. So thank you, thank you in in the work that you've done and I want and and the work that you've done we will probably get close to the end here though in the work that you've done.

31:22.96

Michael

Um, oh oh, it's my pleasure. My pleasure? Yeah, thank you for having me.

31:38.12

BRIAN

What's the biggest lesson that you've learned what's it taught you.

31:41.47

Michael

Um, ah um I'll tell you there's 2 things but the most important thing is every lesson doesn't feel good.

31:58.13

BRIAN

Ah, underline that and take write that down people. Yeah.

31:58.98

Michael

You know what? I mean put it in caps bowl lit 2025 edge font I don't care. You know when you and and once again I'm not setting myself up to be a person who has it all figured out I don't I struggle I am challenged.

32:06.27

BRIAN

Yes.

Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

32:18.37

Michael

I have um, a temper I can be angry I can be self-centered I have an ego all of those things we all do, but there is something about the choice to want to be the best person that you can be and to surrender to I'm ah I'm from a background of faith. And and to surrender to the thing that you were put on this earth to do that. Nobody else can do and that's not ego that I truly believe that every person on this earth was put here for a specific purpose that is uniquely their own with that acceptance also puts you on a path that. Always learning and growing and sometimes those experiences are fantastic and sometimes they hurt growth does not always feel good and so the thing that I have learned in these last few years and that sticks with me. Is that even though something may hurt in the in the moment and my friend I don't if you know Angel Robinson calls them valleys of preparation you know and you need those valleys you need those moments where you don't know and you're questioning and you're doubting and you're.

33:33.27

Michael

You know confused and you're frustrated and you feel like there's no way out and that it's and that the thing isn't going to happen for you So that when you have those mountaintop moments. You appreciate them in a different way but they don't define you right? and life is made up.

33:48.44

BRIAN

Yes.

33:53.24

Michael

Of those Valleys and those mountains and so for me to know that when I'm in those Valleys It don't always feel good but I can look back and go oh this I'm able to do and understand and engage because of that.

34:11.75

BRIAN

Yes, yes.

34:12.59

Michael

Experience that's one the other one is how to extend empathy when empathy is not given to you how to extend Grace when Grace is not extended to you I don't like that one I really don't like that one. That one is a real like attack on my you know who I am as a person because I believe that everything should be just and right and fair right ever since I was little as little kid. It was like but that's not fair. Um, so to be able to extend grace.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

34:35.48

BRIAN

Ah, ah yes, ah.

34:50.13

Michael

When Grace was not extended that was ah that was a bitter pill to swallow and it's something that I continue to navigate and try to center every community that I walk into in that way. Um, so that we have space for mistakes and for forgiveness. And healing if we stay in the anger. We never get to the healing and then we never get to the resilience so centering the work that I do as a teacher as a chair and a person in a space of leadership in creating a community of trust through creating so grace.

35:12.39

BRIAN

Right.

35:27.94

Michael

And empathy compassion letting those things be the center of what we do while we're also looking at how we integrate diversity equity inclusion accessibility belonging into artistic practice as we build community. All those things so those are the 2 big ones that oof.

35:40.89

BRIAN

Yeah, yeah, yeah, that second one I so get you like these are the 2 biggest tough stuff right? That second one I so get you we we have but which have a value on our team. We call it don't smack the wound which I think I stole from Marianne Williamson at some point which is like.

35:47.77

Michael

Been rough ones.

35:59.84

BRIAN

The the simplest comp way and how to explain it is is if somebody owes you five bucks they know that they owe you five bucks you need to keep going. You owe me five bucks you me five bucks show me five bucks it's like if someone said something mean in an email they know they said something email. We don't need to be snarky back. We say oh yeah, we're happy to take care of that and they will go. Oh yeah I wasn't being my best. So like there's just a. Ah, grace that that extension of Grace actually I think it returns everyone back to who they're meant to be and I just appreciate you saying that the truth is who they are oh yeah, sure now you



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

said you got a temper I clocked when you said I have a temper I was like okay, don't piss him off today I was I was like okay to the. Ah.

36:22.19

Michael

Yeah I don't do it all the time though I don't do it all the time. Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know I didn't use to but now I'm making peace with how I can rise up in that way and go okay Michael like I have a rule I'm sure you do too.

36:36.92

BRIAN

Ah, yeah.

36:41.59

Michael

No sending an email for 24 hours you know so if someone like you said send something that's snarky I'm like and then it goes into the draft and then I get up the next day and I go ooh Michael I'm so glad you didn't send this and then I go back and i.

36:42.87

BRIAN

Ah sure. Yes, yeah, and then it sits in drafts. Ah.

37:00.80

BRIAN

And delete a lot.

37:00.83

Michael

Reword and reshape right? You know? um, but that's the journey. That's the you know I don't know you know I'm just I'm trying to figure it out like everybody you know.

37:07.73

BRIAN

Yeah, sure, totally So I'm sure there are a bunch of listeners who want to know more about you. Want to know more about B to you when a no mile Broadway voices where can we can you give everybody some help in and finding those things and those resources sure.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

37:22.11

Michael

Sure black theateratit dot com is our website and has everything that we've done everything we're doing and everything we're about to do is on there and also we're on Instagram same handle. Ah.

37:32.40

BRIAN

Wait can I I want to interrupt you here because I just want to say if you go to their website. They also have your old programming is embedded not old. Programming is embedded onto their site. So it really is a beautiful resource of learning that's there and available to everybody so I just want to advocate for anybody who. Got lit up by this conversation today to really go take a look at that. Okay, and now we'll pass the mic back to you.

37:54.60

Michael

Ah, and then same thing with b l v it's biboices dot org to see what we've done what we're doing with the what the organization is doing I've really um, taken a step back and was you know once again timing I stepped down in June and I stepped into this. Of leadership at University Of Michigan moved to Ann Arbor so good. You know, um I grew up in Ohio so being back in the suburbs is you know, quite familiar. Um, you know so it's it's in an arbor's a lovely place. So.

38:14.41

BRIAN

Wait pause wait. How's that going in Ann Arbor

38:24.97

BRIAN

Got it. Yeah.

38:32.54

Michael

Um, so I really stepped made a real concerted effort to give space so that Biv can move forward in its next iteration and sometimes you know leadership can not allow that to happen because they're still holding on I'm not holding on I'm like.

38:42.88

BRIAN

Car. Yeah.



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

38:52.46

BRIAN

Ah, okay, great.

38:52.64

Michael

Go do what you do and I will celebrate you from a distance and so if they can figure out what they' who they want to be without me kind of looking over shoulders. So I've really taken a huge step a complete step out which I'm happy about so but the website has our history and.

39:09.89

BRIAN

Great, great and then if they want to know more about you if we go look into your Instagram where should we go.

39:12.14

Michael

You know what's coming up. Ah, you know I'm not ah I'm not a social media spirit I have Instagram which I basically use to talk and send funny videos to my friends every once in a while I'll post about something that happened at Michigan.

39:19.92

BRIAN

Okay.

39:30.84

Michael

Like this past week we did a weekend. We had a community day where I invited 6 bipac artists to come and do master classes over the weekend that all the students in our department could go to they could pick two west african dance in salsa and Broadway dance and vocal performance in Shakespeare to August Wilson and a panel and it was so I'll post things like that I'll post what's happening mostly at Michigan with my students and our alums and and then funny videos things that I think are really hysterical like I posted for example, Aldra's ah.

39:52.70

BRIAN



Ep. 69 - Michael McElroy Talks Black Theatre United & Tony Award-Winning Broadway Inspirational Voices - Transcript

Great. Got it. Great. Got a great great, great. Any mean in it. Yes way the gay one The gay one is amazing So we should all I just share One. We are in the I don't know the echoes or the haunting of the don't say gay law and.

40:08.21

Michael

Warming up video Did you see her warming up video. Yes.

40:20.30

BRIAN

In Florida right now in Audra's video so good where she's saying gay over and over and I mean I mean and this isn't a lap. Yeah, just a warm up. Yeah, and it's amazing and it makes a statement. Yeah.

40:26.41

Michael

It's just a warm up, but that's the power of that's the power of Theater. That's the power of art and those are the things that I'm always excited about are like how can I use my art. To to say something in a way that only art can without she could have said you know and I think this is wrong and then at and day. No no, all she did was warm up using vowels that and consonants that when they come together make a word and that says. Exactly the thing that we're not supposed to say anymore if we live in a specific in a particular State. You know, um and it's powerful because it's funny but it gets to the to the core of the message. Um, and that's also what I'm excited me about being a part of black Theater United is how do we use our artistry. To do the things that we want to do to put the messages out to advocate for ah black bodies Black lives black artists black human beings across our country um through our art and also through our our our political power.

41:33.60

BRIAN

Yeah I mean there's no other way to end this conversation other than what you just had I think that's really powerful I'm so grateful that you were willing to spend some time with us today I know you have a lot of invitations to say things to say yes and no to and so I'm just going to advocate for you. You know say and no when you need to but I'm really really delighted and thankful for your time.

41:52.20

Michael

Thank you, Thank you Thanks for having me I Really appreciate it.

41:53.33

BRIAN

For us today really grateful. Absolutely 100 for sure.