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Milwaukee Repertory Theater
Hosts **20/20 Vision For Milwaukee Arts**
A One-Day Conference in Partnership with
Milwaukee Black Theater Festival
September 9, 2020

August 31, 2020 (Milwaukee, WI) – In partnership with the first annual [Milwaukee Black Theater Festival](#), [Milwaukee Rep](#) will host the *20/20 Vision for Milwaukee Arts*, a one-day virtual conference on September 9, 2020 from 1-4pm CT. The conference will include several industry and community speakers, a panel discussion, and the debut of an original commission by Milwaukee Rep. The conference is free and open to the public, just join via this [Zoom link](#).

Playwright and new Director of The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College **Idris Goodwin** will give the Keynote address titled **Be A Citizen Artist**. Goodwin recently wrote and performed an inspiring Break Beat poem [Your House is Not Just a House](#) to kick off Milwaukee Rep's [From Our Home to Your Home](#) virtual programming in April.

Playwright **Cori Thomas** (*Lockdown*) will introduce her play, *Welcome Home*, an online commission for Milwaukee Rep's "From Our Home to Your Home" series. The play centers on Rocket, played by **Gavin Lawrence** (American Players Theater Core Company Member), who finally walks free after his eighteen year incarceration and discovers a very different world on the other side. In a masked up world in the time of COVID, he makes his very first FaceTime call. The short play is directed by **Kent Gash** (founding director of NYU Tisch School of the Arts Department of Drama's New Studio on Broadway) and also features **Heather Alicia Simms** (*A Raisin in the Sun*, Broadway).

Milwaukee Chamber Theatre Artistic Director **Brent Hazelton**, Bronzeville Arts Ensemble Artistic Director **Sheri Williams Pannell**, UPAF President and CEO **Deanna Tillisch** and Skylight Music Theatre Artistic Director **Michael Unger** will take part in a panel discussion around *Building and Sustaining a Diverse and Inclusive Arts in Milwaukee* moderated by **Morgan Phelps** founder of Colorful Connections.

Additional speakers include the founder of Milwaukee's first annual Black Theater Festival, **Malkia Stampley**, **Catina Cole** founder of MPower Theater Group, **DiMonte Henning** founder of Lights! Camera! Soul!, award-winning Milwaukee playwright **Malaina Moore**, actor and costume designer **Austin Winter** and more.

The **Milwaukee Black Theater Festival's** mission is to create highly visible critical mass for Black narratives and focus energy of theater on the conversations about how Milwaukee can exist as its best self for every Black individual who choose to call it home. The Festival is a multigenerational collaborative endeavor between Milwaukee Chamber Theatre, Lights! Camera! Soul!, Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, Black Arts MKE, MPower Theater Group as well as other notable Black Milwaukee independent artists and arts leaders. The Festival runs now through September 12, purchase a pass today [HERE](#).

For more information on the **20/20 Vision for Milwaukee Arts** conference email athome@milwaukeeep.com.

Participant Bios

Catina Cole, *Speaker*

Catina is a mother of a superhero, trauma survivor, counselor, and "artist" in the Milwaukee area. She founded MPower Theater Group, a theater troupe that is dedicated to empowering survivors and offering opportunities for underrepresented artists with a social justice focus on activism, advocacy, and awareness. MPower Theater has addressed topics that include Black femininity, racial profiling, police brutality, molestation, rape, domestic violence, and topics that affect people of color and their communities. MPower has been instrumental in creating a safe space and providing transformational healing, in part due to Catina's leadership and counseling background, but also because the actors of MPower Theater understand the primary purpose is using performance art as a tool for healing. MPower Theater artists have worked with human trafficking training at Sojourner Family Peace Center. Catina's contributions work has been recognized by WCASA (Wisconsin Coalition Against Sexual Assault) 2016 Voice of Courage award and in 2017 with the Milwaukee FIRE Awards in the Arts category. Since 2015, MPower Theater has put on eight productions to sold-out audiences with the most recent, Yetta Young's *Butterfly Confessions*, and was invited three times to Milwaukee Pride. MPower Theater also collaborates with other organizations and "pays it forward" by donating a portion of proceeds to local charities in the Milwaukee area. Catina is excited that MPower Theater Group is included in the Milwaukee Black Theater Festival, with Oliva Dawson's response piece, *20/20*.

Idris Goodwin, *Keynote Speaker*

Idris is a multidisciplinary arts leader and creative community builder. Across two decades, he's forged a multifaceted career as an award-winning script writer for stage and screen, Break Beat poet, director, educator, and organizer. He is the new Director of The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center at Colorado College. The author of Free Plays: open source scripts for an antiracist tomorrow, Goodwin is committed to using the arts to spark meaningful conversation. His critically acclaimed plays like *And In This Corner Cassius Clay*, *How We Got On*, and *Hype Man: A Break Beat Play* are widely produced across the country at professional theatres, college campuses, and non-traditional spaces alike. He's been honored to receive developmental support from institutions like The Kennedy Center, The Eugene O'Neill Conference, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Arena Stage, and The Playwrights' Center. In addition to the recently released poetry collection *Can I Kick It?*, he's had several publications from Haymarket Books including Inauguration co-written with nico wilkinson, *Human Highlight: Ode To Dominique Wilkins*, and the play *This Is Modern Art* co-written with Kevin Coval. The two also cohost *The Same Old New School* Podcast on Vocalo Radio. He's appeared on HBO "Def Poetry," "Sesame Street," NPR, BBC Radio, and the Discovery Channel. For six years, Idris taught in the department of Theatre and Dance at Colorado College and was voted Teacher of the Year in 2015. Most recently, Idris served two seasons as Producing Artistic Director at StageOne Family Theatre in Louisville, Kentucky. Passionate about cultivating new audiences in the arts, Goodwin actively serves on both the advisory boards of Theatre for Young Audiences USA and Children's Theatre Foundation Association, as well as New Mexico's 516Arts. A catalyst for culture, Goodwin uses his full creative powers to galvanize people to the community square. He is a creative voice for change, impassioned by art for social good.

Brent Hazelton, *Panelist*

A Whitewater, Wisconsin, native and longtime Milwaukee resident, Hazelton enthusiastically joined Milwaukee Chamber Theatre after two decades on the Artistic Staff of Milwaukee Repertory Theater. Most recently at The Rep, Brent served for ten years as Associate Artistic Director, and built The Rep's John (Jack) D. Lewis New Play Development Program as well as spearheaded the season planning process and participated in ongoing strategic planning. Prior to that, he built The Rep's Emerging Professional Residency into one of the two strongest such programs in American regional theater. As a director and playwright, his work has set all-time sales records in two of The Rep's three core performance spaces.

DiMonte Henning, *Speaker*

DiMonte serves as Artistic Director for theater-arts organization, Lights! Camera! Soul! An organization

committed to the advancement of Black artistry and stories expressed through the Black lens. He received his formal theater training from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with additional training from Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Emerging Professional Residency. In addition to serving as Artistic Director for Lights! Camera! Soul! DiMonte has performed regionally with the following theater credits: *Stick Fly* (Writers Theatre), *A Christmas Carol* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), *Lobby Hero* (Milwaukee Chamber Theatre) *The Wiz* (First Stage), *Our Town* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), *Skeleton Crew* (Forward Theater Company), *Dreamgirls* (Milwaukee Repertory Theater), *Black Nativity* (Black Arts MKE), and *Deathtrap* (Milwaukee Chamber Theatre). TV credits include: guest starring roles on NBC's *Chicago PD* (Seasons 4&6), *UBER*, Disney's *Encore*, *Cousin Subs*, and *Harley-Davidson*.

Malaina Moore, Speaker

Malaina is a Milwaukee based actress, playwright and teaching artist. She trained at Marquette University where she studied theatre with an emphasis in performance and a minor in Social Welfare and Justice. She enjoys writing stories with social justice themes, such as her works: *This Just In* at the Milwaukee Chamber Theater and *White Privilege* which has been performed in both a range of times in Milwaukee and Madison.

Sheri Williams Pannell, Panelist

Sheri is a native Milwaukeean who has performed, directed or written for a number of Milwaukee's theater and arts entities including Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, First Stage, Florentine Opera, Milwaukee Chamber Theater, Milwaukee Fringe Festival, Milwaukee Rep, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Arts Museum, Renaissance Theatreworks and Skylight Music Theatre. Beyond Milwaukee, Sheri has worked at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Utah's Old Lyric Theatre, University Opera and University Theater at UW Madison, and the Children's Theater of Madison. Pannell was honored to direct a production as part of the United Nations Conference on Genocide, hosted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A founding member and artistic director at Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, Sheri is also director/teaching artist at Black Arts MKE and co-director of the drama ministry at Calvary Baptist Church. In 2018, Pannell was appointed to the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Peck School of the Arts as an Assistant Professor in Theatre and Area Head for the Musical Theatre Program. Her upcoming directing projects include the tour of *Bronzeville Boheme* for Florentine Opera (January 2021), *All Night Strut* (A Jumpin' Jivin' Jam) at the Peck School of the Arts (May 2021) and *Black Nativity* for Black Arts MKE and Marcus Center for the Performing Arts (November 2020). Pannell is a graduate of Spelman College and holds an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Morgan Phelps, Moderator

Morgan Phelps serves organizations and people who want to become better versions of themselves, create a sense of belonging for all, and uplift the voice of the underrepresented. Morgan is the Founder and CEO of Colorful Connections, a social enterprise that helps businesses succeed by creating inclusive workplaces and connecting with diverse talent. Specifically, Colorful Connections provides diversity recruiting services, inclusion trainings and assessments, as well as career development support with programs such as Think Tank, which retools underestimated professionals for the communications and creative industries. Morgan's professional history began in Journalism, includes more than 15+ years in Public Relations, and a lifetime adapting to different communication styles and homogenous environments. Throughout her career, Morgan has led high-profile campaigns for top, national agencies and companies such as Edelman, Burrell and Northwestern Mutual. From counseling senior executives to spearheading company announcements, Morgan has worked with an array of clients including GrubHub, SC Johnson, Bush's Beans, Belize Tourism Board, and the African-American Chamber of Commerce of Wisconsin – to name a few. Morgan graduated with a MSJ from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University, and a B.S. in African-American Studies, Theater and Politics from Oberlin College in Ohio. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.

Malkia Stampley, Speaker

Malkia is one of the founders and leaders of Milwaukee's first Black Theater Festival, as well as curator, performer in *Home* and director of *Stew*. Malkia is an actor, director and producer born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

She received her training at Marquette University, Skylight Music, and Milwaukee Rep. She has worked and traveled worldwide as a performer, and in 2013 she co-founded Bronzeville Arts Ensemble in Milwaukee where she served as Artistic Director for three years. Malkia has worked as a performer in Chicago, New York and all over Wisconsin. Favorite productions include *Two Trains Running* (Milwaukee Rep/Cincy Playhouse), *Talented Tenth* (Congo Square), *Good People* (Forward Theater), *Flying West* (Bronzeville Arts Ensemble), *A Midnight Cry* (First Stage) among many others. Malkia began directing in 2016, Black Arts MKE and Marcus Center for the Performing Arts' annual production, *Black Nativity*. She is most recently directed a workshop of the world premier *Sunflowered* by Lachrisa Grandberry and Aidaa Peerzada at Northern Sky Theatre and previously directed *Nonsense* at Milwaukee Repertory Theater. As a tv and film actor, Malkia has appeared on Showtime ("Work in Progress," "Shameless," "The Chi"), NBC ("Chicago Med," "Chicago PD"), HBO ("Native Son"), Fox ("Empire"), Netflix ("Beats") and a host of independent short and feature films. She is also an emerging film director and producer, having most recently directed the short film trilogy "The Pandemic." Malkia enjoys being a voiceover artist, yoga instructor and hosts her own channel, "Malkia Talks" on YouTube.

Cori Thomas, Playwright

Cori is an award winning playwright and screenwriter. Produced plays: *Lockdown; When January Feels Like Summer; Citizens Market; My Secret Language Of Wishes; Liberian Legacy Trilogy* and more. Produced and Developed at: WP Theater; Rattlestick Theater, Playwrights Horizons, Page 73, Ensemble Studio Theatre; City Theater, Pittsburgh; Goodman Theater; Pillsbury House Theater; Mixed Blood; Horizon Theatre Co; Mosaic Theatre Co; and others. She has won the American Theater Critics Osborn Award; Edgerton Foundation Prize; Was a 2017 runner up for The Dramatist Guild Horton Foote Playwriting Award; and more. Cori is the Mellon Playwright in Residence at WP Theater; and a New Dramatists Resident Playwright. Fellowships at O'Neill National Playwrights Conference; Sundance Theater Lab; MacDowell Colony; Bogliasco Foundation; Baryshnikov Arts Center; Djerassi and more. Film and TV Projects include: Original screenplay for HBO Films and Tribeca Productions. Cori is presently co-writing the memoirs of Sex Trafficking survivor, Sara Kruzan for Knopf/Random House. Founder: The Pa's Hat Foundation a 501(c)(3) in 2012. an organization focused on helping former child soldiers and other marginalized citizens of Liberia, West Africa with educational and work related assistance. Ongoing volunteer at San Quentin State Prison with the anti-violence program No More Tears. Board of Directors: of New Dramatists, Pa's Hat Foundation, Project FEEL, and No More TearsSQ. Cori is represented by Leah Hamos and Vernaliz Co at The Gersh Agency, Kirsten Jacobson at Good Fear Content; Eve MacSweeney at Fletcher and Co.

Deanna L. Tillisch, Panelist

Deanna L. Tillisch is President & CEO of the United Performing Arts Fund (UPAF), the largest nonprofit of its type in the country. UPAF raises much-needed dollars for 14 "Member Groups" that deliver world-class performances and nationally recognized arts education throughout the region. In 2019, UPAF raised just under \$12 million. Prior to UPAF, Tillisch spent almost two decades at Northwestern Mutual, holding leadership positions in Communications, Marketing and the Foundation. Tillisch is a Board member of Milwaukee Institute for Art and Design, serving as Governance Chair and Executive Committee member. She also serves on the Burke Foundation Board, Penfield Montessori Academy Board and Imagine MKE Board. Tillisch is a founding member of UPAF Notable Women, an Affinity Program that raises dollars for arts education. Tillisch received the Women of Distinction Award from the Waukesha County Community Foundation in 2014 and the Women of Influence Award from the *Milwaukee Business Journal* in 2016. The Tillisch family was honored by Life Navigators in 2017 as the 34th Annual Challenger Honoree. Tillisch holds a Master of Business Administration, graduating with honors, from Marquette University and a Bachelor of Arts in Communications from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Michael Unger, Panelist

Michael joined the Skylight team in September, 2019, as Artistic Director. Michael is also the Producing Artistic Director of NewArts in Newtown, CT, which he started with a local father in response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy. For NewArts he has directed a dozen large-scale musicals involving over 600 local

children. He was until recently the Associate Artistic Director and Director of Education for Off-Broadway's York Theatre Company. Michael has directed many benefit concerts, including for Susan Stroman, Andre DeShields, as well as for the Sandy Hook, CT and Parkland, FL communities. Selected world premieres include *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *Caligula*, and *A ROCKIN' Midsummer Night's Dream*, which is featured in the award-winning documentary film, *Midsummer in Newtown*. Other directing credits include McCarter Theatre, 59E59, Paramount, W.H.A.T., Signature, Cape Playhouse, Deaf West, and The St. Louis MUNY. He has directed fifteen operas, two of which are available on DVD.

Austin Winter, Speaker

Austin is a Milwaukee native actor, educator and designer. He is thrilled to have the opportunity to work alongside a vibrant community of black artists as costume designer for the inaugural summer of the Milwaukee Black Theater Festival. His most recent work has been with the Milwaukee Rep's 2019/20 Season as an Emerging Professional Resident. Austin is an alum of the Open Jar Residency, Broadway Theater Project, Milwaukee Children's Choir, and FSCT Young Company. Passionate about physical storytelling he has been a lead teacher, director and choreographer for First Stage Academy the last 2 years working with grades 5th through 12th. Austin holds a BA in Music Theater from Carthage College and plans to return this fall for his Masters in Vocal Pedagogy. Many thanks to black artists who have created space, fought for representation and given themselves through mentorship as well as artistic activism along the way. 1 John 4:18 www.austinwinter.com
[@austwintermint](https://twitter.com/austwintermint)

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About Milwaukee Repertory Theater

Milwaukee Rep is the largest performing arts organization in Wisconsin with three unique performance venues in the Patty & Jay Baker Theater Complex— the Quadracci Powerhouse, Stiemke Studio and Stackner Cabaret. For over six decades, Milwaukee Rep has been a centerpiece of Milwaukee's vibrant arts and cultural scene with productions ranging from Broadway musicals to Shakespeare to American Classics and New Works that are entertaining, inclusive and impactful. Under the leadership of Artistic Director Mark Clements and Executive Director Chad Bauman, Milwaukee Repertory Theater ignites positive change in the cultural, social, and economic vitality of its community by creating world-class theater experiences that entertain, provoke, and inspire meaningful dialogue among an audience representative of Milwaukee's rich diversity.