

# CREATING TIME FOR PLAY... GROUND

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By Michael E. McKelvey

## INTRODUCTION

I recently had the great opportunity to attend a Q&A session with Leslie Odom, Jr. at Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama. Probably best known to musical theatre aficionados for his Tony-winning turn as Aaron Burr in *Hamilton*, the CMU alum was asked by one student about how he spends his time when not actively involved with a project. Without missing a beat, he discussed his ongoing commitment to the betterment of his craft in developing his own projects through writing and reaching out to collaborators. Odom, known for both his on-screen and stage work, didn't distinguish between mediums; instead, he delivered a single message to the aspiring professionals. To survive in today's entertainment industry, one must CREATE their own content (L. Odom, talkback, September 23, 2024)!

Whether it is dance videos on TikTok, songwriters collaborating with vocalists across the globe to drop new songs on Instagram, or web series and original musicals created specifically for a platform like YouTube, the internet exposes us to far more original content hourly than we saw even a year ago. No matter one's attitude, this is our reality. Since we logged on to our first Zoom meeting, video content has reshaped how we do business as theatre professionals, practitioners, and educators.

Not only has the act of submitting self-tapes become the norm for auditioning, but we are now in the digital age of the independent content creator who has the internet as their virtual showcase. Whether it is a show, like *Be More Chill*, which gained enough online popularity to push through the drove of movie-based and jukebox musicals to plant its flag on the Great White Way, or an internet influencer gaining enough notoriety to be cast in a Broadway production, we are firmly in the age of independent promotion via virtual presence. Please understand, Odom's message was not about self-promotion over substance, but rather to encourage the young performer to not wait around for someone to cast them. To proactively create material that suits who you are as an actor and speaks to who you are as an artist. To find people who share your aesthetic and collaborate. Instead of waiting for the opportunity, make an opportunity happen. Artist, create for thyself.

In today's crowded entertainment landscape filled with original digital content, are we adequately training future graduates for the entrepreneurial demands of this ever-changing industry? Are curriculums so packed with "the essentials" that there is no room (or time) to add anything more? Beyond the annual new works program where students from the one or two playwriting courses get to show their wares, are there opportunities in the academic year to encourage students to create and show their work? Where do our students get to take creative risks?

Photo credit: Markus Spiske, courtesy of Unsplash





For the past 22 years, Carnegie Mellon University has afforded its students just such an opportunity to perform, write, compose, design, and play on their own terms, away from the scrutiny of the classroom. Welcome to Playground!

### What is Playground?

Playground is a student-run program of the School of Drama (SOD) where students create and present original work: plays and musicals, experiential and art installations, design displays, and any other sort of creative output one can imagine. The event takes place over one week during a semester of the school year, either Fall or Spring, where all drama classes are canceled to allow students time to rehearse and then perform and present their work. Described as a “festival of independent work,” (Zazzali, 2021, p. 73) students from every discipline of the SOD, including acting and musical theatre performance, dramaturgy, playwriting, directing, technical and costume design, and stage and production management, converge to share their creative voices.

As described in the 2024 Playground program:

Students submit proposals to a committee comprised of students and faculty. Proposals range from live performances, short films, light shows, art installations, murals, and more. Students often collaborate with other CMU departments such as the School of Music, the Entertainment and Technology Center (ETC), and even students from other universities. Selected pieces are prepared over four days, followed by the festival of showings that run from Thursday through Saturday in and around the Purnell Center for the Arts (Playground XXII, 2024, p. 2).

The 11-person selection committee, which includes the festival manager, assistant manager, technical coordinator, assistant coordinator, two producers, three ad hoc student representatives, and two faculty coordinators, receives 80 to 100 proposals annually, and accepts 40 to 50 (M. Mongello, interview, 2024). Festival Manager Marion Mongello, a third-year Stage Management and Production major, shared that the committee looks for a student’s “true passion” for the project. The committee tries to avoid pieces that are self-serving or cliquy. They also champion work from students who desire to work outside of their area or discipline (i.e. the designer who writes a play, a musical theatre or acting major who composes a musical, a stage manager who wants to return to the stage and sing, etc.). According to Mongello (2024), only SOD students can submit proposals; however, participants can include CMU students and others outside of CMU. Also, SOD students may propose a work written by someone not affiliated with Carnegie Mellon (C. Moore, interview, 2024).

One of the most important aspects of Playground is that it is completely original content conceived, created, and collaborated upon by the students during the week. A student may propose a work that is pre-existing or licensed, but since Playground participants receive no budget to produce their shows, there are no funds available to pay licensing and royalty expenses. Student participation is not mandatory. Besides attending the performances, faculty members are only called upon at the request of the students.

The two categories for proposals are performance and installation/exhibited works. Performance pieces have a time limit of 45 minutes. The proposal describes the piece’s parameters (e.g., concept, cast size, technical needs), though sometimes a brief one- or two-sentence idea suffices. The committee also must consider if the concept is possible or realistic within the limited time frame, technical capabilities, and available performance spaces. They apply similar considerations when reviewing proposals for installations and design displays (Moore, 2024).

As mentioned previously, there is no budget extended to the students to create their work. This is to force the students to learn to work with limited means and rely on their talents and ingenuity, as well as those of their colleagues and collaborators. They may use the facilities and the technical resources of the venues. Restrictions exist on borrowing costumes and props. However, a reasonable supply is available. Resourcefulness creates the sets—using scraps of wood from the scene shop, acting cubes and door units from the classrooms, etc. The students are discouraged from spending their own money, although some may do this occasionally. Instead, they are commended for creating the world of their projects using only the festival’s resources.

Ben Ferguson, a CMU alum and member of the nationally acclaimed PigPen Theatre Co., recalled they used “the extra bed sheets their parents had sent them, stuff from around the apartment, and pizza boxes” to create their shows, which used a great deal of shadow and makeshift puppetry (B. Ferguson, interview, 2024). The creativity within the limitations is one of the most inspiring aspects of Playground.

As participants conceive, propose, and realize pieces, only their imaginations and the constraints of the space (aka The Purnell Center) limit their execution. Purnell offers three theatre spaces of varying sizes, but performers may also use unconventional locations. Whether a performance or installation, the location can be as whimsical as the idea itself. There has been work presented in a bathroom, the hallways, the basement, parking lots, a traveling show with the audience moving with the play to various areas within the building, a piece that took place on the third floor and viewed from the second floor, the outdoor bridge that connects the School



of Drama and the School of Computer Science, and light installations in the lobby and the outside of the Purnell Center itself.

As for the installations, they are far more than exhibited design work. Many are more experiential. For example, stage management and design students created a Stage Management Karaoke experience where two people would call and execute lighting cues from a stage manager's light cue calling script to music ranging from pop to classical with varying degrees of expertise. Think Dance Dance Revolution for SMs. Other memorable recollections of Playground's past include an interactive ride that was a facsimile of flying over the countryside like a bird. The viewer or passenger would lie down on a mat of sorts, which moved up and down according to the video they watched. It was in every way a virtual reality experience. All the equipment was borrowed or otherwise procured for no cost. The "ride" was the brainchild of scenic design student Tom Kelly, who would become a theme park designer and worked in collaboration with Computer Science students (D. Block, interview, 2024).

Rehearsals consume the first four and a half days of the week, Sunday through Thursday, running from 9:00 a.m. each day to 1:00 a.m. Each performed work gets two hours of rehearsal per day. On Thursday evening, Playground kicks off three days of performances running from 7:00 p.m. to midnight on the opening day, followed by back-to-back-to-back events from 12:00 p.m. to midnight on Friday and Saturday.

Six rehearsal spaces run concurrently, while the theatres and performance spaces are being loaded with lighting and sound equipment. Shows are allotted roughly eight hours of rehearsal, however, extra time may be requested depending on availability, or additional rehearsals can be arranged outside of Playground's schedule. Each show will have thirty minutes of spacing time in their allocated theatre prior to the performance, and then a technical rehearsal lasting one and a half times the duration of their show immediately before their single performance (for instance, a 30-minute play will have 45 minutes of tech time). The brave festival management team handles all rehearsal and performance scheduling, accounting for the scheduling conflicts of approximately 80 performers, many of whom appear in multiple festival pieces (Mongello, 2024).

According to Mongello (2024), "Festival management oversees facilitation, scheduling, logistics, making sure the dots connect." She explained the maximum number of pieces a student can be in is eight because there are only eight (rehearsal) slots in a day. "Students have done nine, but I'm not really sure how."

To grasp the Playground experience from the attendee's perspective, audience members can experience 40 to 50 performances and installations in 24 hours spread out over two and a half days during the all-student "fringe" festival. All shows, productions, happenings, and experiences, are the creations of the CMU School of Drama students who program, schedule, build, facilitate, compose, conduct, conceive, devise, design, produce, and perform the work.

### HISTORY OF PLAYGROUND

In October 2003, the first Playground festival debuted. The initial idea came from the Head of the School of Drama, Elizabeth Bradley, when she approached the faculty and proposed a week dedicated solely to student-created work in response to the strain being put on students rehearsing their own work late in the evening.

"At that time the students were constantly asking for time and space in the building to produce/perform a wide variety of activities—cabarets, readings, low-resourced (or no-resourced) productions," says Dick Block, Associate Head of the SOD. Block would become one of two faculty members who have dedicated themselves to this special event since its inception 22 years ago. "Liz suggested we cancel classes for a week to dedicate the time for this and asked if anyone was interested. Catherine [Moore] and I immediately raised our hands," (J. Levine, 2022, para 2).

Catherine Moore, a Teaching Professor of Movement, recalled that Bradley approached the faculty with the proposal in the Fall of 2002 or Spring of 2003. Moore, who had worked with Anne Bogart's SITI Theatre during a summer session where the concentration was on the "Relationship between the Actor and the Audience," was intrigued by the idea of new works created by the students. She shared that there was initially some pushback from a few faculty members because of the loss of a week of instruction, but most of it was hesitation if such a thing could work. Moore (2024) offered: "That first year, we were making it up as we went along." Moore and Block coordinated the inaugural festival and then received student help the following year. "Once people saw it was working and successful, there was complete faculty buy-in, and it was academically valuable."

Playground allows students an opportunity to spread their wings and explore all sides of their creative being, no matter their prescribed discipline. CMU alum Will Reynolds, who majored in musical theatre, wrote a musical for Playground, even though music composition or playwriting was not part of his course of study. Following that experience, Reynolds has gone on to win the Fred Ebb Award for Musical Theatre Writing, the Kurt Weill Foundation's Lotte Lenya Award, and the Dramatists Guild Fellowship for his musical theatre compositions (Levine, 2022, para 8).



Following in a similar path as Reynolds, Hudson Orfe, a third-year musical theatre major and promising composer, says: "I use Playground, and I always have used Playground, as that outlet to throw music up against a wall, try styles, orchestrate everything myself. Do everything that I can't do in the curriculum. To build those skills, to see what works and what doesn't work, what in my music is sticking and what is not, how it is received, a kind of trial and error in a space that I can't get anywhere else" (H. Orfe, interview, 2024).

Over the years, Playground has also served as a testing ground for solo work for budding performing artists, who have taken their work to audiences far outside the walls of CMU's Purnell Center. FringeNYC has produced several Playground shows over the years, including *Inexperienced Love* (2010) and *Sheherizade* (2012). Many other Playground pieces have received productions at regional theaters; Jon-Michael Reese's solo show *By Myself*, created for Playground in 2009, was recently produced in New York City with its original writer and music director. Lee Harrington's piece *Jellybean* has received numerous productions between 2015 and 2018 including FringeNYC and an Off-Off-Broadway run, and in 2018, Ars Nova presented Samora la Perdida's piece *pato, pato, maricón!* as part of ANT Fest (Levine, 2022, para 7).

Playground has also welcomed collaborations between institutions and outside collaborators. In 2007, Matthew Gardener arranged a performance of the University of Michigan musical theatre grads Benj Pasek and Justin Paul's song cycle, *Edges*, which was subsequently attended by a "bus load" of U of M students, who traveled from Ann Arbor for the event (Moore, 2024). Gardener's exposure to Playground new works would prove part of his professional trajectory as the artistic director of Signature Theatre, which specializes in the development and production of new plays and musicals.

Since collaboration is at the heart of the festival, it would stand to reason that Playground's most noteworthy success is a group of actor-musicians, who honed their special brand of theatrical storytelling at CMU. PigPen Theatre Co, who recently made their Broadway debut composing the score for *Water for Elephants*, first banded together as freshman in 2007. Although they were not sure what Playground was, a few of the group's founding members put out a call for volunteers "to create something," unsure of what that something might be (Ferguson, 2024).



They met in their spare time to devise work, using what they were learning in their classes, such as Viewpoints and Laban. The first show they created was an original folktale, *The Hunter and the Bear*, which they performed using various forms of storytelling such as shadow puppetry and found object, as well as incorporating couple of originally composed songs. A few members of the group accompanied the songs, which would become a trademark of the group. They would later take two other Playground shows, *The Nightmare Story* and *The Mountain Song*, to the New York International Fringe Festival in 2010 and 2011, becoming the only group ever to win the festival's Overall

Excellence Award in two consecutive years. Described as "*Once meets Peter and the Starcatcher*" (Adame, 2014, para 1) and noted for their unique "music, movement, and puppetry-group aesthetic," the seven-member ensemble of instrumentalist-puppeteer-storytellers has developed and performed new projects throughout the United States, such as *The Old Man and the Old Moon* at Williamstown Theatre Festival and the New Victory Theater in New York, *The Tales of Despereaux* at the Old Globe Theatre, *Phantom Folktales* for Virgin Cruises, and *Pericles* with director Trevor Nunn (S. Sinha, 2024 and Ferguson, 2024).

Arya Shahi, PigPen member and spokesperson stated: "Our training directly correlates to PipPen. The Playground Festival was the first time that the seven of us realized we were more than just actors . . . Playground allows students the freedom to fail. That is an important part of actor training in this country that often gets overlooked" (Zazzali, 2021, p.75).

### THE VALUE OF PLAY AND EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

As educators, we face the periodic task of creating and implementing program and course objectives and learning outcomes for our various programs. Traditional academic conventions constrain us to a system that asks us to measure the immeasurable and quantify the unquantifiable. How do we measure the growth of an artist by the assignment of a grade or a metric in a rubric?

Although Playground falls outside of the parameters of a class, it has become entrenched as an important educational opportunity for its participants. Like other classes within the SOD curriculum, the program has inherent learning outcomes. These outcomes might not be measurable by conventional academic methods (tests, memorization, etc.), but they are apparent in the work and growth of the participating students following the Playground experience, nonetheless.

Moore (2024) provided the following learning outcomes and attributes associated with the program: Playground...

- supports the student's development through risk-taking.
- supports social, group, and peer engagement and membership.
- offers autonomy from faculty/adults with support when needed.
- provides an opportunity for students to find their voices.
- students take part in creative exploration.
- creates an atmosphere of structure with empowerment.
- participants develop skills in leadership and organizational management.
- students learn to articulate artistic ideas and goals.
- encourages participants to collaborate with their peers.
- students practice entrepreneurship.

To put it in other terms, Playground allows these students to explore, create without judgment, and not suffer penalties if something fails. In actuality, it is through failing that the student may learn the most. It is often said that an actor cannot truly learn their craft until they practice it, on their feet, on the boards. However, in an academic setting, there is still faculty oversight and the realization that a student's performance on a project or in class may carry forward to future decisions regarding casting and recommendations. With Playground, the faculty is merely there to support the work as audience members. The student or creator may ask faculty members to perform, consult, or assist in other ways, but the faculty member acts as a colleague and collaborator, choosing whether to help.

Moore (2024) commented on the importance of the collaboration the students experience, not only in their work but within the Playground community as a whole. When discussing work she has seen over the years, she referred to it as "the bravest work I've seen in the building," and recalled how she has seen thematic shifts over time as generations of students react to current events, societal pressures, and other issues on their minds (Levine, 2022, para 5).

PLAYGROUND | Carnegie Mellon University  
Photo courtesy of CMU Drama



Asked about Playground's value, an alumnus and current student offered similar, yet individual, responses. PigPen's Ferguson (2024) said:

Playground teaches you how to work as collaborators, and theatre is a collaborative art form. It is impossible to do it alone, and you have to be able to work within the parameters of "these are the people I have; these are the resources we have, and what are we all trying to make together." It's sort of the definition of collective goals and teaching the value of them as artists...It's incredibly freeing. We are creating this piece, not for our teachers, not for a grade, but for our peers. We are making this for them, so we asked "what would be exciting for ourselves to see?"...There's nothing to gain other than something that we are looking for.

Marion Mongello (2024) may have summed up the program's value best:

Playground gives students the platform to do what they are itching to share. The stories that gnaw at them and they know should be seen by people to fulfill their true artistic passions. It makes them better creators. Giving them the space, and sort of trying our best to take the scary part away and take the expectations and intimidations away so they can share what they've been working on. It makes the school a better place, it makes them better students, and it makes the audience aware of what these students want to be doing.

### PUTTING IT TOGETHER—THE PLAYGROUND EXPERIENCE

So, with approximately 50 performances and experiences occurring in such a compact window of time, you may ask, how do you create a schedule for an undertaking like this? Besides the limited space, you also must consider that when scheduling the two-hour rehearsal blocks for each show, most of the performers, stage managers, and directors are in multiple shows and cannot be in conflicting rehearsals. To compound this even further, some creators may also be directing, music directing, or accompanying other productions. The job falls on the Festival Manager and her staff, who rely on their organizational and communication skills, much of which is learned and practiced in their stage and arts management courses.

Festival Manager Mongello is an arts management major who wants to go into late-night television because of the fast-paced setting and multi-faceted management of production. Playground was among the factors that she mentioned when describing what drew her to Carnegie Mellon. Now, in her third year, she remembers the experience of her first Playground where she did some volunteer work behind the scenes, but for all intents and purposes was an audience member. "I watched every piece that year...the energy that is created in the space is not like anything I've ever seen...I was hooked" (Mongello, 2024). In year two, she took on the role of assistant manager, which groomed her for the festival manager role, which is a two-year appointment.

Her team includes 10 primary members: an assistant manager, a festival producer, an assistant producer, a technical coordinator, an assistant coordinator, two

heads of visuals, and heads of video, lighting, and sound, as well as a team of tech volunteers and two faculty coordinators. The plan for the festival, currently programmed in the fall, begins in early to mid-August. At that time, they meet with the SOD's Director of Production, David Holcomb, to find a week that will fit within the packed CMU performance calendar. This year, the only available week fell between the end of Thanksgiving break and CMU's finals week.

Once dates are in place, the committee will choose a theme and then get the word out, which includes a call for proposals with an October deadline. In the planning, they also must identify potential rehearsal and performance spaces, and work with the School of Drama administration to coordinate publicity, facility usage, etc. After several four to six-hour review sessions of the 80 to 100 submissions, the committee announces the selected proposals that will fit into the 24 hours of the allotted performance time spread over the three-day festival.

Just as the staff will migrate to large roles on the production side, participants may also venture to wear new hats as they grow throughout the program. In an interview with Hudson Orfe and Greyson Taylor, two of the busiest participants in this year's event, they discussed the opportunity that Playground affords them to grow as artists and creators, but more importantly, leaders. Orfe and Taylor, high school friends and CMU musical theatre majors, began their Playground experience as performers, each participating in four to six pieces. Orfe, who is a talented pianist and aspires to write musicals, also accompanied several shows. In year two, Orfe composed a song cycle entitled *Mackinac*, which became the talk of the festival. Now, in their third Playground, both are serving in even more important leadership positions.

Taylor is taking a multi-hyphenated role (conceiver-creator-director-choreographer) with his semi-devised movement work, *Spheniscidae*. Meaning "a family of birds containing all extant penguins" (Playground XII, 2024, p.22), *Spheniscidae* is based on the real-life story of a gay penguin couple, Sphen and Magic, at the Sea Life Sydney Aquarium, who became a "symbol for equality and the conservation cause" (T. Turnbull, 2024). The piece focuses on the courtship, the colony's reaction to the relationship, the death of Sphen, and Magic absorbing the realization of this loss.

Taylor employed Orfe to score the piece, which he did for piano and flute. As for "semi-devising" the work, Taylor (2024) said that because of time constraints and the truncated devising process, he had to come up with ideas ahead of time as to the seminal points and touchstones for every movement of the non-verbal work for the performers to arrive. Storyboarding became a very useful tool in the creation process. He then allowed the cast members to devise their individual tracks between those points. Using Viewpoints and influenced by the choreography of Pina Bausch, Taylor and his 11-person cast seamlessly guided the audience through the tale with heart-wrenching effect, earning a well-deserved standing ovation.

Besides composing *Spheniscidae*, music directing and accompanying a few other Playground shows, and being a featured actor in a few more, Orfe composed one of the most anticipated pieces in the 2024 festival, a musical based on Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match Girl*.

The folk tale was one he had heard as a child with a lasting impact. Taking place on New Year's Eve, a young girl, whose only means of income relies on the selling of match sticks, braves the bitter cold of the winter's evening to earn what little money she can to survive. We follow her "on a journey of Isolation, Mourning, and, above all, hope" (Playground XXII program, 2024). According to Orfe (2024), who views the dark/heartbreaking tale in a much more romantic and optimistic light than some, said, "As she strikes a match to get warmth, she experiences a vision of what her life could be." He said he had a similar cathartic experience each time he sat at the piano to write the piece.

In addition to a beautifully imaginative score, *The Little Match Girl* features a well-crafted narrative using Andersen's original text dispersed among the nine ensemble members. In the spirit of Playground, Taylor performed in the staged reading. As for the performance, Orfe's opus proved to be as memorable as Andersen's age-old tale with a poignancy and pathos rarely found in a work by a composer of such a young age.



As Orfe has aspirations to be the next Jason Robert Brown or Adam Guettel, with superlative piano chops and harmonic maturity to go with his sensitive lyric writing, CMU may also have a budding musical theatre collaboration in Noah Van Ess and Catcher Sanchez to soon rival the likes of Pasek and Paul or Kitt and Yorkey.

Like Orfe and Taylor, Van Ess and Sanchez are all-in for the Playground experience but view it as an opportunity to experiment and develop in their writing with each Playground. In only their second Playground, the songwriting team is growing from their first year when they wrote an original musical folktale about pirates using a variety of musical styles ranging from sea shanties to Motown and 80s rock. This year's project came out of a suggestion from a fellow collaborator who suggested a wedding as the setting. Thus, *There Goes the Bride*, a 2000s style musical rom com, was born. Van Ess and Sanchez, a musical theatre and acting major respectively, said that because of the freedom to create on their own terms, they could experiment with different styles and work on the craft of writing musical theatre.

*Bride* is a one-act musical featuring a cast of nine and scored for piano, guitar, and percussion. The show ran forty-five minutes and was performed fully staged and memorized. Quite an accomplishment considering the 8 to 12 allotted rehearsal hours to teach and learn the music and staging, as well as numerous edits and additions occurring throughout the process, particularly the final run-through. Besides the upbeat pacing and clever comedic writing, one of the most impressive aspects of this work were the songs featuring multiple characters articulating their juxtapositions within the story, displaying an advanced understanding of scenic structure and character development. The committed cast, mainly first- and second-year students, superbly executed these numbers.

According to Sanchez (interview, 2024), "I think the fact that we take the whole week off puts gravity upon the event, which makes people want to try hard and put in time and effort into creating stuff that is worth putting up, especially in these beautiful spaces where we have resources to lights and amazing design production friends." Van Ess (interview, 2024) added, "What's beautiful is how excited other people are about your work, and they put their best foot forward for your piece. They almost take it on as their piece too. It's a real team effort."

**FINAL THOUGHTS**

Having now experienced my first Playground, I can say without pause the experience left me with so many feelings and superlatives:

- Wonder for the creativity of these young theatre makers.
- Amazement of their energy, talent, and commitment to the festival, but more importantly to the community who makes this extraordinary event happen.
- Pride in the on- and off-stage work I witnessed by the acting and musical theatre majors turned composers, lyricists, playwrights, directors, choreographers, or producers.
- Astonishment at the selfless production staff who makes seven days of what most would view as chaos run as efficiently as any professional production.
- Compassion and empathy for the vulnerable and heart-wrenching plays written from personal and cultural experiences and shared as honestly and sincerely as a song from Billie Holiday.
- And joy that I get to experience this all again next year.

Although I am a member of this institution, this article is not a testimonial for Carnegie Mellon University, but rather an illustration of what is possible when we can think beyond "what we've always done." It is an encouragement (or call to action) to think beyond what we're allowed to do within the constraints of our institutions and articulate to our administrators what is possible as we near the end of the first quarter of this new century with an ever-evolving arts landscape. I hope Playground can demonstrate what is achievable if we address the needs of our increasingly numerous multi-hyphenate artists and theatre makers.

**BIOGRAPHY**

Michael E. McKelvey is an assistant professor of musical theatre at Carnegie Mellon University. He has run musical theatre programs at Fort Lewis College, Tulane University, and St. Edward's University, and the MT voice program at Point Park University. An award-winning director, Michael is the artistic director of Doctuh Mistuh Productions.

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**OTHER COMMUNICATIONS**

Leslie Odom Jr. talk with CMU School of Drama Students, September 23, 2024, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.

**INTERVIEWS**

- Dick Block, interview, November 15, 2024. Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Ben Ferguson, interview, December 6, 2024, Conducted via Zoom.
- Marion Mongello, interview, November 26, 2024, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Catherine Moore, interview, November 15, 2024. Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Hudson Orfe, interview, November 26, 2024, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Catcher Sanchez, interview, December 3, 2024, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Greyson Taylor, interview, November 26, 2024, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.
- Noah Van Ess, interview, December 3, 2024, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, PA.



**Final Playground XXII Rehearsal & Spacing Schedule**

\*CHANGES HIGHLIGHTED IN YELLOW\*

**DEC. 1-7, 2024**

**MARION MONGELLO**  
festival manager  
cmuplayground@gmail.com

Sunday, 12/1/24									
Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D	Check	Wagner	Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D
10:00-10:30am	Phantom of the Opera								

Monday, 12/2/24									
Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D	Check	Wagner	Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D
10:00-10:30am	Phantom of the Opera								

Tuesday, 12/3/24									
Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D	Check	Wagner	Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D
10:00-10:30am	Phantom of the Opera								

Wednesday, 12/4/24									
Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D	Check	Wagner	Room	Studio B	Studio C	Studio D
10:00-10:30am	Phantom of the Opera								

Thursday, 12/5/24 - SPACING		
Room	Studio B	Studio C
9:00-10:00am	Phantom of the Opera	Phantom of the Opera

INSTALLATIONS		
Room	Studio B	Studio C
9:00-10:00am	Phantom of the Opera	Phantom of the Opera

Friday, 12/6			
Venue	Title	Length	
12:00 PM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>There Goes the Bride</i>	45min
12:55 PM	The John Wells Video Studio	<i>Renovations...</i>	30min
1:35 PM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>Sinking Ship</i>	30min
2:15 PM	Chosky (Blackbox)	<i>FLIP FLOP</i>	15min
15 MIN BREAK			
2:30 PM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>Black Resurgence</i>	45min
3:40 PM	The John Wells Video Studio	<i>Thou Shalt Not Worship False Idols</i>	30min
4:20 PM	PCA 103	<i>Your Brain on Drama: Trial</i>	20min
5:00 PM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>Another Star</i>	45min
5:50 PM	Varies	<i>Installation Crawl!</i>	25min
6:20 PM	The John Wells Video Studio	<i>Photobook</i>	30min
7:00 PM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>House of Phobic: she wants revenge</i>	45min
1 HR DINNER BREAK			
8:45 PM	The Philip Chosky Theater	<i>The Little Match Girl</i>	45min
9:40 PM	The John Wells Video Studio	<i>Paradise Profound</i>	30min
10:20 PM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>The Sublime Inheritance of Elsie Katzowitz</i>	45min
11:15 PM	The Philip Chosky Theater	<i>Praise is What We Do</i>	45min
12:00 AM - END OF DAY			

Thursday, 12/5			
Venue	Title	Length	
7:00 PM	Purnell Lobby	PGXXII Opening Event	1h 15min
8:15 AM	The Philip Chosky Theater	<i>When We Begin Again</i>	15min
8:40 AM	The John Wells Video Studio	<i>BLESS ME, BOWIE</i>	30min
9:20 AM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>Lessons of the Immaculate Heart</i>	30min
10:00 PM	Chosky (Blackbox)	<i>Out of the Wings: a Non-Performer Cabaret</i>	45min
10:55 PM	The Helen Wayne Rauh Theater	<i>F Train</i>	45min
11:40 PM - END OF DAY			