

I was always a theatre kid – a talented kid -- growing up in a tough neighborhood in Brooklyn that did not value or appreciate musical theatre. I give my Mom all the credit for my love of the arts because she took me to see my first musical, *Young Abraham Lincoln*, when I was 4 years old. I can still sing the songs from that show! It was truly love at first sight and I was hooked. This inconvenient truth did not sit well with my peers and I hid my passion and lost my true self in order to fit in.

Many years later, I started to write. It was as if something inside of me would not be silenced any longer. I wrote plays and musicals that were produced at a local church I attended. We received great feedback but I thought it was too late. It was too late to change careers. I was stuck -- too late to become the person I was always meant to be – too late to dream.

Ken Davenport and the *Inner Circle* helped me rediscover my dream, and in doing so, reconnect to the person who fell in love with musical theatre when he was just a boy. From Ken's first advice to me, "Go book a theatre and put up your show," to the invaluable action items Ken gave me through consultations, seminars, webinars and interactions at *Inner Circle* meetings, I am no longer afraid to be true to myself. Also, networking, sharing, and learning from my fellow *Inner Circle* members and various Tony Award winning artists who meet with us regularly has filled my tool box for many years to come.

When I put my first show up, I worked alone. But since working with Ken and the *Inner Circle*, I now have a small but dedicated team, essential legal documents in place, an Investor handout with budget, a script reviewed by a dramaturg, a library of additional resources online provided by Ken and other *Inner Circle* members, and friends and colleagues who encourage and collaborate with me. The generosity of Ken, and my fellow *Inner Circle* theatre professionals has proven to be

invaluable and has given me more than I can ever repay. How can you ever really thank the person who helped you find yourself? I will try to repay by extending the same generosity to others and produce entertaining shows that also impact the culture.

It is paramount at this time that I receive financial support for my work. I write and produce original musicals birthed out of my life experiences as a person of color. My shows reflect those experiences as seen through the lens of my multi-cultural casts. I am reaching new demographics that will expand our theatre audience because I create stories that pull from their lives. My shows are diverse on the stage and in the audience! We averaged 75% capacity of which 80% were people of color. Imagine if we could create a culture of theatre patrons among black and brown communities? What if we could even motivate 10% of that population to become consistent theatre goers? The impact would be a game changer to the NY theatre seen driving up capacity, longevity, and ROI for our industry. This will take time to bring to fruition, but it is totally worth the effort. There are too many great shows that are forced to close much too soon that would have been loved and well attended if those afore-mentioned demographics were consistent theatre patrons. Let's grow our audience and fix this problem. Ken Davenport and the *Inner Circle* have empowered me to help engage this humongous, yet oft neglected pool of potential theatre lovers. Many in these non-traditional markets will become enthusiastic about theatre once they develop the habit of coming out to shows. There is a lot to do in this regard and I am passionate about the work. We will all benefit as we work together as one community.

I am currently at work on two shows that would have never gotten off the ground if I had not heeded Ken's advice: "Book a theatre." Prior to membership in the *Inner Circle*, I did not know how to raise money for these projects. Now I not only have learned many fund raising techniques but also know which people and organizations are likely to

support my work. I am currently in serious talks with several potential partners who believe in my projects and have pledged to help me get these shows funded in the very near future. It may have taken me years to find them on my own. Ken and the *Inner Circle* helped me identify them and gave me the laser focus to get to the right people now. I am also composing a score for a London based playwright using my “superpower” as Ken recently encouraged me after listening to my music. I probably would not have taken this job if not for Ken’s advice (“There is more than one show in you, my friend”). Nor would these shows have the production values and best practices needed to sustain them, without the “nuts and bolts” advice given to me from the most accomplished artists in our industry at *Inner Circle* meetings. Ken Davenport and the *Inner Circle* are pouring into the next great theatre producers, writers, and composers. Thanks to Ken and the *Inner Circle*, my dream is alive again.