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## Celebrate Black History Month

The performing arts have always been about inclusion, a universal language and a way to bring people from completely different backgrounds together. Inclusiveness in the arts has continuously been an important part of Greater Milwaukee, and a vital part of the groups that UPAF supports. This February, we celebrate Black History Month and reflect on the talent that lies in our own community.

One example of the great talent that exists in Milwaukee was in the exceptional [First Stage Theater](#)'s production, *Welcome to Bronzeville*, a show that was near and dear to the city of Milwaukee and ran from Jan. 13 - Feb. 5.



Set in 1957, the heart of Milwaukee's Bronzeville pulses to the beat of jazz and doo-wop. Michael Jr., the show's protagonist, is expected to follow in his father's footsteps. Surrounding a local talent show and a visit by iconic singer Billie Holiday, the community comes together to help Michael discover who he is meant to become. Created with input from the elders of the Bronzeville community, this homage to the historic neighborhood provides a humorous and moving tale of growing up, finding one's self, and the true power of community.



Written by local playwright and dramaturge Sheri Williams Pannell, *Welcome to Bronzeville* was inspired by the input that Pannell got from community elders in

order to add authenticity and cultural elements to the work.

"In the play, a young African American man is struggling to find his place in his home, his community, and what it means to truly be 'a man.' His parents, siblings, the local police sergeant, and friends all have expectations for him, but ultimately he must decide which path he will take," said Williams Pannell. "By sharing his journey and the choices he makes, I hope to inspire young people and families of all races to forge their own journey of self-discovery, re-examine the choices they make and their influences, and find ways to connect with and celebrate their unique cultural heritages."



Sheri Williams Pannell

The play featured songs of the period and original music by Pannell and local composer John Tanner, bringing the unique artistry of this African American community to the stage. *Welcome to Bronzeville* is indicative of the thought-provoking theater being created and performed by Milwaukee talent, and an important show for our community as we celebrate Black History Month.



The Making of Welcome to Bronzeville

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***Thank you for supporting UPAF and the Greater Milwaukee area's performing arts groups!***

The opportunities available to the Milwaukee community are making a difference in so many lives.

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