

## **Diversity in Arts Leadership** **2022 Nashville Mentors**



**Carmen Nelson** (Mentor for Vinh Huynh)

[cnelson@oasiscenter.org](mailto:cnelson@oasiscenter.org)

Youth Engagement Specialist, Oasis Center

Carmen wants to live in a world where music, dancing, and visual expression are an integral part of everyday life. Raised in Puerto Rico, fluent in Spanish and English, she moved to the United States at age 16, settling in Georgia with her parents and two sisters. A graduate of the Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), she spent the first five years of her professional career as a graphic designer and the last 23 years working in the nonprofit field. Breaking new ground with the Girl Scouts, she worked in underserved

communities and created the "Hermanitas" program for Latina youth. Her work as a Youth Engagement Specialist at Oasis continues to inspire her in her dedication to helping youth reach their fullest potential and make their mark in this world. A self-proclaimed foodie, you can find Carmen cooking and eating, watching soccer (all of her kids play), planning her bucket list, or binging on the newest "Flavor" on Netflix.



**Daniel Jones** (Mentor for Sai Clayton)

[daniel@kindlingarts.com](mailto:daniel@kindlingarts.com)

Manager of Artistic Programming, OZ Arts

Daniel Jones (he/him) is a Nashville-based producer, dramaturg, writer, and director passionate about facilitating creative storytelling, diverse narratives, and shared live arts experiences that ignite social change. He is currently the Manager of Artistic Programming at OZ Arts Nashville and the Producing Artistic Director of Kindling Arts Festival, where he facilitates the development and production of local interdisciplinary works. In his role at OZ Arts, Daniel has supported

hundreds of artists and performers from around the world as the on-the-ground coordinator for the Visiting Artist Series, which has included artists from New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Brazil, Japan, Chile, Germany, and more. He also works closely with

Nashville artists as they develop new works and realize their visions in the organization's unique 10,000 square-foot warehouse.

As the lead curator and producer of Kindling Arts, Daniel has worked with hundreds of Nashville-based artists to launch 40+ unique artistic experiences in the past five years. Those projects have generated more than \$50,000 in income for performing and visual artists working outside existing institutions. In addition to the 2022 Kindling Arts Festival, upcoming projects with Kindling Arts include the world premiere of *The Naughty Tree*, a queering of the Garden of Eden myth developed in collaboration with Woven Theater Company, playwright River Timms, and theatrical rock band Fable Cry, which will play April 24 + 25 at the Blue Room at Third Man Records. He's also working with local poets and filmmakers on the second installment of the Heroic Couplets poetry into film collaboration with Defy Film Festival, which features all LGBTQIA+ and female voices in a Genderbend series. Both projects are made possible, in part, by funding from the Metro Arts THRIVE program.



**Gabe Baker** (Mentor for Lalena Young)

[gabe.baker14@gmail.com](mailto:gabe.baker14@gmail.com)

Freelance Artist and Program Director, King's Academy

Gabe Baker is a professional musician, entertainment creative, and community leader based in Nashville. Originally from San Antonio, TX, Gabe attend Rice University as an undergraduate on a football full-scholarship from 2010-2014. While at Rice, he majored in Environmental Engineering, became captain of the football team, founded and led an on campus Christian ministry, and enjoyed a myriad of other activities as he became a leader for the student body. Upon graduation, he began his professional career as roadway design civil engineer and

chose to add to his Christian ministry life by pursuing a master's degree in Christian Theology from the Houston Graduate School of Theology (15'-18'). After a few years as an engineer, he shifted into working for the local county Mayor (Houston-Harris County) as a public policy advisor. His work in the greater Houston community coupled well with his work as lead community organizer for the international nonprofit HOPE Worldwide, where he served in numerous roles for domestic and international efforts for over a decade. His move to Nashville in 2020 can be described as a "divine shift" from his previous career and life in Texas to build a career primarily in music. Having played the cello since 4th grade and singing mainly in church worship settings, he now has been rapidly growing his career as a performing artist, songwriter, and studio session instrumentalist. His heart continues to be driven toward community and faith leading and so, since fall 2021, he stepped into the role as the faith chaplain and enrichment program coordinator for King's Academy, a

first-year Christian elementary school. With a life that is rather eclectic, Gabe is very resolute on passionately following the desires that God's puts on one's heart, doing it with others, and inspiring them to do the same.



**Jyoti Gupta** (Mentor for Julia Reparip)

[jyoti.gupta@vanderbilt.edu](mailto: jyoti.gupta@vanderbilt.edu)

Assistant Professor of the Practice, Vanderbilt University

Jyoti Gupta (she/her) will be an Assistant Professor of the Practice in the Department of Human and Organizational Development at Vanderbilt University, beginning in the fall of 2022. She is an interdisciplinary researcher with interests that intersect urban and community studies, community power and collective action, agency and subjectivity, and action research methods. She examines participatory processes and the opportunities they afford or foreclose for individuals and collectives to shape the conditions that affect their lives. Since 2016, she has been exploring efforts by Metro Arts: Nashville's Office of Arts + Culture to center racial and cultural equity as well as analyzing Nashville's broader public and private efforts to integrate arts and culture into urban development strategies. Her most recent projects have examined community organizing practices and the development of grassroots leaders with Faith in Action affiliates, PICO California and Faith in Indiana, and community power as a vehicle for transforming health inequity with colleagues across academic and base-building organizations. Jyoti earned her PhD in Community Research and Action from Vanderbilt University, an MPH concentrating in Urbanism and the Built Environment from Columbia University, and a B.A. in Sociology & Anthropology and Theater from Swarthmore College.



**Nikki Walker** (Mentor for Harlequine Clay)

[nwalker@nmaam.org](mailto: nwalker@nmaam.org)

Education & Programs Manager, the National Museum of African American Music

Nikki Walker is the Education & Programs Manager at the National Museum of African American Music. In her role, she oversees all K-12 education programming while establishing and sustaining partnerships with community organizations, corporations, and stakeholders to ensure the achievement of organizational goals. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Communications from Tennessee State

University and her Master of Education degree in Organizational Leadership & Communications from Belmont University. Nikki spends her time serving on several nonprofit boards as well as enjoying spending time with her husband and daughter.



**Nakisha Hicks** (Mentor for Torrance Buntyn Jr.)  
[khicks@theelevateher.org](mailto:khicks@theelevateher.org)  
Founder, ElevateHer LLC

Passionate about empowering women of color and a gifted leader in the human resources field, it's no surprise that Nakisha Hicks, the Career Path Finder, has made it her mission to help female HR professionals land their dream jobs. As founder of The ElevateHer LLC, Nakisha has shown undervalued, underpaid HR professionals how to shift their mindsets, advance their careers and increase their earnings exponentially. Some of her clients have even secured multi-figure salary increases after working with her. Nakisha's genuine interest in uplifting others is rooted in her own nontraditional climb up the corporate ladder. With 16 years of experience in high-level HR executive positions, Nakisha has gained an impressive reputation as an industry leader. Her insights on career transitions and DEI work have been featured in The Wall Street Journal, on nearly a dozen podcasts in the last year, and in books and blogs nationwide. An in-demand speaker, Nakisha has been called on to discuss a wide variety of topics including career development and planning, mindset shifts for HR professionals, effective time management for leaders, workplace perceptions, leadership and team development, and networking and community building.



**Pratik Dash** (Mentor for TC)  
[pratik@tnimmigrant.org](mailto:pratik@tnimmigrant.org)  
Political Director, Tennessee Immigrant & Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC)

Pratik grew up in Franklin, Tennessee. After graduating from college with a master's in computer science and living with his grandfather in India for 5 years, Pratik returned to the U.S. in 2014. Pratik first learned about the work of TIRRC by attending the annual TIRRC convention where he learned of systemic racism against communities of color, which changed his life. He joined TIRRC in March of 2015 as an organizer and has never looked back. Pratik has organized multiple actions across the state for immigration issues such as DACA, Asian and Pacific Islander justice, and the Muslim Ban. Pratik has also been an integral part of

TIRRC's civic engagement campaign, helping register thousands of first- and second-generation immigrant voters since 2015, as well as building strong, immigrant youth-led, canvassing teams to knock on tens of thousands of doors across the state. His work has led to one of the largest shifts of the rising American electorate in the state, as more immigrants and refugees continue to get engaged in local, state, and federal elections. He has also helped found voter coalitions across the state to create voting blocs of black and brown communities registering to vote and heading to the polls. Pratik is proud to be a part of this movement, and will continue to push forward until equality and justice for communities of color are attained in the state of Tennessee.



**Wilna Taylor** (Mentor for Michayla George)

[wilna.j.taylor@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:wilna.j.taylor@vanderbilt.edu)

Assistant Director, Curb Center for Art Enterprise and Public Policy

Wilna Julmiste Taylor is an actor, writer, producer and art administrator. Her interest and work include investigating the intersections of art and culture, social justice efforts, and highlighting her Haitian heritage. She is an alumna of the Negro Ensemble Company in New York. She also studied acting at Rutgers University, The Wilma Theater and the Walnut Street Theater in Philadelphia. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at Rutgers University, a Master of Science in Arts Administration from Drexel University and a Certificate in Diversity and Inclusion from Cornell University. She is currently a MOSAIC Change Maker Fellow. Ms. Taylor currently works at Vanderbilt University as the Assistant Director at the Curb Center for Art Enterprise and Public Policy. She oversees all aspect of the Curb Scholars Program in Creative Enterprise and Public Leadership. She also leads the Creative Campus Initiative and manages the Creative Catalyst grant awards. Lastly, she co-directs the Racial Equity and Arts Leadership program also referred to as REAL with Nashville Metro Arts. She received a National Endowment for the Arts grant to continue her work with REAL. Prior to this position, Ms. Taylor worked at Penn State as the Special Assistant to the Dean for Student Engagement and the Arts Engagement and Programming Manager. Ms. Taylor's artistic work has been presented national and internationally and produced at venues such as the Manhattan Repertory Theatre and the National Black Theatre Festival. She has been published in the Caribbean Writer where she is noted as an up-and-coming voice in the community of Haitian writers. She is a recipient of a Leeway Foundation Art and Change grant. The grant assisted her in producing a short film based on her original screenplay, *Lugawu: A Shape Shifter* which is a contemporary narrative based on a traditional Haitian folklore. Ms. Taylor's second short film, *Lumiere Douce, Lumiere Brilliant* (Soft light, brilliant light) explores the idea of duality, how the ordinary and sacred, or how the natural

and supernatural legitimately co-exist. This film received an Audience Award at the Paris Film Festival- ARFF. It has been an official selection in several film festivals and was a featured work at the Louisiana Cinema on the Bayou Film Festival where it was considered for a best experimental film award.