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Pressures Surrounding Musical Theater Students

The pressure to succeed and to be accepted are what all of us long for. In the world of the performing arts, there are increased pressures to be superior than the person next to you, let alone get a job. Elon has one of the top musical theater programs in the country and has had several notable alumni on Broadway and Television. Tres McMichael is a Freshman Musical Theater major here at Elon University. He has had a interesting journey finding his place here but I am lucky to call him one of my closest friends.

We are sitting on my bed with the window open, it’s the first warm day of the year and we are basking in the fresh air. “I started singing, I guess you could say, in church.” He began. “Ever since the age of 3 I’ve just been singing- they put me in piano lessons”.Tres has dedicated his entire life to his craft, and is studying to make it his future.“It’s always been my main thing” Tres says. He went to a performing arts middle school and high school. His parents went took him to New York several times to audition for more professional work. Music is his passion, his art, and his world. “It just happens that the thing I love to do is the thing that I hope will make me money” Tres says.

Tres journey began earlier than most. His application was due months earlier than the average undergrad student at Elon. After thousands of applicants, 500 potential musical theater students were selected for a live interview. The Musical Theater program also requires students to apply and be accepted to the university academically. On top of that, Tres also interviewed, and later became, a leadership fellow. “It was like applying to all these different programs just to make my own college experience cohesive” Tres says. He visited Elon his junior year of highschool, and saw some performances. “I could see myself doing what they did” he admitted. But his initial experience with the program was not what he expected.

Of the 18 initial members of his Musical Theater class, he was the only African American. “I think in the entire MT department there are about ten of us” Tres says. Many would not think this matters much anymore, but it created additional divisions and left him feeling isolated from his class. “It was lonely at times. Everyone didn’t quite understand where I was coming from” he says. He describes this difference as a clash of cultures. Things didn’t always line up between belief systems, morals, and tastes in music and the rest of his class’.

Musical Theater communities have some of the closest knit relationships. Each cast often creates their own emotionally supportive family that helps them get through the immense about of physical and mental exhaustion that artists endure. “I didn’t really feel a part of the MT family, and I think part of that is I don’t fit the face of what an MT typically is.” Tres says. Most of his friends are not in the program, he prioritizes his academics and does not go out of his way to see them.These are some of the basic characteristics of the average MT student’s lifestyle. The fact that Tres is different, in more ways than one, has put a lot of pressure on him.

He craves success and fulfilment, not conformity. Being at one of the top Musical Theater schools is half the battle. What he can do with the skills and knowledge that he will gain in four years is the challenge. Tres would love to perform but also has a passion to help others. This summer he will be working in New York City to teach kids who live in poorer neighborhoods about Musical Theater.

Structure:

finish talking about tres, goals, pressure

bring up briea

introduce her and her story

show how they support each other in facing pressures in the MT program

how it changed Tres experience.