

MICHAEL R. JACKSON

b. January 26, 1981

PULITZER-WINNING PLAYWRIGHT

“That’s the experience of what being a young Black gay man is ... I wanted to try to invite everybody to step into that.”

He is the first Black writer to win a Pulitzer Prize for a musical.

Michael R. Jackson is a playwright, lyricist, and composer, celebrated for his groundbreaking Tony- and Pulitzer Prize-winning musical, “A Strange Loop.”

Jackson grew up in Detroit, Michigan. He started playing the piano at age 8 and participated in church choir and plays. His early experiences on stage fueled a passion for the theater, which his mother indulged. She took him to plays throughout his childhood.

Though he knew for much longer, Jackson came out as gay at age 16. He attended NYU Tisch School of the Arts, receiving both his undergraduate and graduate degrees. As a queer Black man, Jackson felt like an outsider in the typical New York City gay scene. He channeled this sense of alienation into his art.

Before his commercial success, Jackson served as a Sundance Theatre Institute Composer Fellow and a Dramatist Guild Fellow and worked on a variety of projects. Among them, he wrote the lyrics and co-wrote the book for the musical adaptation of the indie film “Teeth” and composed “The Kids on the Lawn,” a song cycle that The New York Times Magazine published in its culture section.

Earlier, Jackson worked as an usher for various Broadway musicals, including “The Lion King.” He wrote “A Strange Loop”—with the book, music, and lyrics—drawing upon this period. The story follows a queer Black man named Usher, who works as an usher and is writing a play about a queer Black writer who is writing a play about a queer Black writer. The show opened off Broadway in 2019 and premiered on Broadway in 2022. In 2020 it made Jackson the first Black writer to win a Pulitzer Prize for a musical, and it was the first musical to win a Pulitzer Prize before opening on Broadway. In 2022 the play earned two Tony Awards: Best Musical and Best Book of a Musical.

Among his many other honors, Jackson has earned two Obies, two Drama Desk Awards, two Outer Critics Circle Awards, and a Lambda Literary Award for Drama. The New York Times named him one of the “Best Black Male Writers of Our Time” and Queerty listed him among 50 heroes furthering equality and acceptance in America.

Jackson’s second musical, “White Girl in Danger,” channels his childhood soap opera obsession into a campy, humorous exploration of race, class, and identity. It opened in April 2023.



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