

E. LYNN HARRIS'S ESTATE PARTNERS WITH OSCAR-WINNING CREATIVE CARL REED FOR BEHIND THE MASK: INVISIBLE LIFE - THE MUSICAL

Featuring an original score by Grammy Award-winning legends Ashford & Simpson, this new musical makes its premiere at D.C.'s Howard Theatre on World AIDS Day.



(From Left to Right: E. Lynn Harris, Carl Reed, Proteus X, Deonté Staats)

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[E. Lynn Harris](#) was the writer who made it impossible for publishing to keep looking away at a self-published debut that grew into 12 consecutive New York Times bestsellers and gave millions of readers their first mainstream glimpse of Black gay love. Nearly two decades after his passing, his most iconic story is having its biggest moment yet, arriving on stage as one of the first musicals in the United States built with AI-driven set design, marking a new era for one of the most significant literary franchises in Black American fiction.

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We're entering a new chapter for E. Lynn Harris's narrative tapestry, where theater and AI can come together in ways that honor his legacy while welcoming new possibilities for Black storytelling.”

Proteus X

[BEHIND THE MASK: INVISIBLE LIFE \(THE MUSICAL\)](#) will have its World Premiere at the historic Howard Theatre in Washington, D.C. on November 30, and closing on December 1, 2026, World AIDS Day a date chosen deliberately to honor the novel's unflinching portrayal of love, identity, and the human cost of silence.

The production reunites the creative team behind one of

the most celebrated literary franchises to ever emerge from Black American fiction, featuring an original R&B, Gospel, and House score by Motown and Grammy Award-winning legends Nickolas Ashford & Valerie Simpson. The adaptation of the book was done by award-winning writer/actor Javon Johnson whose credits include *The Lincoln Lawyer* and *The Oval*, and who was handpicked

by the legendary August Wilson as his protégé. The production is executive produced by Reggie Van Lee and produced by Proteus X, Javon Johnson, Toni Isreal, and Zain Sheikh. Oscar Award-winning producer [Carl Reed](#) and his studio, Composition Media, are bringing the production's visual world to life. Reed and the Composition team are developing the production's visual elements, blending animation, set design, and emerging creative tools to extend the storytelling beyond the stage and create a distinctive visual language for BEHIND THE MASK: INVISIBLE LIFE (THE MUSICAL). "Our focus is always the story," says Reed. "AI doesn't replace creative vision, it amplifies it, giving experienced artists, animators, and professional production studios new ways to bring ideas to life and expand the boundaries of what's possible."

The creative team behind the production is a roster of theater veterans: musical direction by e'Marcus Harper-Short, choreography and musical staging by Otis Sallid. Casting is led by Victor Vazquez, CSA (Cats: The Jellicle Ball). The production is sponsored by Gilead Sciences, whose "Creating Possible" platform supports storytelling that advances HIV awareness, education, and destigmatization.

"It's a profound milestone to bring BEHIND THE MASK: INVISIBLE LIFE (THE MUSICAL) to Howard Theatre on World AIDS Day," says producer and co-writer Proteus X. "We're entering a new chapter for E. Lynn Harris's narrative tapestry, where theater, television, and AI can come together in ways that honor his legacy while opening the door to new possibilities for Black storytelling. The mission isn't simply to revisit what was created, but to imagine where E. Lynn Harris's work can go next."

Harris is widely credited by The New York Times, NPR, and the Los Angeles Times alike with bringing gay Black love stories into mainstream popular fiction for the first time, at scale, for an audience of predominantly straight Black women who had never before encountered these narratives on a bestseller list. As his longtime Doubleday editor, Charles Flowers, has put it, Harris's novels "gave some closeted gay men the courage to come out." NPR called it plainly: "E. Lynn Harris made sexuality a best-seller."

The Howard Theatre premiere marks only the beginning of a renewed push to bring E. Lynn Harris's full literary universe to new audiences and new formats. Proteus X and Deonté Staats, are extending the Harris library into television, developing Basketball Jones, Harris's New York Times bestselling novel as a one-hour prestige television drama. The series follows Dray Jones, a future NBA lottery pick, and AJ Richardson, a brilliant team manager hiding behind an adopted name, as an unexpected bond forces them to navigate ambition, sexuality, race, and the institutions determined to profit from their futures before they can define themselves for themselves.

Deonté Staats, whose credits include Peacock's Bel-Air, A LA Carte on ALLBLK, and co-writing the penultimate episode of Season 4 of Showtime's The Chi, is the writer, creator, and showrunner for Basketball Jones, with Brandon Anderson serving as creative producer.

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