



July 2, 2025

Award-Winning Artists Join The Songbook Academy as Guest Mentors

Guest Mentors Include Celebrated Stars from Stage and Screen

CARMEL, Ind. – A celebrated group of award-winning stars from stage and screen will join The Songbook Academy 2025 as guest mentors during the Great American Songbook Foundation's annual summer music intensive set to take place July 12-19 at **Allied Solutions Center for the Performing Arts** in Carmel, Indiana.

In addition to founder of the Great American Songbook Foundation, **Michael Feinstein**, an impressive group of performers and entertainment professionals have been assembled to help lead the 40 student participants at The Songbook Academy. This group includes **Jessie Mueller** and **Nikki Renée Daniels**, appearing during the week's public events, as well as **Kate Baldwin**, **Lorna Courtney**, **Catherine Russell** and **A.J. Shively**, leading private masterclasses and workshops.

- **Michael Feinstein** is the multi-platinum-selling, two-time Emmy and five-time GRAMMY® Award-nominated entertainer known as “The Ambassador of the Great American Songbook.” Feinstein founded the Great American Songbook Foundation in 2007 and serves as Artistic Director for Allied Solutions Center for the Performing Arts.
- **Jessie Mueller** originated the role of Carole King in *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, earning a Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, and GRAMMY Award for her performance. She went on to originate the role of Jenna in *Waitress* (Tony, Drama Desk, and GRAMMY nominations) and starred as Julie Jordan in *Carousel*, winning the Drama Desk Award and receiving Tony and GRAMMY nominations. Most recently, she appeared on Broadway in Tracy Letts' *The Minutes*.
- **Nikki Renée Daniels** has appeared in 12 Broadway productions, including *Once Upon a Mattress* (Lady Larken), *The Book of Mormon* (Nabulungi), *Les Misérables* (Fantine), and the Tony Award-winning revivals of *Company* (Jenny) and The Gershwins' *Porgy and Bess* (Clara). She portrayed Angelica Schuyler in *Hamilton* at the CIBC Theater in Chicago. On screen, Nikki's film and television credits include *The Other Woman*, *Billions*, *The Equalizer*, *Chappelle's Show*, *Madam Secretary*, and *The Sound of Music: Live*.
- **Kate Baldwin** is a two-time Tony and four-time Drama Desk Award nominee, celebrated for her roles in *Hello, Dolly!*, *Big Fish*, *Finian's Rainbow*, and more. She has performed in concert with the American Pops Orchestra, New York Pops, Boston Pops, National Symphony, the American Songbook series at Lincoln Center, and the Kennedy Center. On television, her work includes a guest star on NBC's *Law & Order: SVU* the Disney + series *Just Beyond* and *The Gilded Age*.
- **Lorna Courtney** starred as Juliet in the hit Broadway musical *& Juliet*, for which she was nominated for a Tony Award and a Drama League Award for Distinguished Performance and won the Clive Barnes Award for Theatre. She is currently starring in the new Off-Broadway revival of *Heathers* at New World Stages. Her previous credits include the premiere episode of

The Equalizer (guest lead opposite Queen Latifah) and Broadway's *Dear Evan Hansen* and the revival of *West Side Story* directed by Ivo Van Hove.

- **Catherine Russell** is a GRAMMY award-winning Jazz/Blues vocalist. She has released nine solo albums since 2006 and three of her solo albums, *Harlem On My Mind*, *Alone Together* and *My Ideal*, earned GRAMMY nominations for Best Jazz Vocal Album. As a solo artist, Catherine has performed at major festivals and venues in the US, Europe, South America and Africa. She has also recorded and toured with artists including David Bowie, Cyndi Lauper, Jackson Browne, Paul Simon and Steely Dan.
- **A.J. Shively** is an acclaimed actor with Broadway credits including *Paradise Square* (Tony, OCC, Chita Rivera nominations), *Bright Star* (Drama Desk nomination), *La Cage Aux Folles*; Off-Broadway credits such as *Philadelphia*, *Here I Come*, *A Man of No Importance*, *Titanic*; and TV/Film credits including *Julia* (HBO Max), *Bull* (CBS), *Hunters* (Amazon Prime), *Homeland* (Showtime), *Madam Secretary* (CBS), *The Blacklist* (NBC), *Other People's Bodies* (upcoming), *Syrup*, and *HairBrained*.

The students will work throughout the week with an esteemed faculty including music directors **Caelan Cardello**, **Jeff Harris**, **Oscar Hernández**, **Daryl Kojak** and **Melanie Shore**, and vocal coaches **Shereen Ahmed**, **Kathleen Hacker**, **MaryAnn Hu**, **Melvin Brandon Logan** and **Mary Michael Patterson**. Collectively, this accomplished team includes GRAMMY winners, Broadway stars, educators from top collegiate performing arts programs, and leading professionals across the music industry.

Other special guests assisting with this year's Academy include **Catherine Walker** as Vocal Technique Coach and Songbook Choir Director, **Kenny Shepard** as Guest Choreographer, **Russ Kasso** as Guest Music Director for The Songbook Academy in Concert, and 2016 Songbook Academy alumna **Nina White**, who made her Broadway debut in *Kimberly Akimbo* and recently finished her run in the new Broadway-bound musical *The Queen of Versailles*, opposite Kristin Chenoweth.

The Songbook Academy, now in its 16th year, is the flagship education program of the Great American Songbook Foundation. The program includes workshops, masterclasses, and performance opportunities that help participants hone their vocal and stage skills, particularly in song interpretation, while building friendships and professional connections that last a lifetime.

Songbook Academy Week features public performance events at the **Payne & Mencias Palladium** concert hall for both live audiences and livestream viewers worldwide, offering opportunities to witness the rising stars of tomorrow alongside today's top performers.

Tickets for all three of the public performances are on sale now:

- [Public Masterclass](#)
Tuesday, July 15 | 2 p.m. ET | Payne & Mencias Palladium or Livestream
Michael Feinstein and Tony and GRAMMY award-winning actress Jessie Mueller will offer insightful critiques and real-time guidance to 10 talented vocalists randomly selected from The Songbook Academy Class of 2025.

- **Songbook Showcase**

Thursday, July 17 | 7 p.m. ET | Payne & Mencias Palladium or Livestream

Each of the 40 participants will perform a solo on the Payne & Mencias Palladium stage. The evening also includes special performances by Michael Feinstein and guest mentor and Broadway star Nikki Renée Daniels.

- **The Songbook Academy in Concert**

Saturday, July 19 | 7 p.m. ET | Payne & Mencias Palladium or Livestream

Michael Feinstein returns to the stage to emcee as all 40 singers perform choral numbers, small group ensembles and featured solos, celebrating their growth over the week and paying tribute to iconic composers and lyricists of the Great American Songbook.

Ticket Information:

Tickets for the Public Masterclass are free. The Songbook Showcase is pay-what-you-can with a \$5 minimum for in-person attendees and no minimum for livestream viewers. The Songbook Academy in Concert offers in-person tickets starting at just \$25 with pay-what-you-can livestream access at no minimum. Tickets are available now at TheSongbook.org, by phone at (317) 843-3800 or toll-free at (877) 909-2787.

The Songbook Academy receives generous support from the Efroymson Family Fund, Traditions Senior Communities, the City of Carmel, the Ella Fitzgerald Charitable Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and Salon 01.

Guest Mentor support is provided by generous contributions from individual donors, including Libby and Randy Brown, Tim and Karyl McGeath, Bob and Rose Popovich, and the Tobin Family.

The Songbook Academy in Concert performance is part of Allied Solutions Center for the Performing Arts' 2025-2026 *Center Presents* Season, sponsored by Allied Solutions, and its BHI Senior Living Songbook Series.

About the Great American Songbook Foundation

The mission of the Great American Songbook Foundation, founded in 2007 by five-time Grammy® Award nominee Michael Feinstein, is to inspire and educate by celebrating the foundational era of American popular music. Headquartered at Allied Solutions Center for the Performing Arts in Carmel, Indiana, the Foundation advances this rich legacy by curating physical artifacts of its creators, performers and publishers in the Songbook Library & Archives; operating a multimedia exhibit gallery; overseeing the Songbook Hall of Fame; offering programs for the public and research opportunities for scholars and artists; and providing educational opportunities for student musicians, including the annual Songbook Academy® summer intensive. The Foundation is a Cultural Affiliate of the Los Angeles-based Grammy Museum®. More information is available at TheSongbook.org.

ATTACHED IMAGES

Headshots: A.J. Shively, Catherine Russell, Kate Baldwin, Lorna Courtney

Montage – Left to right – Kate Baldwin, Lorna Courtney, Nikki Renée Daniels, Jessie Mueller, Catherine Russell, A.J. Shively