

Alabama

Alabama alum, Huntsville native will play lead in smash musical 'Hamilton' on Broadway

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When Seth Panitch got a call from Michael Luwoye saying he'd been tapped to play the lead in the biggest Broadway musical in decades, Panitch wasn't surprised.

"On the other hand, I was thrilled for him in the giddiest of ways, as all professors are when the best of things happen to the best of our students," said Panitch, a theater professor at the University of Alabama who taught Luwoye when he was a student.

Theater-loving friends, families and communities across the state are celebrating the news that Luwoye, a 2009 graduate of Lee High School in Huntsville and a 2013 graduate of the University of Alabama, **will make his Broadway debut** onstage in New York City as the lead role in "Hamilton."

Luwoye was named as the alternate to actor Javier Munoz in the title role in "Hamilton," a hip-hop musical about American founding father Alexander Hamilton. The Broadway show, which has seen sold-out crowds for months, won a near-record 11 Tony Awards this year.

"You'll often hear people talk about the 'It factor' when it comes to performing; it's impossible to describe, more like a feeling you get when you watch someone in their element. Michael had the It factor in spades," said Sarah Brown, a Lee High graduate who performed with Luwoye in Huntsville Community Chorus's 2006 production of 'Seussical the Musical.'

"He was great in any role, but his incredibly sweet nature made him a perfect fit for leading roles," she said. In that show, Luwoye played a main role of Horton the Elephant.

After graduating from Lee High School's arts magnet program, Luwoye went on to the University of Alabama where he majored in theater with a concentration in musical theater.

Panitch said he performed in musicals and plays of "all kinds and styles" while at UA, and recalled his "fierce work ethic, prepared to share any side of himself that a role demands."

Productions at UA included 'St. Joan,' 'Moby Dick' and 'Othello,' as well as a production with Cuban actors in Havana. While a student at Lee High School in 2008, Luwoye won best actor in a one-act play for his performance in "Godspell" at a regional high school theater competition.

Since graduating from UA in 2013, Luwoye has appeared in professional productions regionally and in New York City.

"He has made an incredible name for himself in a very short time in the industry," said Panitch.

Luwoye most recently performed Off-Broadway in "Invisible Thread." For that performance he received a 2016 Lucille Lortel Award nomination for outstanding lead actor.

After the announcement was made that Luwoye would be the Hamilton alternate on Broadway, the show's creator, Lin-Manuel Miranda, tweeted that he'd been a fan of Luwoye since he saw him in a workshop production of 'Invisible Thread.'

"Tremendous talent, AWESOME Hamilton," tweeted Miranda.

The thing to know about Luwoye, said Panitch is "Michael is an incredibly generous actor – to fellow actors, the directors who work beside him, to the teachers that train him.

"When you talk about doing something 'the right way,' you are talking about Michael."

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