

FALL ENTERTAINMENT SERIES

COMEDY OF CONSPIRACY



Langston Kerman performs at Uptown's Green Mill cocktail lounge during his stand-up special "Bad Poetry." NETFLIX

BY ERICA THOMPSON, STAFF REPORTER
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When Langston Kerman graduated from college amid the Great Recession, he faced a precarious job market — especially with an English degree.

"I ended up moving back to my mom's basement, which I vowed I would never do," said the 37-year-old Oak Park native, who now lives in Los Angeles. "It just all felt dark to me. It was so antithetical to what I had envisioned in my head. I went to school, I got good grades, I followed the rules, and now I'm back in this life that I did not want."

Feeling a conventional path had failed him, Kerman decided to take a risk and pursue a dream. He signed up to do a comedy set at an

open-mic at Doc Ryan's bar in Forest Park.

"I went up there and I bombed for five minutes," he said. "But it was the right kind of bomb that a sick person like me can somehow translate as, 'You should go do this again. You should keep trying.' So, every week I would go to that open-mic and bomb. And every week I felt a little bit better about the idea of pursuing this."

A decade and a half later, Kerman has a

Oak Park native Langston Kerman is a rising stand-up star and actor, but he's also exploring the world of 'Black conspiracy theories' with humor on his podcast 'My Momma Told Me'

promising career as a stand-up, actor, writer and producer. He has worked on TV projects including "South Side," "Bust Down," "The Boys" and the new FX show "English Teacher." On the heels of his recent Netflix comedy special, "Bad Poetry," he and comedian David Gborie will bring a live taping of their podcast, "My Momma Told Me," to the Den Theatre on Oct. 13.

Presented on Will Ferrell's Big Money

Players Network, the podcast showcases "Black conspiracy theories": Did Bill Cosby attempt to buy NBC? Does the Black Illuminati exist? Are aircraft "chemtrails" infecting the public with chemical or biological agents?

"We take a lot of pride in neither of us being scared of any conversation," Kerman said. "I think conspiracy theory is so important. I don't mean that we should all be conspiracy theorists, but I do think that conspiracy theory is sort of like the adult version of imagining and whimsy. It's fascinating to me to unpack where these ideas come from."

That playfulness is a constant thread through Kerman's work, though he first gained popularity in a more dramatic role as Jared on the TV show "Insecure."



Langston Kerman (left) appeared on "Bust Down" with his friends Jak Knight and Chris Redd. PEACOCK

"He's this serious guy, sexy and flexy," he said. "That's not really how I've ever seen myself or the career that I've ever wanted to create."

That's why he's glad "Bad Poetry" is showcasing his comedic side, he said.

The special was filmed at the Green Mill and directed by fellow Chicagoan John Mulaney, who was a fan of Kerman's outrageous, envelope-pushing Peacock show, "Bust Down," about four casino workers in Gary.

'MY MOMMA TOLD ME' LIVE PODCAST

When: 7:15 p.m. Oct. 13

Where: The Den Theatre, 1331 N. Milwaukee Ave.

Tickets: \$28+

Info: thedentheatre.com

"He was actually interested in potentially coming on as almost like a Danny DeVito for 'It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia,'" Kerman said. "He was going to help produce and then become like a fifth member of the 'Bust Down' gang."

But the "Bust Down" team discontinued the show following the death of co-creator and co-star Jak Knight and Peacock's negative reception to the raunchy content, said Kerman, who went on to write for Mulaney's weeklong Netflix talk show "Everybody's in L.A."

Kerman said he admires Mulaney's narrative style of comedy, and tried to take a similar approach with "Bad Poetry."

The result is a collection of personal stories, including one about Kerman's mother's marriage to Chester Brewer, a former

Chicago Bulls mascot, aka "Da Bull," who was arrested for selling marijuana out of his car in 2004. The marriage lasted for several years, but Kerman said he has no idea how she initially met his former stepfather.

"My mom just be doing stuff," Kerman said, laughing. "I come back, and the results are affecting all of us."

Kerman also talks about his career as a poet and educator: Before pursuing comedy full time, he taught at his alma mater, Oak Park and River Forest High School, as well as a school in Boston and an after-school poetry program in New York. He also holds a master's degree in fine arts.

In the Netflix special, he relays a time when a student poked fun at his poetry.

"I deeply resent that child," Kerman said. "She's not a child anymore. As a grown person, should I ever come across her, I got smoke for her."

Kerman said he was inspired to become a poet by a teacher at Oak Park and River Forest High School, where he also joined the spoken-word club. "It was very formative, like this is not just a silly art form to try to make girls like me," he said. "This can be something a little more elevated."

And now he has derailed his path in favor of telling dirty jokes, he said, laughing.

"I don't really see comedians as smart people," he said. "I think we certainly know how to articulate ourselves, but I don't look at us as the insightful, groundbreaking thinkers that we sometimes find ourselves positioned as. That's not what I seek out of great comedy. What I seek is to connect. ... How do I talk about me and make you feel like I'm talking about you?"



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