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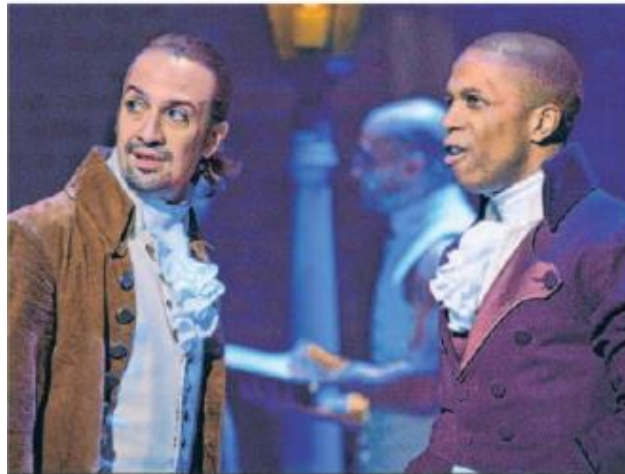
'Hamilton' Creator Partners With Foundation to Mentor Students

BY LESLIE BRODY

When Lin-Manuel Miranda started writing his Broadway musical "In the Heights" during his sophomore year at Wesleyan University, he had just moved into a campus house with eight fellow Latino students.

Their deep sense of community inspired his work, he says. Now, the creator of the blockbuster "Hamilton" wants to help a new generation of artists enjoy such mutual support and handle the challenges of college.

Mr. Miranda said Thursday his family's fund is teaming up with the Posse Foundation, which recruits small, diverse groups of talented students and helps them succeed together at partner colleges on full scholarships. Most Posse scholars are Black or Latino and come from low-income homes. Most are the first in their families to



Lin-Manuel Miranda, left, and Leslie Odom Jr. starred in 'Hamilton.'

attend four-year colleges.

The Posse Arts initiative aims to nurture musicians, dancers, writers and visual artists. The first group of 10 seniors will be chosen from New

York City and head to California Institute of the Arts near Los Angeles in the fall of 2022.

Mr. Miranda said he benefited enormously from a "protoposse experience" in college.

"Suddenly I had fellow students and really close friends who were all kind of going through the same thing and had the same wealth of cultural references. I wasn't leaving half of me behind to go to school," he said in an interview.

Deborah Bial, founder of the Posse Foundation, said she launched the nonprofit in 1989 because of a student who said he wouldn't have dropped out of college if he had his posse with him. So far the program has picked 10,000 participants, recruits in 20 cities and partners with 63 selective colleges. It says 90% of its scholars get diplomas, a rate that exceeds that national average for undergraduates.

Ms. Bial said she hopes the new initiative would develop decision makers who represent society more broadly than leaders in the arts industry today, who are mostly white men.

She said Mr. Miranda's work mirrors Posse's mission—having a Black actor, Leslie Odom Jr., play the rival of founding father Alexander Hamilton, for example. "Our goal is to change who is sitting at the table, being in the room where it happens," she said.

Mr. Miranda said his goal is "new stories, more perspectives. Our culture is richer when you have that."

Posse aims to grow the arts initiative to support 250 students yearly, with five arts colleges providing the scholarships. The project gives students help through the admissions process, mentoring on campus and alumni networks.

Posse selected 780 high-school seniors out of 17,000 applicants for fall 2021. To be considered, a student must be nominated by a high school or community-based organiza-

tion. Vetting aims to spot academic and leadership potential. It includes a group interview where contenders tackle team challenges such as building robots, debating genetic testing or creating a public-service announcement. Candidates for the arts version also would submit portfolios.

Mr. Miranda said he sees his role largely as finding partner colleges and artists to pitch in.

Ravi Rajan, president of California Institute of the Arts, said he expects to host 40 Posse scholars at a time when the program is phased in. He plans to fundraise to offer free spots at a campus where tuition costs about \$53,000 a year. He remembers that when he was a child being raised by Indian immigrants, seeing Zubin Mehta, an Indian conductor, leading the New York Philharmonic "was a huge thing for me."

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