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News: U.S./Canada

Brian Stokes Mitchell on *Shuffle Along*, Audra McDonald and Tonight's Café Carlyle Debut!

Stokes is stoked.

Tony-winning Broadway leading man [Brian Stokes Mitchell](#) is back in the New York limelight in a big way this season, debuting his first club gig at the tony Café Carlyle Sept. 15, a new Broadway musical in the spring and possibly a new solo CD.

That's all par for the course for the handsome star of *Kiss Me, Kate*; *Ragtime*; and *The Man of La Mancha*. "Through most of my life, music has been like a radio that plays and plays in my head," he said, explaining his side work as a composer and arranger.

Mitchell spent a chunk of the past summer in Hawaii, where the one-time *South Pacific* tour star has literally got mangoes and bananas he can pick right off a tree. Well, mangoes anyway. He has been choosing songs and working on arrangements for the Sept. 15-26 Café Carlyle event, which he had decided to call *Plays With Music*—because that's what he plans to do in the concert.

"I'm a fan of odd meters," he said. "For example, I've decided to sing 'No Business Like Show Business,' but I'll be doing it in constantly changing 5/4, 7/4 and 11/4 time signatures. I've found a way to make that work. Everyone will recognize it, but they'll feel that there's something not quite usual with it. I hope to bring whimsy and fun and joy to songs we all know so well."



Brian Stokes Mitchell

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The concert forms a follow-up to his successful 2012 album and concert series "Simply Broadway," and features Broadway favorites, standards and jazz. The acclaimed singing actor is accompanied by a trio led by his long-time pianist and collaborator, Tedd Firth, with Gary Haase on bass and Mark McLean on drums. - See more at:

Mitchell plans to do "Gesticulate" from *Kismet*; Arthur Schwartz' "By Myself" from "The Bandwagon"; Jerry Herman's "I Won't Send Roses" from *Mack and Mabel*; the Brazilian song "Começar De Novo," known in English as "The Island"; [Michel Legrand](#)'s "The Windmills of Your Mind" combined with a Bach piece Mitchell loves; Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Hello, Young Lovers" from *The King and I*, plus "The Man I Love," a song he performed at one of the BC/EFA *Broadway Backwards* concerts in which male singers do numbers usually performed by women, and vice versa.

"I may do one or two other songs normally associated with women," he said. "That will be another part of the *Plays With Music* idea."

Mitchell said he also plans to do one or more [Stephen Sondheim](#) songs, "but I'm going to leave those as a surprise."

Mitchell said he had toyed for a while with the idea of recording a "Simply Broadway II" album, but now says he may go into the studio after Café Carlyle and record *Plays With Music* instead.

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Jeff Hyslop, Chita Rivera and Brian Stokes Mitchell in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*

Photo by Martha Swope

Important as the Café Carlyle gig is, an exponentially more awesome one is coming up in the spring. Mitchell will re-team with his *Ragtime* co-star [Audra McDonald](#) for *Shuffle Along*, or *The Making of the Musical Sensation of 1921 and All That Followed After*, the

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backstage story of that classic all-black 1921 musical hit, which will co-star [Billy Porter](#) and have choreography by [Savion Glover](#) and direction by [George C. Wolfe](#), who is also doing the libretto.

[Scott Rudin](#) is producing the show, which will start previews at the Music Box Theatre March 14, 2016, and open April 21.

Mitchell has been engaged to play the role of the show's original book co-writer, Flournoy Miller, but he said he doesn't know much about the assignment beyond that at this point.

"George Wolfe called me and said, 'I've got this show!' I didn't even know Audra would do it at that point. But I love George personally—his spirit, his voice, his point of view, his creativity. When I met with him, he described the show to me and I just said yes. It's such an incredible list of people [working on it]. Sometimes you just have to take a leap of faith."

Mitchell said he hopes to see more of the script when he does the first of two workshops for the show in New York. Coincidentally, that is scheduled for the same week as the Café Carlyle concert, so he'll be doing *Shuffle Along* during the day and *Plays With Music* at night.

Is he daunted by that schedule? No, energized. "I love the idea that we'll be creating it as we do it. That's when George is at his best. There are some projects where you have to just start doing it, and, after a while, the show starts telling you what it wants to be. You put your spirit in and, after a while, something bigger takes over and it turns out to be much more fun and creative than what it was at the beginning."