

Coco Elysses

CULTURAL EXECUTIVE ♦ CREATIVE STRATEGIST ♦ INSTITUTION BUILDER

*Building institutions that preserve culture, cultivate artists,
and inspire future generations.*

A life devoted to cultural stewardship.

Coco Elysses is a multidisciplinary artist, cultural executive, educator, creative strategist, certified Full Spectrum Doula with more than 35 years of experience, traditionally trained End of Life Doula, and MBA Candidate at OneDay Business School. Her work bridges music, education, cultural preservation, compassionate care, entrepreneurship, and institution building.

For more than three decades, Coco Elysses has led at the intersection of art, education, and institution — an executive whose work has quietly reshaped the cultural landscape of America.

As the former Chair of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians and a multidisciplinary artist in her own right, she cultivated the conditions in which artists thrived: rigorous, financed, and free.

Her leadership joins the sensibility of a curator with the discipline of an operator. Budgets grow. Audiences arrive. Institutions endure not because they are marketed, but because they are cared for.

Beyond the stage and the boardroom, her practice is rooted in care. As a certified Full Spectrum Doula with more than 35 years of experience, she has supported individuals and families through pregnancy, birth, postpartum transitions, reproductive choices, advocacy, education, and compassionate care. Trained in a family tradition of caregiving, she also serves as a traditionally trained End of Life Doula, accompanying people and families through major life transitions with dignity, presence, emotional support, and cultural sensitivity.

She is currently an MBA Candidate at the OneDay Business School, deepening her capacity to build ventures that bridge cultural purpose and institutional scale.

“The archive is a living instrument.”

The training and practice behind the leadership.

EDUCATION

Master of Business Administration (MBA)

OneDay Business School · Candidate

Master of Fine Arts (MFA)

Creative Writing

Bachelor of Arts (BA)

English

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE & LEADERSHIP

Certified Full Spectrum Doula

More than 35 years of experience providing compassionate, evidence-informed support through pregnancy, birth, postpartum care, reproductive transitions, advocacy, education, and family-centered care.

Traditionally Trained End of Life Doula

Raised in a family tradition of caregiving and trained to provide compassionate emotional, spiritual, cultural, and practical support for individuals and families during the end of life journey.

Former Chair

Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM).

Founder

The Learning Prism.

Founder & Creative Director

Starchild Lovechild Productions.

03 LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

Leading through creative stewardship.

“Great cultural institutions do more than preserve history. They cultivate imagination, create opportunity, and strengthen communities through creativity.”

— COCO ELYSSES

04 EXECUTIVE IMPACT

Measured in institutions built, artists lifted, audiences convened.

757%

ORGANIZATIONAL BUDGET GROWTH, AACM

586%

ANNUAL BUDGET GROWTH, AACM

1,051%

AUDIENCE GROWTH, AACM

30+

YEARS OF LEADERSHIP

100+

ARTISTS & STUDENTS MENTORED

40+

MAJOR ARTISTIC PRODUCTIONS

Three decades in the making.

2025 TO PRESENT

Executive Leadership

Chief steward of institutional strategy, artistic vision, and financial sustainability.

SEPTEMBER 2025 TO PRESENT

Diddley Bow Construction Class

Teaching Artist and Program Facilitator. Chicago Public Library Renaissance Project, supported by the Mellon Foundation. Designed and facilitated an experiential public arts program connecting Diddley Bow construction, African American music history, cultural preservation, creative expression, and community learning.

2025

One String: The Story of the Diddley Bow

Producer and creative director on the acclaimed feature documentary.

2025

The Learning Prism

An educational initiative exploring sensory-based learning and neurodiverse education through music.

2023

Mutual Mentorship

Selected fellow of the Mutual Mentorship for Musicians global cohort.

2023

Symphonic Distribution

Selected as one of 25 women leaders worldwide for Symphonic Distribution's Women Empowered Mentorship Program.

2021 TO 2023

Chair, AACM

Elected to lead the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

2022

AACM: Ancient to the Future

Co-producer for Carnegie Hall's Afrofuturism Festival.

2021

The Multi Genre Artist Creativity Tool Workbook

Designer of a framework created to help multidisciplinary artists and neurodiverse creatives organize ideas, sustain creative practice, and complete projects.

2019

ALTA Award

Winner of the ALTA Award for Best Original Music in a Play.

2019

Joseph Jefferson Award

Winner of the Joseph Jefferson Award for Best Original Music in a Play.

1998 TO PRESENT

Certified Full Spectrum Doula

Supporting individuals and families through pregnancy, birth, postpartum transitions, reproductive choices, advocacy, education, and compassionate care.

TRAINED

Traditionally Trained End of Life Doula

Trained caregiver providing dignity, presence, emotional support, family guidance, and compassionate accompaniment during major life transitions.

The disciplines of building things that last.

01

Strategic Planning

Long-horizon roadmaps that align mission, budget, and artistic ambition.

02

Board Governance

Board development, fiduciary rigor, and executive partnership.

03

Fundraising

Major gifts, capital campaigns, and diversified revenue design.

04

Grant Development

Foundation and government funding across the arts and humanities.

05

Educational Innovation

Curriculum, pedagogy, and access programs rooted in cultural equity.

06

Community Partnerships

Coalitions across neighborhoods, universities, and cultural districts.

07

Creative Direction

Artistic programming, curation, and multidisciplinary production.

08

Artist Development

Career-long support of composers, performers, and interdisciplinary artists.

09

Operational Excellence

Finance, HR, and infrastructure that let creative work flourish.

10

End of Life Doula

Compassionate accompaniment for individuals and families through major life transitions.

Performances, lectures, and collaborations across continents.

A practice that travels into concert halls, universities, museums, and public squares from Chicago to Havana, Berlin to Salvador.

01 United States

02 France

03 Spain

04 Portugal

05 Germany

06 Brazil

07 Poland

08 Canada

09 Panama

10 Cuba

A body of work, curated.

01	Diddley Bow Construction Class	CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY, RENAISSANCE PROJECT	2025
02	The Learning Prism	FRAMEWORK AND APP DEVELOPMENT	2025
03	One String: The Story of the Diddley Bow	DOCUMENTARY FEATURE	2025
04	Multi Genre Artist Creativity Tool Workbook	WORKBOOK	2021
05	Starchild Lovechild Productions	PRODUCTION HOUSE	2012 to Present
06	AACM at 55	ANNIVERSARY CURATION	2021
07	Ancient to the Future	FESTIVAL CONCERT	2022
08	Osun's Water	MUSIC DIRECTOR AND COMPOSER FOR DISCO POET KHARI B.	2018 to Present

A featured case study in cultural stewardship.

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY · THE RENAISSANCE PROJECT · SUPPORTED BY THE MELLON FOUNDATION

Program Description

Produced and co-facilitated by Dr. Traci Lombre, Coco Elysses designed a hands-on Diddley Bow Construction Class presented through the Chicago Public Library's Renaissance Project supported by funding from the Mellon Foundation.

The program introduced participants to the history, cultural significance, construction, and creative possibilities of the Diddley Bow, a foundational one-string African American instrument with roots in African musical traditions, and the development of the Delta Blues.

Program Outcomes

Program date	September 2025 to Present
Chicago Public Library branches	South Chicago Branch, Budlong Woods Branch, Chicago Bee Branch, Mayfair Branch
Number of participants	100+
Participant age range	10 to 75
Number of instruments completed	100+
Program duration	1.5 hours
Additional teaching artists or collaborators	Dr. Traci Lombre

Collaborators in the work.

Carnegie Hall	MCA Chicago	Harvard University
Adler Planetarium	Universal Music Group	Field Foundation
American Composers Forum	Old Town School of Folk Music	Chicago Cultural Treasures
New Music USA	University of Chicago	Chicago Public Library
The Renaissance Project	The Mellon Foundation	3Arts

11 AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Honors for the work, quietly kept.

2023

Mutual Mentorship for Musicians

2022

Symphonic Distribution

2020

Chicago Cultural Treasures

2019

ALTA Award

2019

Joseph Jefferson Award

The lectern, the studio, the classroom.

01 NOTABLE INSTALLATIONS | FEATURED INTERVIEWS | BOOKS

2024

Faith Ringgold: American People (voice-over), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL · Permission I (visual art exhibit), Cultural Connection, Chicago, IL · Permission II (visual art exhibit), 345 Art Gallery, Chicago, IL

2015

Free at First: The Audacious Journey of the AACM 50th Anniversary (featured musician exhibit), DuSable Museum of African American History, Chicago, IL · The Freedom Principle (featured musician exhibit), Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, IL

Selected

99 New Poems: A Contemporary Anthology (featured poet) · America Is... Personal Essays for Social Justice (featured writer) · Jazz: A Documentary (musician) · A Doula Story: Documentary (voice-over), HealthConnect One, Chicago, IL · Skywatchers of Africa, Adler Planetarium, Chicago, IL (voice-over) · Black Women and Music: More than the Blues, University of Illinois Press

02 PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

1998 to Present · Actors' Equity Association (AEA)

1996 to Present · SAG-AFTRA

2006 to Present · Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM)

03 MASTERCLASSES & SESSION WORK

1996 to 2023 · Masterclasses across universities, conservatories, and cultural institutions.

Session member for First Presbyterian Church.

13 PRESS, FILM, RADIO, AND RECORD

The public record of the work.

01

A conversation with Coco Elysses

Featured interview and profile.

02

Performer uses her upbringing to inspire art

Press feature on creative roots and inspiration.

03

AACM at 55

Chicago Tribune feature.

04

Television

Featured musician on the Fox series Empire.

05

Documentaries

Narrator of A Doula Story. Featured musician in Thee Debauchery Ball Documentary.

06

Podcasts

Creator of the Fifty-Year-Old Pussy Podcast, a cross-generational dialogue among Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, and Millennials on the wisdom, humor, and sexuality of the maturing woman. Co-creator of Pretty Girl Chronicles Podcast.

07

Radio

Former DJ for WHPK show, Pushing the Envelope, featuring world music and music created by AACM musicians.

08

Voice Over

35-year veteran voice-over artist whose work ranges from commercials and video games to film narration.

The future of cultural leadership.

- 01 **Preserving Black cultural history.**
- 02 **Building sustainable institutions.**
- 03 **Artist-centered leadership.**
- 04 **Innovation through collaboration.**
- 05 **Education as cultural preservation.**
- 06 **Community-driven transformation.**

For executive opportunities.

Board seats, executive appointments, artistic leadership, keynotes, and select consulting engagements are welcomed.

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REPRESENTATION

Available upon request

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