Nicoye Banks is an accomplished and dynamic actor. You may know him from his work in movies like “Invincible,” “Green Zone” or “Brooklyn’s Finest.” You may remember him from one of the three characters he has played on the series “Law & Order.” Perhaps his work in “Queen Sugar” is cherished because of the local connection or maybe you have been captivated by his character in his latest project “Sacrifice” on BET. With 40 credits to his name, his work is notable in television, film and theatre.
Locally he co-starred in director Tommye Myrick’s Voices in the Dark stage production of “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner” at the Joy Theater in February 2013, taking on the role of Dr. John Prentice.

Nicoye’s roots in performing started in the uptown neighborhoods of New Orleans. He attended Our Lady of Lourdes and De La Salle High School where he enjoyed playing baseball and running track. It was also where he discovered his passion for the stage. In sixth grade he started competing with the speech and debate team. This is where he started to blossom and realize he had what it took as he placed in competition after competition.

“I was competing with other junior high students from Holy Ghost and St. Stephen’s. I read poetry and performed in ‘A Raisin in the Sun,’” said Nicoye. “The performance thing was coming naturally.”

Nicoye was encouraged by the leading ladies in his life; his mother, grandmother, great-aunt and his great-grandmother. They all lived together in a typical shotgun house where rules were strictly enforced and boundaries set for Nicoye and later for his sister when she was born.

“All that I am is because of those women in my life,” Nicoye noted with pride. “I definitely had a lot of attention on me because I was the only boy for a period of time. There was a lot of love and adoration and on the other hand, a lot of accountability. I was raised to be responsible and to take care of my belongings. There was no getting away and getting around things in this house full of women.”

A natural actor in plays, Nicoye also sharpened his acting skills on the streets of New Orleans as a cultural performer. His mother, Joycelyn Davis, was involved in social aid and pleasure clubs and his stepfather, the late Franklin “Wingie” Davis, masked Indian with the Yellow Pocahontas. These opportunities gave a young Nicoye a different type of stage where he could execute his other talents.

“I picked up the needle and thread and started with some pearl work and some sequins and that was the basis of our suits,” he proudly stated. “I tell you, those were some serious good times.”

Nicoye studied communications, political science and history at Loyola University. It was on the manicured lawns of the uptown campus that Nicoye played basketball and he was very active in both the Black Student Union and NAACP. “It was my ‘boys to men’ story. I made lifelong friends at Loyola and I also realized that I didn’t want to go into politics.” said Nicoye.

In addition to his many gifts, he also loved to tell stories and make people laugh and cry. He discovered that he could do it through stage plays, television and film. As he explained, “Being a people person is one thing but my affinity was truly for performance, not just public speaking.”

Nicoye moved to New York in 1997 to study acting at Gene Frankel Theatre in lower Manhattan. He says this is when the real work began. He was one of three students out of 29 who were selected to study with professional students who were actually working in soap operas and in off-off Broadway productions. With hard
work, consistent study and a little bit of luck, doors began to open for him.

Two weeks before completing the program, someone suggested he look into a role they thought would be perfect for him and after auditioning he secured the part. “This was a sign for me to stay in the city,” he recalled, adding, “I only had enough money for the duration of the program but it was a sure sign for me to stay and pursue my career.”

There have been many successes for Nicoye since those days in New York and eventually he started to make more money through his craft. Besides acting and doing some professional stunt work, he has also produced a short film and two stage plays.

Nicoye recently finished wrapping up ten episodes of “Sacrifice” starring Paula Patton, Altonio Jackson, Nelson Bonilla and Juan Antonio. He plays the assistant district attorney in the BET series about an entertainment lawyer managing the scandals of Hollywood’s elite. He calls the show a “drama/thriller” and is hoping for a second season and beyond. He enjoys working with everyone involved in the project and has had a good time shooting.

“The show keeps you captivated with twists and turns and the season definitely ended with a really good cliffhanger,” said Nicoye.

Fans of Nicoye’s work can also look forward to seeing him in an upcoming movie that he just completed called “The Channel” where he plays an FBI special agent. “I was very fortunate to be a part of this particular project because it was shot here in New Orleans about the Irish Channel neighborhood. I was excited about being a part of it,” he said.

Nicoye enjoys showing off his hometown when filming takes place locally. “There is an elevated sense of pride and also a comfort when shooting at home. I know that the people who I am working with and around know what’s at stake and we come together to put out a solid product.”

Home based here in New Orleans, he and his wife Essence and their two sons enjoy all that his hometown has to offer. From fine dining to Red Bean Mondays to enjoying a day out at City Park to having a cocktail at one of the corner bars, all of these experiences and others bring a unique perspective to Nicoye. “My art and artistry have depth and structure because of my life circumstances in New Orleans,” he proudly noted.

Giving back to his community is a huge priority for Nicoye. He is the current president of the Nkrumah Better Boys club that will be celebrating its 30-year anniversary in October 2022. Second lining is only a small fraction of what the members do. They dedicate about 150 hours of service into the community annually. They partnered with Total Community Action in 2021 to distribute toys during the holiday toy drive that was held at Ray’s on the Avenue, as well as sponsored a luncheon for women and children at a local shelter. “Interacting with the children and putting smiles on their faces and joy in their hearts is what it is all about,” said Nicoye.

As busy as Nicoye is, he has also enrolled at Dillard University to complete his degree requirements. With three semesters under his belt, he is enjoying blending in with the other students and is looking forward to graduation.

“I’m enjoying getting the academia side of what I do professionally. Maybe someday I will go into teaching. Now, that would be a role of a lifetime!” he concluded.