

# **“The Color Purple” Musical has MyiaRené Carter Thrilled Over Major Role**



## **HOME ON THE STAGE**

By Dean M. Shapiro, Senior Editor

PHOTO COURTESY OF MYIARENÉ



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When MyiaRené Carter received the email informing her that she was chosen for the role of Sofia in the upcoming Le Petit Theatre musical production of “The Color Purple,” she spontaneously dropped to her knees praising God and shedding tears of joy.

As she describes the joyful moment, “I was in my classroom in front of my students and I literally fell to my knees in tears. I’ve gone through so much in life where I thought I wasn’t good enough to play a major role. I’ve been mostly limited to small parts. Now I feel like this is finally my time. My time to shine and I am so excited.”

As the Choir Director at McDonogh 35 Senior High School and voice instructor at her own Soul Sounds Vocal Academy studio, this role is the culmination of a life-long career in the live entertainment field for MyiaRené. And, strangely enough, the key role of Sofia wasn’t even the one she initially planned on auditioning for.

No stranger to the 1985 feature film version of “The Color Purple” starring Whoopie Goldberg and Oprah Winfrey, which she used to watch multiple times on her home VCR, MyiaRené had previously performed in a production of the musical version for the Anthony Bean Community Theatre several years ago. However, it was in a minor role as the Church Soloist who opened the production.

When she was alerted this past summer by Pedronia Burrell-Turner, her sorority sister from Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority Inc., that Le Petit was holding auditions for the production, MyiaRené said, “I really wanted to audition for the Church Lady part. I didn’t want to audition for Sofia because I assumed that role was taken.

“But, when I got there, the director (Donald Jones Jr.) asked me, ‘Why don’t you want to audition for Sofia?’” MyiaRené continued. “I told him I thought the part was already taken, and he was like, ‘No. Please audition’ and so I did.”

Several anxiety-filled weeks went by before MyiaRené received the good news

for which she had been anxiously waiting. “I never saw myself being in a role as large as the one I’m doing right now and I’m giving it everything I’ve got,” she proudly declared.

“The Color Purple,” adapted from Alice Walker’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, opens at Le Petit on January 12 and runs through the 29th. MyiaRené’s character, Sofia, plays a key role in the story’s drama and has several of the production’s best-known songs in her repertoire.

Raised on Abundance Street in the 7th Ward of New Orleans, MyiaRené attended Gentilly Terrace for her elementary school years, Marian Central for middle school and Warren Easton High School. She went on to graduate from Dillard University in 2015 with a B.A. degree in vocal performance.

Like many other professional vocalists, MyiaRené grew up singing in church from an early age; in her case it was the New Home Full Gospel Baptist Church on Carondelet Street. “I was singing by the age of seven and I started thinking I was going to be a career singer when I was about 11. I knew something was good back then,” she recounted.

Raised in a single parent home, MyiaRené received encouragement from her mother, Leslie Carter, but her musical mentors were her choir director from Warren Easton, Jolanda Robertson, and the late Cheyra Jenkins. “They were both really supportive of me,” she said.

During her high school years, MyiaRené did productions under Robertson’s tutelage and, while attending Dillard, she





performed a small role in “Dream Girls,” a prototype group resembling The Supremes, and mirroring the dynamics of the Motown music scene of the 1960s.

In the years since graduation from Dillard, MyiaRené has continued following her career path, taking on small roles in various productions while



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teaching and voice coaching. She is fiercely determined to shine in the role of Sofia and burnish her credentials for whatever good fortune might lie ahead for her and her chosen profession. She is taking this major role so seriously that she passed up an opportunity to travel to Spain with a local gospel group.

“I wouldn’t have given up this role for anything in the world, even a chance to travel,” she said. “I feel like I’ve been grooming myself for this my whole life. I feel like, even though this is a local production, I want to become known locally. I want my people to know me when I make it to the top.”

And what does she see as “the top”? One word: Broadway!

*“I wouldn’t have given up this role for anything in the world”*

~MyiaRené Carter

“Yes. I really can see myself on Broadway because I’ve really worked hard,” she replied

to the obvious question. “I’ve trained for this and I’m also getting ready to get back into vocal training. I’m a vocal coach myself but I know that, if I continue learning, I can go from there. I feel like I’m built for this. I am at home on the stage and Broadway is something that I definitely want to do.”

But before that happily anticipated day comes, MyiaRené is diligently rehearsing her role, eagerly and appreciatively taking her direction from Jones and vocal directors Raion Ramsey and Berkley the Artist. “I am absolutely astonished by how professional these people are. How good they all are,” she noted. “The sound people, the costumes and everything else about the production is fabulous. I’ve dealt with theatre before but never to this capacity. Especially with me being in this important role. This is an absolutely amazing process.

“So now I am Sofia,” she proudly stated. “That’s my name. And, until we’re done with this play, that’s going to be my name. I’m going to make sure I play her every day that we’re on that set.”

And who, ultimately, is she doing all of this for? “My students,” she answered.



“The main reason why I’m teaching in the school system and privately at my academy is because of what my own teachers passed along to me. Now I want to give back to some child so that they too can have their dreams come true. I want them to be able to say, ‘If Ms. Carter can do it; if Ms. Carter can go to Broadway, then so can I.’ I am simply giving back what I received from my teachers.”

Wrapping up, MyiaRené again emphasized that “I feel like this is my time and I’m going to fit into it and enjoy it. I’m thanking God in advance for the things that He’s doing for me. Because I prayed for this moment and I feel like I was humble for a long time, now it’s my time for me to make a little noise.”

“*The Color Purple*” will be running from January 12-29 at Le Petit Theatre, 616 St. Peter Street in the heart of the French Quarter. Show times are 7:30 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and 3:00 p.m. for Sunday matinees. Ticket prices range from \$15-\$65 (plus fees) per person. To make reservations or for other questions call the box office at 504-522-2081 ext.1 or email [boxoffice@lepetittheatre.com](mailto:boxoffice@lepetittheatre.com).