BIOGRAPHY

# Nikiya Mathis

Actress · Broadway Hair & Wig Designer · Educator · Entrepreneur

*Trained to act. Called to design.*



Nikiya Mathis is an actress, hair and wig designer, educator and entrepreneur, and the first wig designer in history to receive a Special Tony Award, honored in 2024 for her work on *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*.

She earned her MFA in Acting at NYU, and she knows what it feels like to wear the hair, not just build it. After years of her own hair horror stories on stages and TV sets, and hearing the same stories from other actresses of color, she decided to be the change she wanted to see. She started ActTRESSES Hair Consulting to give actors of color the hair support they weren't getting, and to teach costume designers how to give it.

That work took her from the hair trailer to Broadway. She has styled and designed wigs for Kerry Washington, Jurnee Smollett, Phylicia Rashad, Anika Noni Rose, Danai Gurira, Susan Kelechi Watson, Patina Miller, Wendell Pierce, André Holland, DeWanda Wise, LaTanya Richardson Jackson, André De Shields, Karen Pittman, Danielle Pinnock and more. Her Broadway credits include *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play*, *Imaginary Invalid*, *Cats: The Jellicle Ball*, *Liberation*, *Purpose*, *Topdog/Underdog*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Heart of Rock & Roll*, *Once Upon a One More Time*, *Home* and *Chicken & Biscuits*, earning her two Drama Desk Awards, three Henry Hewes Design Awards, an Obie Award and two Broadway Black Awards.

She still balances acting, with recurring roles on *Power Book III: Raising Kanan*, *Snowfall*, *Love Life* and *BrainDead*. On stage, she originated Shanita in Dominique Morisseau's *Skeleton Crew* at Atlantic Theater Company, Margie in Kirsten Greenidge's *Milk Like Sugar* at Playwrights Horizons, Cassan in Katori Hall's *The Blood Quilt* at Arena Stage, and roles in Oscar winner Tarell Alvin McCraney's *The Brother/Sister Plays* at the Public, and appeared in Lynn Nottage's *Fabulation* at Signature Theatre.

The questions actors kept bringing her became what she termed HAIRversations, a word and approach she created. When do I have the hair conversation? Should I have a hair rider in my contract? Should I be paid for wearing my own wig? What do I do when the designer says there's no budget for hair? She now answers them for drama schools, theaters and companies as a keynote speaker and teacher, with annual master classes at NYU Tisch as a guest artist, where she first taught natural hair to costume design students, and workshops at prestigious institutions like Yale, Princeton and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

A proud graduate of Newark's University High School and Temple University, Nikiya leads a full design team and runs her own wig brand, Our Black Tresses. Through her internship and training program, she is building a pipeline, showing high school students, beauty school students and professional stylists that a career in hair and wig design is within their reach. Next up: *Warriors*, the new Lin-Manuel Miranda musical.

## HONORS

- Special Tony Award, 2024
- Drama Desk Awards (2)
- Henry Hewes Design Awards (3)
- Obie Award
- Broadway Black Awards (2)
- Kathleen Perkins Behind the Curtain Award, Black Women on Broadway
- AAFCA honoree

## EDUCATION

- MFA in Acting, New York University
- Temple University
- University High School, Newark, NJ

> *"My mom was a teacher in Newark, New Jersey. I watched her take money from her own pockets to provide teaching resources for kids who look like me, in an underfunded school system. She instilled in me a heart of service."*
>
> NIKIYA MATHIS



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CREDITS AT A GLANCE

# Selected work

Both sides of the mirror: the designer behind the hair and the actress in the chair.

### BROADWAY HAIR & WIG DESIGN

*Jaja's African Hair Braiding* (Special Tony Award) · *School Girls; Or, The African Mean Girls Play* · *Imaginary Invalid* · *Cats: The Jellicle Ball* (Drama Desk Award) · *Liberation* · *Purpose* · *Topdog/Underdog* · *Death of a Salesman* · *The Heart of Rock & Roll* · *Once Upon a One More Time* · *Home* · *Chicken & Biscuits*

### NOW & NEXT

August Wilson's *Seven Guitars*, Lincoln Center, dir. Ruben Santiago-Hudson · *Imitation of Life*, the new Lynn Nottage musical · *Warriors*, the new Lin-Manuel Miranda musical · *Purpose*, London

### OFF-BROADWAY DESIGN

*A Raisin in the Sun* and *for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf*, The Public · *Nollywood Dreams*, MCC · *Primary Trust*, Roundabout · *This Land Was Made*, Vineyard Theatre · *Crowndation*, National Black Theatre · *The Cotillion*, The Movement Theatre Company · *Stew*, Soho Rep/Page 73 · *Wine in the Wilderness*, Classic Stage Company · *Feeding the Dragon* (first New York design credit)

### TELEVISION & FILM WIG DESIGN

Danai Gurira: *Matchbox: The Movie* (Apple TV+) and an upcoming Netflix film
Phylicia Rashad: *The Gilded Age* (HBO)
Alana Bowers: *Best Medicine* (FOX)

### TELEVISION (ACTRESS)

*Power Book III: Raising Kanan* (recurring, N'kiyah Franklin) · *Snowfall* (recurring) · *Love Life* (recurring) · *BrainDead* (recurring) · *The Blacklist* · *Chicago Med* · *Blue Bloods* · *The Night Of* · *New Amsterdam* · *The Last O.G.* · *Person of Interest* · *Elementary*

### STAGE (ACTRESS, ROLES ORIGINATED)

*Skeleton Crew*, Shanita, Atlantic Theater Company
*Milk Like Sugar*, Margie, Playwrights Horizons
*The Brother/Sister Plays*, Shun and Shaunta Iyun, The Public
*The Blood Quilt*, Cassan, Arena Stage

### TEACHING

NYU Tisch, guest artist, annual master classes for Graduate Design and Graduate Acting · Yale · Princeton · Temple · UConn · Sam Houston State University · NAATC · Black Theatre United · The Billie Holiday Theatre · Denver Center for the Performing Arts