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Parham Performs in Broadway's *Porgy and Bess*

May 16, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Bryonha Parham '07 is currently playing the role of Serena in the Broadway revival of the classic opera, *Porgy and Bess*, running at the Richard Rodgers Theatre through Sept. 30. The acclaimed show received 10 [Tony Award nominations](#).

Like many other IWU alums that made the successful transition from McPherson Theatre to Broadway, Parham is enjoying her time working on this high-profile show, just four years after her graduation. She notes that after her time at IWU, she worked in a lot of regional theatre productions to build her resume for when she moved to New York City. "I've probably done about 15 shows since then, my most notable being *Ragtime* at the Kennedy Center and on Broadway," said Parham. She shared the stage with fellow IWU alumna Lisa Karlin '05.

Parham came to the University from Kansas City, Mo., and was immediately absorbed into the music theatre program. Although she says she struggled initially due to inexperience, IWU gave her the tools she needed to succeed. "My professors were wonderful and I never hesitated to ask for any help," said Parham. "I always felt like my best interests were at hand."



Bryonha Parham '07

Utilizing the knowledge and experience she obtained in her classes, Parham secured roles at IWU in the musicals *A Man of No Importance*, *Chicago*, *Urinetown*, *Polaroid Stories*, *Albert's Bridge*, *Alison's House*, *I Love You, You're Perfect, Now Change*, *Frozen* and the comedy *Finding the Sun*. "Post graduation, I expected to have to work a lot of jobs for the money, but I've been very blessed. I have gotten some amazing opportunities so far, and I'm so thankful to have worked on shows that mean something, that move people, and that are full of incredible music," said Parham. Some of her other favorite shows she's been a part of after IWU were *Streetcar Named Desire*, *Once on This Island*, *Ain't Misbehavin'* and *The Civil War*.

Parham revels at how different life in Los Angeles is from New York; "I moved to LA to try my hand at television, but booked *Porgy and Bess* only three weeks after moving." Parham said that working on *Porgy and Bess* is different for her as well because it's such a high-profile show. "I've never worked with celebrities before and everyone on the team is very accomplished," she said. "There is a lot of pressure for the show to be good—not to mention all the press about the changes and revisions we're making to the show."

Parham notes that this show is making headlines especially because of the transition from opera to musical, and what that means for the production. She originated the role of Serena Robbins, the wife of a spry and impulsive man who loves to play craps, for the revival, but "many wonderful women have gone before me in this role for the opera," she said. The original opera has been cut from four hours to two and a half hours, but most importantly, "the characters are raw and real human beings. It's a heavy, hard-hitting *Porgy and Bess*—I think because the director, Diane Paulus, insists on the utmost honesty from the actors. She's compiled the most capable group of actors and singers I may have ever worked with, so things hit home in a big way," said Parham. "Some of the music has been re-orchestrated and cut, keys have been changed, but ultimately, it's still *Porgy and Bess*, with the same story and the same wonderful music."

Porgy and Bess is Parham's first principle role on Broadway, and she hopes that it leads to more quality shows on Broadway. "I definitely want to get back to LA and try to work in television as soon as possible—My goals are huge. I see no reason why I can't be on a sitcom within four years and start recording a CD," she said.

Parham offers some advice to students going into theatre and Illinois Wesleyan students: "Stay true to yourself and what you do. There is so much room for artistry in this business and I think people forget to showcase what makes them special. What you do onstage or onscreen is special because of what you can bring to it, and we as actors have to remember this."

For tickets, visit Ticketmaster.com. The Richard Rodgers Theatre is located at 226 West 46th Street.

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