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'Waitress: The Musical' Star Charity Angél Dawson on Her Path as an Actor, Her Film Debut in 'Waitress' Fathom Event

NEIL TURITZ
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Charity Angél Dawson has spent the last bunch of years tearing it up on Broadway, most famously and successfully as sassy waitress Becky in *Waitress: The Musical*, the Tony-nominated theatrical adaptation of the much-beloved movie, written and directed by the late Adrienne Shelly. Thanks to Fathom Events, a cinematic version of the show will be in theaters for five days, starting December 7th, meaning Dawson's movie debut is the same role that got her attention from the theater world. With her star on the rise, she is returning to Broadway next month in another show, though she can't yet say which one. She talked to us from New York City.

How did you start acting in the first place?

I started acting in church. In our drama ministry at church, we did skits and sketches. It was always kind of a part of things. They wrote original musicals with original music at my church in Detroit, so it was always in the mix. And I've always been a singer. So when I actually paired the two when I was in high school singing and acting, it was explosive.

So did you then after high school, what happened? What was the path?

I actually didn't know that acting as a career was available to me. I wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I knew I enjoyed cooking for people, so I was thinking about culinary school. I love and picked up on sign language quickly, so I was thinking about being an interpreter for the theater.

I went to Mesa Community College for a year and a half just to try it and figure out what was what, and I took an elective group called Standing Room Only. They brought us to New York on spring break, and I saw my first Broadway show. We took some acting workshops, and I realized that this was a career. Then AMDA [the American Musical and Dramatic Academy] was auditioning the next week in Phoenix. I went home, got my monologue and my song together and I auditioned. That fall, I moved to New York to go to AMDA to pursue this thing called Broadway.

I imagine it was not a direct path from AMDA to Broadway.

No, it was not. (Laughs) Everyone's path is different. Some people before they were even out of college had the huge gigs lined up. For me, it was step by step by step by step. I graduated and did this production, and I use the term

loosely, of *Aida*. I was getting paid \$250 a week, though, to sing and act.

You're a professional!

Okay, baby! Yes, that's it. But then I got a tour with George Faison, who wrote the script, directed and choreographed the show *If This Hat Could Talk*. I began to be connected with the right people pretty early on, but I graduated in 2005 and didn't make my Broadway debut until 2014.

That was the revival of *Sideshow*. Do you consider that your big break? The moment when you knew you would make it?

Waitress. Honestly, it was *Waitress*. *Sideshow* opened and closed in two and a half seconds, then I did some regional gigs here and there. Then I booked *Waitress*, and I was playing Nurse Norma and was in the ensemble, but I was understudying Becky. For the first day of rehearsal, Keala Settle couldn't be there, so for the very first day of rehearsal, I did Becky and Nurse Norma. She was already attached to me. Getting to take over six months into the run to playing Becky on Broadway playing my first principal role opened a lot of doors.

It occurs to me that this is actually your cinematic debut as well.

Yes, it is.

It's an interesting way to do it, don't you think?

It is, but I love the way they shot it. I didn't know what to expect and I was a little nervous because I'd never seen myself on a screen like that. When I sat there, I was like, this is filmed like a movie. I felt like I saw things in the show that I hadn't seen before. So it was really cool to see something that I've been a part of for so long in this new way.

So now that you have officially broken through cinematically, are you looking to do more?

I would love to do more. I feel like, in the past, I hadn't had the same level of comfort in doing film or television, and I have had to grow into that. Theater actors, a lot of times we get really self-conscious about being on film because you don't want to be too big. I don't want to be too this or that, but shooting *Waitress* really helped. They were really great about saying, "Oh, I love what you did, give me one for the camera." And I said, "Oh, I got it." I know exactly

what you mean. It was little tweaks, and I understood. I feel like I'm ready to make more of a splash over those waters. (Laughs)

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