

Leslie Uggams Biography

Tony and Emmy Award-winning Leslie Uggams recently won an Audelco award for her starring turn in "First Breeze of Summer" at the acclaimed off-Broadway Signature Theater. She recently starred as Lena Horne in a pre-Broadway run of "Stormy Weather" at the Pasadena Playhouse. Ms. Uggams' Broadway appearances have included starring alongside James Earl Jones in "On Golden Pond" and co-starring in the Broadway hit "Thoroughly Modern Millie." In 2001, her Broadway portrayal of Ruby in August Wilson's "King Hedley II" was nominated for a Tony Award. "Headley" followed two other Audelco Award-winning, critically acclaimed, off-Broadway performances: "The Old Settler" and Keb Mo's blues musical "Thunder Knocking on the Door." Leslie co-stars in the soon-to-be-released independent film, "Toe to Toe."

Those are just the latest accomplishments for a woman who has been captivating stage, screen and television audiences since her national television debut at age six on the TV series Beulah, portraying the niece of Ethel Waters.

At the legendary Apollo Theater in Harlem, 9 year-old Leslie opened for such legends as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and Dinah Washington. She also made appearances on "Your Show of Shows," "the Milton Berle Show," and "The Arthur Godfrey Show."

Embracing her love of music, Leslie attended the New York Professional Children's School, and at the age of 15 appeared on the CBS-TV quiz show "Name That Tune," winning \$12,500 toward her college education.

Her appearance proved to be fortuitous. Mitch Miller, head of recordings for Columbia Records, was so impressed by her vocal talents that he signed her to a recording contract and then made her a regular on "Sing Along With Mitch." As such, Leslie Uggams became the first African-American performer to be regularly featured on a weekly, national prime time television series.

Concurrent with her musical composition and theory studies at the Julliard School, Leslie released the first of 10 albums she was to record for Columbia Records, including her first hit single, Morgan. Alternating major nightclub appearances with her stage work, Leslie appeared in the musical "The Boyfriend" in Berkeley, California, and soon made her Broadway debut as the lead in "Hallelujah, Baby!" That performance earned Leslie the 1968 Tony Award for Best Actress in a Broadway Musical Comedy. She followed that with a starring role in her next Broadway show, "Her First Roman," opposite Richard Riley.

In 1970, she had her own musical variety television series on CBS-TV, "The Leslie Uggams Show," and signed a new recording contract with Atlantic Records. In 1972, she made her dramatic film debut opposite Charlton Heston in the MGM film "Skyjacked," followed by "Black Girl," the acclaimed film directed by Ossie Davis.

However, it was Leslie's portrayal of Kizzy in the most watched dramatic show in TV history, Alex Haley's "Roots," that won her worldwide recognition as a dramatic actress - including the Critics Choice Award for Best Supporting Actress in 1978, an Emmy nomination for Best Leading Actress and coveted Golden Globe Nomination from the Hollywood Foreign Press Association.

She later starred in the miniseries "Backstairs in the White House," the ABC-TV movie of the week "Sizzle," and the HBO special "Christmas at Radio City Music Hall." Leslie went on to win an Emmy as co-host of the NBC-TV series "Fantasy."

In addition to ongoing concert dates, Leslie returned to Broadway to star in the musical "Blues in the Night" and enjoyed a two year run the hit musical revue "Jerry's Girls," based on the music of the legendary Jerry Herman. In 1987, she toured with Peter Nero and Mel Torme in "The Great Gershwin Concert," for which she received rave reviews. IN 1988, she starred as Reno Sweeney in the National Company of the Lincoln Center Production of "Anything Goes" and later reprised the role at Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater on Broadway. Recently, Leslie starred in a new version of Kander and Ebb's "The Rink" at the Cape Playhouse, and an acclaimed production of "Hello, Dolly!" at Houston's Theater Under the Stars.

Leslie Starred in the all-star tribute to the legendary Jerry Herman in "Jerry Herman's Broadway" at the Hollywood Bowl. She also starred in the revival of "Play On" at New Jersey's Tony Award-winning Crossroads Theater in New Brunswick and tackled the demanding dramatic portrayal of opera diva Maria Callas in Terrence McNally's "Master Class" at TheaterFest, also in New Jersey.

When not performing in the theater, Leslie can be found touring the country with her acclaimed concerts. She has appeared with The Cincinnati Pops, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, The Washington Symphony Orchestra and The Rhode Island Symphony, to name a few. In addition, she performed before 300,000 people during the Memorial Day Concert on the Washington Mall and reached millions more as the event was televised live by PBS.

Most recently, Leslie received rave reviews for her new CD "On My Way to You - The Songs of Marilyn and Alan Bergsman."