

Michelle Banks

Michelle, a true-hearted native of Washington, D.C., is proud of her accomplishments on stage and screen, for she has broken down many barriers in the entertainment industry. As an acclaimed artist, she has over 40 years of experience in acting, writing, directing, producing, and choreographing. Furthermore, Michelle has been a great motivational speaker and a respectable drama and American Sign Language (ASL) teacher for over 30 years. With her master's degree in Organizational Management, specializing in Organizational Leadership, from Ashford University, she co-founded Visionaries of the Creative Arts (VOCA) in 2019 and is currently the Artistic Director of VOCA.

After Michelle received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Drama Studies from the State University of New York at Purchase, she founded Onyx Theatre Company in New York City, the first deaf theater company in the United States for people of color. Her work with Onyx for eleven years earned several recognitions, including the Cultural Enrichment Award from Gallaudet University, the Distinguished Service Award from New York Deaf Theatre, the Outstanding Achievement Recognition Resolution of 1996 from the Council of the District of Columbia, and an Individual Achievement Award from the National Council on Communicative Disorders, and a featured article in the February 1998 issue of ESSENCE magazine. In 2017, she also received the Laurent Clerc Award from Gallaudet University for her social contributions to the Deaf community.

Michelle starred in T.V. shows, Soul Food Series, Girlfriends, Strong Medicine, and an independent film, Compensation, directed by Zeinabu Davis. In addition to a string of acting experiences, she also appeared in THE C.A. LYONS PROJECT (Alliance Theatre), BIG RIVER (Mark Taper Forum & Ford's Theatre), and FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF (Henry Street Settlement Playhouse & Globe Playhouse). FOR COLORED GIRLS... (Globe Playhouse) won the 2003 NAACP Theatre Award for Best Ensemble.

Her other achievements as a Director of Artistic Sign Language (DASL) include Broadway's FOR COLORED GIRLS..., Olney Theatre Center's THE MUSIC MAN, and other plays at Arena Stage, Kennedy Center, and Baltimore Center Stage. Her one-woman show, REFLECTIONS OF A BLACK DEAF WOMAN, had received rave reviews at Victory Theatre Center, National Black Theatre Festival, the Los Angeles' Women's Theater Festival, Ohio Wesleyan University, and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Michelle was one of the first two Deaf African-American actresses to interpret for the Broadway play HAVING OUR SAY by Emily Mann.

Michelle's first hands-on experience with filmmaking was with Jadolphus CW Fraser, an independent filmmaker who directed his feature debut, ALWAYS CHASING LOVE. Eventually, it prompted her to produce and direct a short film with an ASL version of A RAISIN IN THE SUN with a Black Deaf Cast. Her directing credits include TRASH (IRT & JACK Theatre); ISM (Atlas Performing Arts Center); A RAISIN IN THE SUN (Eastman Theater Studio); LOOK THROUGH MY EYES (Theater Project); SILENT SCREAM (Anacostia Arts Center); Z: A CHRISTMAS STORY (Malz Theater); WHAT IT'S LIKE? (Captial Fringe); IN SIGHT AND SOUND: D.E. (A)F POETRY I, II, & III (Atlas & Ira Aldridge Theatre).