

Maechi Aharanwa's Multifaceted Journey: ACTING, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND EMPOWERMENT

Maechi Aharanwa discusses her remarkable career in theater and her commitment to community engagement, while sharing her entrepreneurial journey with PinMe 1913.

By Mikayla Hunt

In this insightful conversation, we'll discover what drew Maechi Aharanwa to the stage, insights into her current role in Broadway's *Jaja's African Hair Braiding*, and her approach to both classical and contemporary theater. She's also the creative force behind PinMe 1913, a lifestyle brand with a mission to lead with love and intentional service.

WHAT INITIALLY DREW YOU TO THE WORLD OF ACTING AND THEATER?

When I realized that theatre was one of the ways people shared the worlds in their head with others, I was hooked. Even something as simple as the lights coming up or going down was magical - I was transported to different locations but I was in one place.

YOU'RE STARRING IN *JAJA'S AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING*. CAN YOU SHARE SOME INSIGHTS INTO YOUR CHARACTER "NDIDI" AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PLAY'S NARRATIVE IN TODAY'S CONTEXT?

Ndidi is fabulous. She's one of those people who can pivot in an instant and accept all the punches life throws. She makes money, she has dreams. Jocelyn has centered African women in America in a way that I haven't seen on stage. She's centered our beauty, our minds, our care for each other, and our sisterhood through her very specific lens. It's funny, heartwarming, it's real, and illuminating.

YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE IN BOTH CLASSICAL AND CONTEMPORARY THEATER ROLES. HOW DO YOU APPROACH EACH TYPE OF ROLE DIFFERENTLY, AND DO YOU HAVE A PREFERENCE FOR ONE OVER THE OTHER?

I have no preference. I enjoy the craft of acting. Period. The way I approach a role is ultimately determined by the character I'm playing — the common aspects no matter the role are the research and doing what I can to understand the world that I will be playing/living in. I enjoy every part of my process including the more challenging periods and I don't rush it. I never rush my process.



WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER TO YOUNG, ASPIRING ACTORS WHO ARE JUST STARTING THEIR JOURNEY INTO THE WORLD OF THEATER AND THE ARTS?

I don't have a set approach. I meet people where they are and develop a way of working specific to them and the goal we are aiming to reach. Advice? I hate to give it because what works for one doesn't work for another. When invited to give it - I would advise young actors to remain open to the world, to remain an active participant in the world. So much of actor training is about understanding what your whole being is doing that you can get wrapped up in yourself. That work is important and so is being in the world, observing it and choosing how you will participate in it.

IN ADDITION TO YOUR ACTING CAREER, YOU'VE DEVELOPED A LIFESTYLE BRAND, PINME 1913. COULD YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS BRAND AND THE INSPIRATION BEHIND IT?

I shared the company's first designs in November 2020 and officially launched in March 2021. I started with pins. One-of-a-kind designs for members of my sorority but with encouragement from my tribe I took a leap of faith, depleted all my everything, and expanded PinMe 1913 into a LUXE Lifestyle Brand with offerings for everyone. PinMe 1913 offers distinct custom design services, unique pin collections, jewelry, paraphernalia for members of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a bevy of inspired gift options (greeting cards included), and top-tier selections for the home and body. Continuing to lead with love and incorporate intentional service as part of the company's structure is at the heart of my mission.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT DOES "BLACK EXCELLENCE" MEAN, AND HOW DO YOU PERSONALLY EMBODY OR PROMOTE IT IN YOUR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIFE?

I believe in Black Excellence. To be honest, my thoughts about it have shifted over the years— here is where I am now: Black Excellence means intentionally doing your absolute best at all times in all areas of your life. Sometimes the best that we can do today looks different than yesterday's best. At one point I thought Black Excellence meant working myself to exhaustion in order to succeed. I now believe that Black Excellence means taking care of our beautiful Black bodies, our minds, our spirits, so that we can be present and actively participate in the world.

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