

# ELON BFA TO 'BEAUTIFUL! ON BROADWAY



PHOTO SUBMITTED BY NASIA THOMAS  
Nasia Thomas played Dionne in 'Hair' her freshman year at Elon. She'll now preform as Little Eva in 'Beautiful! The Carol King Musical.'

*Alumna lands new role in musical after originally touring as swing*

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A year and two months ago, Nasia Thomas '15 sat in the audience, waiting for "Beautiful! The Carole King Musical" to start. She'd heard about the production from friends who had auditioned for it, though she knew little about the woman whose name was in the title. But when the curtains opened, Thomas was mesmerized.

The doo-wop and "old-school sixties amaz-ingness" stirred something within Thompson. She said this to cast member Gisela Adissa as she was at the stage door last that night. Adissa said to her, "I'll see you soon." She was right.

On Thursday, May 10, Thomas will make her Broadway debut as Little Eva in "Beautiful! The Carole King Musical."

Her former classmates, seniors in the musical theater program Michaela Vine and Ciara Dixon, are in awe of Thomas's fast track to Broadway, but they aren't surprised.

"My first memory of Nasia is 'Ragtime' — she was Sarah Brown and she was gorgeous," Vine said. "I just remember thinking to myself, 'Well, crap, she's gonna make it one day.' That was when she was only a junior."

During her years at Elon, Thomas also starred in "Hair," "Pippin" and "Dreamgirls."

"This isn't the last you'll hear about Nasia Thomas, because she's about to take the world by storm," Dixon said. "Just the fact that seven months after she's graduated, she's already on Broadway in this featured role — this is not her last stop on the Broadway train."

Thomas is even more in awe about the role than her peers.

"I still can't believe it," she said. "I am in utter shock that it's happening so soon. I am so thankful at what the universe has brought me. I'm floating."

**Living the dream**

"The dream is to move to New York and find your musical," Vine said. "If you try hard enough and pound the pavement enough, you can get into a musical on Broadway, but it's not necessarily the one you've been dreaming about since you were little. Somehow the universe and the world puts you where you're supposed to be at the right time."

Thomas' trajectory has been largely about timing. Though her Broadway debut is this week, she has been touring since last summer

with "Beautiful!" throughout North America as a swing — meaning she has to be able to fill in for any of the other roles with similar body types. In this case, Thomas learned six different parts — in the event of sudden injury, illness or other unforeseen circumstance, Thomas had to be ready to go on stage in the place of those cast members.

Thomas was tapped for the swing role just before graduation, on the way to one of her final performances at Elon. Now she has moved to Manhattan full-time to perform at the Stephen Sondheim Theater.

Settling in the city is a major lifestyle change in comparison to nearly half a year of touring. Performing night after night in the same theater in the same city is quite different.

"Being on tours, sometimes you can kind of

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**NASIA THOMAS**  
ALUMNA '15

feel like you don't have a personal life because you go to a show and you go to a hotel," Thomas said. "The whole world doesn't revolve around the show. There's a life to be lived here."

But within that, some changes had to be made. Thomas has had to slow down her social life to take care of her voice and body during a much more hectic schedule.

"On Broadway you do eight shows a week and you have five show weekends. I'm not used to anything like that," she said. "I'm eating right — at least, I'm trying to — exercising, just a lifestyle change. Just making some good habits, breaking some bad ones. I'm getting as much sleep as I can."

Even though she's always been overprotective of her voice, this time, taking care of herself is about something bigger than her body.

"Just to really try to deliver in the best way. There shouldn't be any reason why I shouldn't be able to do a really good performance," Thomas said.

**A lasting impression at Elon**

On Feb. 17, Dixon and Vine sat in their senior seminar course with all of the other se-

nior musical theater majors as well as their two professors. One of them, Cathy McNeela, the program coordinator, got a call from Thomas during class. She stood up to take it and immediately started crying — Thomas was breaking the news about her Broadway debut.

"It was an awesome moment that our class collectively got to experience her telling us all at the same time as we are about to embark on this huge journey for us professionally, where Nasia was sitting just a year ago," Dixon said.

Dixon maintains a strong relationship with Thomas, not just because she was a former classmate, but also because she is like a big sister to her. In fact, she was a mentor to many African-American musical theatre students.

"She would hold 'Amen Corner' dinners for all the African-American people in our department," Dixon remembered. "We would get together and we would listen to gospel music and we would make all of those foods that are innate to our culture and our expression. And we would just get reminded that we do have a family."

Thomas saw this as an essential part of being a student of color at Elon, a predominately white institution.

"It can feel hard to be a minority. I had issues with identity growing up — I hated being black growing up," Thomas said. "But my mom really made me love the skin that I was in. I was lucky to be able to go [to Elon] with confidence, but what if someone didn't have that? It's so important to have people in your corner with an unspoken vibe."

But Thomas was a guiding force even for musical theater students outside of that group.

"She's like that to everyone," Vine said. "Every opening night I've had this year — personal text from Nasia Thomas, 'Happy opening, break a leg, you're gonna do phenomenal.' Everyone else's success is her success, and I think that's what's made her so successful. She took in all the positive energy of everyone and just propelled it forward to be this, not only amazing human, but amazing performer."

Both Dixon and Vine plan to see the show during Spring Break, when Thomas will be in her second week on Broadway. Just a few months from graduation, they sit with the same uncertainty Thomas had a year ago — but Thomas has found

blessings even in the waiting and rejection and unglamorous parts of the business.

"You're not going to always get the job. You're not going to always be in a certain place at a certain time. It's not always going to happen the way you want it to happen, but it's going to happen the way it's supposed to happen," she said. "This job is just an example. I didn't get all those other things because two months later, I'd be making my Broadway debut."

When she was a senior, Thomas was overwhelmed and stressed all the time. She was taking 20 credits of coursework and auditioning regularly. But just months later, she has made it — not over or under, but through that trying time. She recalls a quote that was shared with her recently: "What is meant for me will never pass me up, and what passes me up was never meant for me."

For all the graduating seniors, she has a final piece of wisdom.

"When you walk across that stage, you're going to laugh and thank God for all the missed opportunities," Thomas said.



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