

Heather Headley: From Trinidad to Broadway

✖ Heather Headley grew up in Trinidad as a preacher's kid. "I literally was born into the church. ... My bedroom was the wall to the sanctuary," she says. She lived with an understanding of Christ but as she got older she started to understand why her parents were so happy in church. "You start figuring it out because it now becomes a part of your life," Headley says. It wasn't easy being a preacher's kid, but she adds: "I'm glad I grew up with the morals we had. I'm glad I grew up under that kind of regimen and instruction. I wouldn't trade it for anything."

Headley and her family moved in 1989 from Trinidad to Indiana, where she participated in high school theater before going to Northeastern University to major in communications and musical theater. In her junior year she left to be an understudy on the Broadway show *Ragtime*. The following year she won the role of Nala in *The Lion King*. That performance led to her landing the title role in *Aida*, for which she won a Tony for Best Actress. She recorded two albums for the Broadway shows as well as two solo albums and won a Grammy for her debut R&B album.

Headley believes that Christians should be part the cultural makeup of society, but she also wanted to stay true to herself when recording her R&B music. "The aim was at all times I wanted it to be reflective of my lifestyle. So we had some issues every now and then. I would be like, 'Can't say that line. Won't do that. Won't sing that.' And everybody understood and they were cool about it," she says.

Even with her Broadway and recording success, Headley says she always knew she would record a gospel album. That day has come with the release of her new album, *Audience of One*, which was

inspired by her life in Trinidad. As a young girl she would go into the church sanctuary and sing to the empty pews. Her husband reminded her that those pews weren't empty; that God was there.

"That's why we called it *Audience of One*," she says of her latest project. "The only person that needs to be happy with it is God; and so for everybody else ... it's like you're in the balcony. ... And if you like the concert, I'm really, really happy ... but it's more about the royalty in the room." This album, she says, "is like my thank you ... like a gift to Him."