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**Heather Headley to Receive 2020 Alumnae Award  
From The Alumnae of Northwestern University  
(Photo available)**

EVANSTON, Ill. --- Heather Headley, singer, songwriter, and actress, is the recipient of The Alumnae of Northwestern University's 2020 Alumnae Award. She was honored with the 2000 Tony Award for Leading Actress in a Musical for her role in *Aida*.

The Alumnae Award recognizes a woman who has brought honor to Northwestern University through outstanding professional contributions in her field and who has attained national recognition. Established in 1976, the Alumnae Award has been presented every year to an alumna who has had a significant impact in her field of endeavor. Educators, journalists, doctors, scientists, and artists are included among The Alumnae's roster of awardees.

"As the 44<sup>th</sup> recipient of our Alumnae Award, Heather will join a distinguished group of women bringing honor to Northwestern University," say Alumnae Award committee co-chairs Mary Schuette and Susie Stein.

Following high school participation in choir and musicals, the multi-faceted Headley attended Northwestern University, studying communications and musical theater until the last day of her junior year on 1996, when she made the decision to become part of the musical *Ragtime* and drop out of school. In 1997, she originated the role of Nala in the Broadway musical *The Lion King*. Following, she originated the title role of the Nubian princess in the Broadway adaptation of *Aida*, earning the Tony Award for Best Actress in 2000.

She has performed in other musicals including *Do Re Mi*, *Dreamgirls*, and *Promises, Promises*. From November 2012 until August 2013, Headley played the role of Rachel Marron in the musical adaptation of Whitney Houston's 1992 movie, *The Bodyguard*, at London's Adelphi Theatre. She was nominated for an Olivier Award and a What's On Stage Award for this performance.

In 2016, she assumed the role of Shug Avery from Jennifer Hudson in a revival of the Tony-Award winning *The Color Purple* and co-starred in the Spike Lee reboot of *She's Gotta Have It* as Dr. Clara Jamison.

Musically, she released her debut album, *This Is Who I Am*, in October 2002 with RCA Records. The work on this album earned her a Grammy Award nomination for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance and for Best New Artist, making her the first Tony Award winner to be nominated for this award. Two songs from this album emerged as Top 5 R&B and Dance chart hits. A song from her second album, *In My Mind*, served to promote Headley's March of Dimes educational campaign "I Want My 9 months."

In 2010, she won her first Grammy Award for Best Contemporary R&B Gospel Album for *Audience of One* on the EMI Gospel label. She has appeared with Andrea Bocelli on his Christmas tour and on America's Got Talent television show.

In 2017, Headley began appearing in recurring roles on the TV series *She's Gotta Have It* and the following year, she began appearing as Gwen Garrett in a recurring role on the TV series *Chicago Med*. In 2019, Headley was cast as one of the three leads in the Netflix series *Sweet Magnolias*, which has been renewed for a second season. She lives in the Chicago area with her husband and three children.

Among her many awards, Headley received the coveted Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Actress in a Musical and was listed as one of *People* magazine's 50 Most Beautiful People and *Essence* magazine's 30 Women to Watch.

**Heather Headley will receive her award virtually on Monday, October 19, 2020, at 10 a.m. She will be introduced by noted opera singer Nancy Gustafson (The Alumnae's 2007 Alumnae Award recipient), and Dominic Missimi (founder and former director of Northwestern's Music Theater Program and former director of Waa-Mu, having staged 17 of the original student reviews).**

The Alumnae of Northwestern is an all-volunteer organization of women that raises funds for a wide range of projects to benefit the University. It shares the University's academic resources with the community through its Continuing Education program, which celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2018. The Alumnae has given more than \$9 million to the University in the form of grants, fellowships, scholarships, and an endowed professorship, and has provided funds for special university projects and summer internships. For more information, visit The Alumnae website ([www.nualumnae.org](http://www.nualumnae.org)).

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