

# Leslie Uggams Press Biography

Leslie Uggams is a Tony and Emmy Award-winning actress and singer whose career has brought her from Harlem (The Apollo Theater) to Broadway (*Hallelujah, Baby!*), the big screen (*Deadpool*, *Skyjacked*) to television (*Empire*, *The Leslie Uggams Show*). Perhaps best known for her stirring portrayal of Kizzy in the landmark TV mini-series Alex Haley's *Roots* (Critics Choice Award, Emmy and Golden Globe nominations), Leslie has performed to critical and popular acclaim ever since her first professional appearances at the age of nine at the famed Apollo Theater in New York City. There she opened for such musical legends as Louis Armstrong, Ella Fitzgerald and Dinah Washington. Now, after six decades on stage and screen, Leslie is a legend in her own right. She is on the Board of Directors of the Apollo Theater, and she was recently awarded an Honorary Doctor of Fine Arts from the University of Connecticut. She is also the recipient of an American Artist Award from Arena Stage in Washington, DC.

Currently Leslie can be seen as Leah Walker in the hit television series *Empire*. She also stars as Blind Al in the blockbuster 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox film *Deadpool* starring Ryan Reynolds. Soon she will co-star in the HBO original movie *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* with Oprah Winfrey. Other recent television appearances include *Nurse Jackie*; *The Good Wife*; *Memphis Beat*; and *NYC 22*.

In addition, Leslie continues to tour nationally, performing to sold-out audiences, with her autobiographical one-woman musical *Uptown/Downtown* (LA Drama Critics Circle Award, NAACP Theatre Award, IRNE Award, Broadway World People's Choice Award) which chronicles her extraordinary career in stories and song. From New York to Boston and Los Angeles, critics have raved, calling Leslie "dazzling," "indefatigable," and "delectable!" Recently Leslie also made theater history by becoming the first African-American actress to portray the iconic character of Mama Rose in Connecticut Repertory Theatre's acclaimed production of *Gypsy*. She also recently starred as *Mame* at the Wick Theatre in Florida; in the Encores! presentation of *Pipe Dream* at New York City Center; and in the Broadway-bound world premiere of *Stormy Weather: The Lena Horne Story* (Ovation nomination) at the Pasadena Playhouse in California, where she broke the all-time house attendance record.

On Broadway Leslie made her stunning musical theater debut starring in *Hallelujah, Baby!* earning both Tony and Theater World awards. Since then she has starred on Broadway in *Blues in the Night*, *Her First Roman* with Richard Kiley, *Jerry's Girls*, *Anything Goes* at the Lincoln Center Theatre (also the first national tour), *King Hedley II* with Brian Stokes Mitchell (Tony Award nomination), *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, and *On Golden Pond* opposite James Earl Jones. Off-Broadway Leslie has won Audelco Awards for *The Old Settler*, Keb Mo's blues musical *Thunder Knocking on the Door*, and *First Breeze of Summer* at the acclaimed Signature Theater. Regional roles include *A Little Night Music*, *The Rink*, *Into the Woods*, *Master Class*, *Call Me Madam*, *Blue, Hello, Dolly!* and the national tour of *Guys and Dolls*.

Leslie's still vibrant television career, which began at the age of six portraying Ethel Waters' niece on the TV series *Beulah*, spans decades. As a teenager she famously won a \$12,500 college scholarship on *Name That Tune*, and as a regular on *Sing Along with Mitch* she was the first African American performer to be featured on a weekly national primetime television series. Other early guest appearances included *Your Show of Shows*, *The Milton Berle Show*, *The Arthur Godfrey Show*, and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In 1970 she hosted her own primetime variety series, *The Leslie Uggams Show*. Later starring roles included her award-winning portrayal in Alex Haley's *Roots*, the miniseries *Backstairs at the White House*, the ABC-TV movie *Sizzle*, the HBO special *Christmas at Radio City Music Hall*, and her Emmy-winning duties as co-host of the NBC-TV series *Fantasy*.

While a student at the Julliard School in New York, Leslie released the first of 10 solo albums she was to record for Columbia Records. Later she signed with Atlantic Records. Her newest CDs are *Leslie Uggams: Uptown/Downtown; On My Way to You: The Songs of Marilyn and Alan Bergman*; and *Wishing You a Happy New Year* with the Curtis McKonly Orchestra. She can also be heard on the new cast album of *Pipe Dream*.

In concert Leslie has toured with Peter Nero and Mel Torme; performed at the Hollywood Bowl in *Jerry Herman's Broadway*; and appeared as a guest soloist with numerous symphony orchestras across the country, including The National Symphony Orchestra, The Cincinnati Pops, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, and The Rhode Island Symphony. In addition, Leslie performed before 300,000 people during the Memorial Day Concert on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol which was also broadcast live by PBS to millions of viewers nationwide.

For more information, please visit her online at [www.leslieuggams.com](http://www.leslieuggams.com), [www.facebook.com/LeslieUggams](https://www.facebook.com/LeslieUggams), [www.YouTube.com/SmagguProductions](https://www.YouTube.com/SmagguProductions) or on Twitter @LeslieUggams.