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SPECIAL FEATURES

Charity Angél Dawson on Balancing a Stage Career While Being a Budding Restaurateur

Go backstage with the *& Juliet* actor as she dishes up vegan soul food with a side of joy.

BY DIEP TRAN
FEBRUARY 28, 2024

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Charity Angél Dawson backstage at *& Juliet* (Heather Gershonowitz)

Charity Angél Dawson lives up to her name. To wit, she regularly makes food for the cast of *& Juliet*: “Saturday night on Broadway, we will hang after the show,” she tells Playbill. “So I made some vegan brisket sliders for the cast.” She then chuckles with pleasure. “Oh gosh, they love that. I prioritize it because I enjoy it and I love to feed people that I care about.” It is that maternal energy and innate positivity that Dawson has been infusing into her roles lately, and one that’s made her a favorite for Broadway fans.

Dawson currently plays Nurse Angelique, mother figure and confidante for Juliet, in the hit **Max Martin** jukebox musical *& Juliet*. She took over that role in January. That same month, the *Waitress* pro-shot was released on demand, which featured Dawson in the role of Becky opposite **Sara Bareilles** as Jenna. Angelique and Becky share a similar DNA—they both provide some tough love to the more soft-hearted main characters and they both sing killer power ballads (“F-ing Perfect” for the former and “I Didn’t Plan It” for the latter).

And crucially, both characters have no problems admitting their flaws—they may have made mistakes but they are unashamed about it. Or as Dawson sums it up, “Look around. No saints here, baby,” she says. “We’re all just trying to make it. I am drawn to things like that—the complexities of our human experience. Like, who’s the good guy, who’s the bad guy? It’s just life.”



Charity Angél Dawson does her own makeup for *& Juliet* (Heather Gershonowitz)

But back to those vegan brisket sliders. When she's not on the stage, Dawson runs her own vegan soul food business called Who Tryna Get A Plate?!. It was a venture she started during the pandemic and has since kept up with. In fact, "I'm gonna cook when we get off this call," says Dawson.

Dawson's love of performance and food grew simultaneously. She did musical theatre as a teenager at Valley Youth Theatre in Phoenix, Arizona (she and [Emma Stone](#) even did a show together). Then, when it came time to decide on a career, she debated between culinary school and acting. "When I was growing up, I used to want to have a restaurant," she recalls. "I didn't know that Broadway was a career, or that acting was something I could do for a career."

But that soon changed when she went to New York for the first time for a Mesa Community College trip and attended her first Broadway show. Dawson then auditioned for and got into the American Musical and Dramatic Academy and since then, has won over audiences with her bombastic high notes and loving personality as Mamma Morton in *Chicago*, Wanda in *Mrs. Doubtfire*, the scene-stealing Nurse Norma in *Waitress* and later Becky in the same musical.

Though Dawson is also interested in leading a musical (she's done workshops of an Ella Fitzgerald bio-musical where she played the legendary jazz singer), to her any character is an opportunity to make an impression.

"I played Nurse Norma, I loved that. I loved creating Nurse Norma," she enthuses of the role she originated in *Waitress*, an OBGYN nurse with a keen eye and a love for pie. "It's a supporting, featured ensemble role. But I got to have a blast doing that. And it left such an impression on people. And now Nurse Norma is her own thing. So you can take whatever role you have, and really dive in and make it a full-bodied person."



Sara Jane Donovan helps Charity Angél Dawson put on her wig (Heather Gershonowitz)

Acting took her away from cooking for a while. Then during the pandemic, that old dream of owning a restaurant peaked its head out. “I was at home, just cooking and playing around with recipes. It was kind of a therapeutic thing for me,” recalls Dawson, who’s a pescatarian. “And my friends would try the food. And they were like, ‘You need to sell this.’ And the more I did it, the more feedback I got. Then I realized, ‘Oh, I’m just tapping into the old passion that I had, that’s now being reborn.”

Dawson started cooking for small dinner parties, as well as taking orders and delivering to customers. But she has dreams of growing it. She’s currently waiting on approval to move into a commercial kitchen, which will allow her to scale up her operations—her future dreams for the business include doing pop-up dining experiences, selling her vegan biscuits to local grocery stores, and eventually opening up a restaurant.

For Dawson, the cooking feeds the acting, and vice versa. “They are both very creative,” says Dawson. “Creating something vegan, out of nothing—like making a vegan brisket out of a bag of flour—it brings me joy. To go from this five pound bag of flour to this vegan meaty brisket and people going, ‘Wait a minute, I’m a meat eater, but this is brisket.’ I feel just as good as I do when I give a great performance. So it’s feeding and serving me in a lot of ways.”

This care doesn’t just manifest itself as food. Dawson let Playbill into her dressing room backstage at *& Juliet*, which has become something of a community space. On the wall is a whiteboard where **Melanie La Barrie**, the original Nurse Angelique, wrote a message to Dawson: “You are the only Angelique.” Dawson also has a puzzle station, for anyone to come and play when they’re not onstage. Folks regularly lounge on the recliner near her make-up table.



Charity Angél Dawson's dressing room at *Juliet* (Heather Gershonowitz)

Dawson admits she's an empath and "an introvert in an extroverted field." So it's important for her, especially when the wider world is so tumultuous and filled with negativity, to be in an environment where she is able to spread positivity and joy—whether that's making mushrooms taste like fried chicken or belting out "F-ing Perfect" on the stage of the Stephen Sondheim Theatre.

"What I can do is get on stage and tell this beautiful story. And share light and love and hope with everyone that I possibly can...it's looking at what I can possibly do, and that's bring this balm and bring this salve to people's hearts."

Below, go backstage with Charity Angél Dawson as she gets into character for *Juliet*.

PHOTOS: CHARITY ANGÉL DAWSON PREPARES FOR & JULIET

