

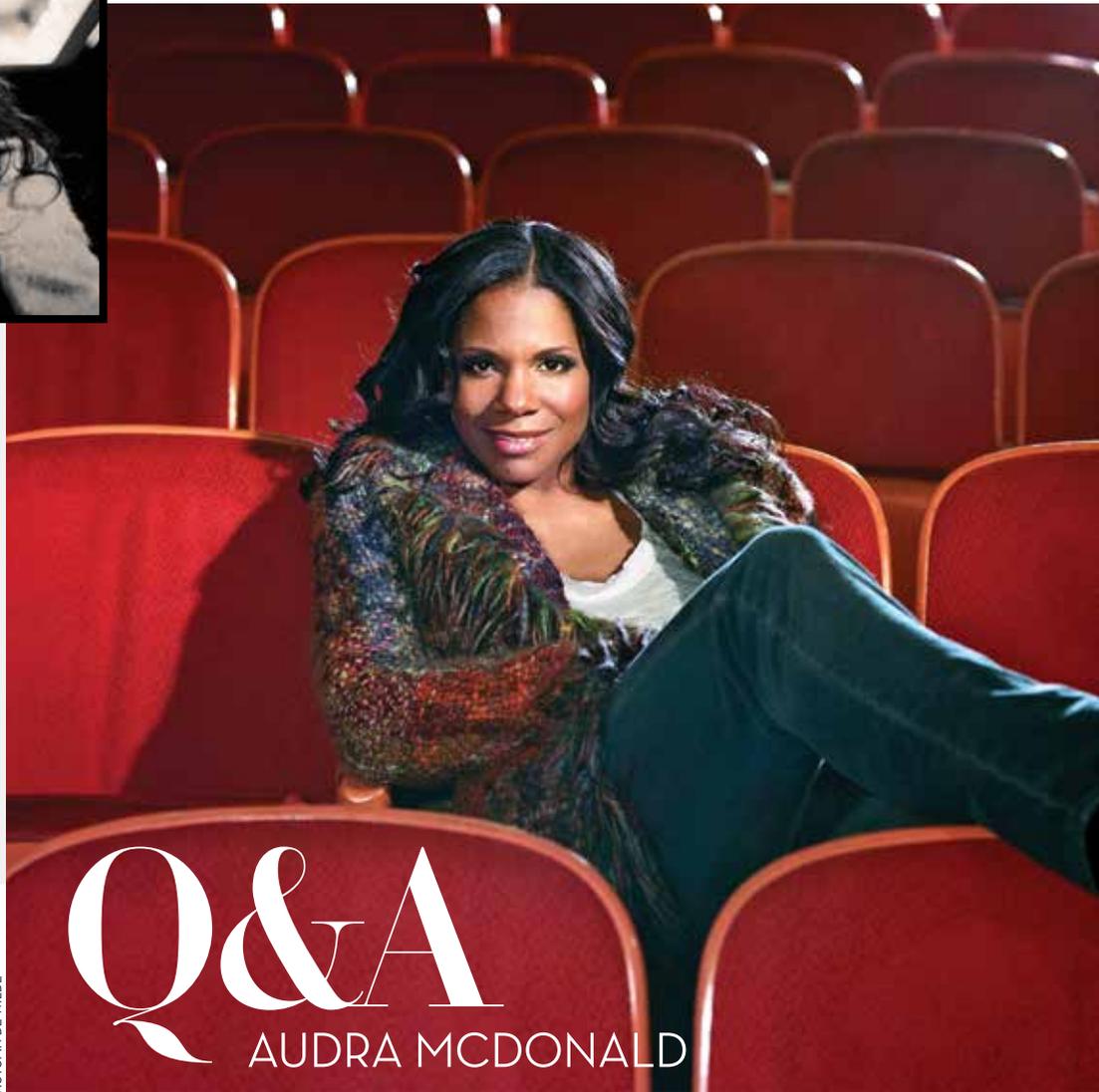
# Insider

BY MARY MURRAY



AUTUMN DE WILDE

Singer and actress Audra McDonald is Broadway royalty. She made her debut in 1992 (while still a student at Juilliard) and has earned a record six Tony Awards for roles like Ruth in *A Raisin in the Sun*, Bess in *Porgy and Bess*, and Billie Holiday in *Lady Day at Emerson's Bar & Grill*. Throughout her career, she's also appeared on TV and film, most recently portraying Madame de Garderobe in the live action remake of *Beauty and the Beast*. Regardless of the part, McDonald's soaring soprano is always instantly recognizable. On March 17, she'll share her otherworldly talent with audiences at the Kravis Center in West Palm Beach. *PBI* caught up with McDonald to talk all things Audra—and a bit of Billie, too. (561-832-7469, [kravis.org](http://kravis.org))



AUTUMN DE WILDE

## Q&A AUDRA MCDONALD



### **PBI: What's your earliest memory of singing and performing?**

**McDonald:** I come from a musical family, and everybody sings. My grandmothers were piano teachers. My dad was a music teacher. I don't remember a moment when there wasn't music in my house. For me, I remember singing in my church choir, getting the solo on Christmas Eve, and standing up and turning around to face the congregation to sing. I remember the butterflies in my stomach and how much I enjoyed it.

### **What has been the most challenging vocal role you've tackled?**

Billie Holiday. I had to completely alter my voice to sound like someone else. Not only the singing voice but the speaking voice, too. That was just a huge challenge, to sound authentically like her, because her voice is so specific and original. And

to find a way to do it that was healthy and wouldn't destroy my own voice night after night.

### **How did her vocal styling influence your own?**

What I did learn about her is that she absolutely had to be emotionally connected to the material in order to sing it. A song that she'd been singing for years, if she didn't feel it on a certain night, she couldn't do it. What I took away from that is more of a commitment to making sure I'm emotionally connected to every single note and song that I sing. Even though I have such a completely different style than Billie Holiday, that was something that drives us both, making sure there's a connection.

### **What are your pre-show rituals?**

I'm very quiet. I stay in my dressing room. I do my little warmups, but mainly I get introspective and quiet, which is unlike me in regular life. It's a lot of output, especially when you're doing concerts. To get as quiet as I possibly can, conserve my energy, and check in with where I am emotionally helps me to make sure that when I am out there I'm able to give my all and connect with the audience.



**WHAT'S ON MCDONALD'S BROADWAY  
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