

NEWS

# Nashville's Shonka Dukureh Steps Into Role of a Lifetime in New Elvis Film



Shonka Dukureh (Photo by EmexFocus)



Shonka Dukureh as Big Mama Thornton in Warner Bros. Pictures' drama "ELVIS," a Warner Bros. Pictures release. Photo by Kane Skennar

NASHVILLE, TN — A new film based around the life and career of Elvis Presley is set to premiere in theaters this Friday, and Nashville's own Shonka Dukureh will grace the screen as Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton, who first recorded "Hound Dog."

A Fisk graduate and longtime local artist, Dukureh's powerful voice is one of a handful of talented artists tapped to play some of the most famous names in music history.

This is Dukureh's first foray in the film industry, though she's no stranger to performing.

"I was humming music before I was forming words," she said. She spent much of her formative years singing at her church and got involved with musical theater in Nashville, leading her to Fisk where she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Theater.

When her artistic endeavors ventured from her college campus to the larger Music City community, Dukureh began getting opportunities to showcase her talents on the road.

"That was my basis, my foundation to prepare me to take advantage of an opportunity that was presented to me to be a part of this absolutely amazing film," she said.

That opportunity first came in the form of appearing as the voice of Big

Mama Thornton on the soundtrack.

"I was contacted by a local legend here in the music arena, Odessa Settles," Dukureh said of

landing the role. Settles is the daughter of Walter Settles, formerly of the famous Fairfield Four, a legendary gospel ensemble.

Dukureh had traveled with Settles and the Princely Players, and when Settles heard that recording for the Elvis soundtrack was to take place on Nashville's Music Row, she called Dukureh.

It definitely wasn't something she'd sought out, she said. In fact, when Settles called with the news, Dukureh was in the middle of an emergency.

"I'm glad I picked up," she laughed. "She said that she had been looking for me, and she wanted to let me know that they were getting to do the music here in this city for this big film with Warner Brothers about the life of Elvis Presley, and she wanted my name in the hat," Dukureh intimated.

So she auditioned, singing a few songs released from different artists

around the time of Elvis's heyday, including Thornton and Sister Rosetta Tharpe.

"Not very long after I sent the [audition tapes] in, Miss Odessa called me back, and she had a chuckle when she called back, as a matter of fact," Dukureh recalled. "She said, 'Shonka, they love you!' ... I think she was just as shocked and surprised as I was at how much they loved what they heard and saw from me."

Though Dukureh isn't a Nashville native, she's made her home here for years.

Despite her time here, however, she'd never gotten to record on the famous Music Row.

Dukureh has performed at Coachella and has big plans for the future — plans that include paying homage to Blues music, which paved the way for rock n' roll long before Elvis or The Beatles took stage (John Lennon famously declared the band owed its existence to Chuck Berry when the two collaborated in a live performance on the Mike Douglas Show in 1972).

Directed by Baz Luhrmann ("William Shakespeare's Romeo + Juliet," 1996; "Moulin Rouge!" 2001), the film follows a young Presley (Austin Butler) and his decades-long relationship with his enigmatic manager Colonel Tom Parker (Tom Hanks),

who narrates. Luhrmann is known for his incorporation of music and directing style,

so the film shouldn't disappoint music and film aficionados alike.

IN THE HUDDLE

with Coach Jennings

Why The Shaking?

—TODAY'S SCRIPTURE—

(Acts 8:3-4, NLT)

But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church...But the believers who were scattered preached the Good News about JESUS wherever they went.

—TODAY'S WORD—

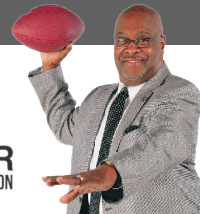
The early church was flourishing and doing great things in Jerusalem. But then a persecutor named Saul came along and wreaked havoc against the church, shaking the disciples' lives. Believers were forced to flee their homes and livelihoods and were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. I'm sure they thought, "GOD, why did YOU allow this?" But sometimes GOD allows things to be shaken to shift us. In this case, it caused the gospel to be spread and new churches to be established. In life, we all have times when things shake us to our core--an unexpected illness, a lost loved one, a job layoff. All the stability we were used to is no longer there. It's easy to get discouraged. But here's the key: The shaking is not there to stop you; the shaking is there to shift you. If you keep the right attitude, the shaking will shift you into promotion, into greater influence, into better relationships. GOD uses shakings to get us in position for new levels.

—PRAYER FOR TODAY—

FATHER, thank YOU that times of shaking in my life are not going to stop me, but they will shift me. Thank YOU that the things meant for my harm are going to lead me into promotion and things that are better. I believe that I am going to see favor and blessing I've never seen. In JESUS' Name, Amen.

Lurone "Coach" Jennings

Mary Walker Foundation Executive Director



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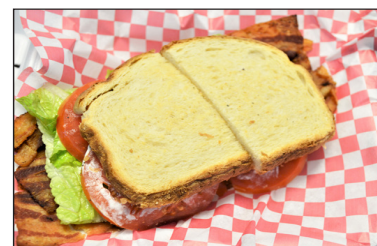
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