

Emmy® Award-Winning Broadway Star/Actress Talks to PC, Gives Tips to Students



PC Update recently had the chance to speak on the phone with Patrice Covington, an Emmy® Award-winning actress, singer, teacher, author and model, best known for her role as Squeak in the 2015 revival of “The Color Purple.” (See the superb [Broadway Channel interview](#) with her on YouTube.)

Here’s a quick summary of some of her diverse career experiences before she landed this role with National Geographic:

- Traveled the world providing background vocals for legendary performers like Stevie Wonder and Christina Aguilera, among others.

- Lit up the holiday charts with her soulful rendition of [My Favorite Things](#).
- In 2019, starred in her first film, “They Come. They Go.” on Amazon Prime.

Now she makes her television debut in National Geographic’s [GENIUS: ARETHA](#), playing Erma Franklin, the talented sister of soul singing legend Aretha Franklin.

(Fun fact: Erma was a successful recording artist as well, and was the first to record the legendary hit [Pieces Of My Heart](#).)



Patrice Covington as Erma Franklin in National Geographic's GENIUS: ARETHA. (Credit: National Geographic/Richard DuCree)

“Aretha” is a multi-episode dramatization of the Queen of Soul’s life. Technically, it’s the third season in NatGeo’s “Genius” series, which began with Albert Einstein in 2017. Directed by Anthony Hemingway (“Red Tails”), “Aretha” brings a fresh architecture of research and care to everything the viewer sees and hears. It feels like a time machine the moment the first vintage flash bulb goes off in the opening scene.

That opening concert scene in Episode 1, by the way, which features Patrice Covington singing, was the real deal, as she explained to PC Update:

“That was the most fun because we always got to wear these really cool costumes when we performed, and we would even perform for a live audience. So we were doing what we love to do already, you know, and we had real musicians and we were really singing. It was a real performance. It was the greatest.”

If you didn't catch its premier on March 21st, [all episodes are now available on Hulu](#). The show is a perfect compliment to PC's recent Black History Month celebrations and the Women's History themes we've been exploring in March.

Covington had this to say about Aretha's inspiring example as a black woman who trailblazed a path for others:

"This woman was everything. She was a mother, a sister, a daughter, a wife. She was an activist. She was a champion for civil rights and for women. She was a boss, like a *boss*. [laughs] That's where the whole demanding my respect thing comes from. You can look up clips of her with her purse on stage, and she demands her money before she performs so that she wouldn't get hit with any tricks after the performance. She just really empowered women, I think, and continues to empower women, and will empower even more women after they see this show because I think it's super relatable. You'll see that you're not the only person with a complicated family dynamic, and that if she can overcome all the things that she did, and it's a lot, then surely you can too."



Her last comment hits home. Many of our students at PC come from difficult situations, and they can draw strength from Aretha's example. Covington herself has made a big impact on the lives of students and children and serves as an inspiring example.

Offstage, Covington serves as a celebrity ambassador for Kids in the Spotlight and provides performance education and coaching through her program, The Galaxy Method. She loves how students use these creative projects to overcome mental health challenges and grow into well-rounded individuals. Covington's motto is, "Don't be a star...be a galaxy," as she explains:

“The Galaxy Method is my own project that I created. I do everything from masterclasses to teach young artists. I do private voice lessons, acting coaching, and I also do music therapy for ages eight to 90 [laughs] ...and music can be so healing, so that also inspires me. I work with a lot of young ladies who have mental health concerns, and we just sing. We write music to write out their feelings, and then they sing it. And some of them are far more talented than I am when it comes to writing and playing instruments, and it's just been beautiful to see their growth.”

Besides her own work with the Galaxy Method, her time with Kids in the Spotlight has been eye-opening:

“Kids in the Spotlight is an organization that caters to children in the foster care system by giving them an outlet and a constant. I heard one young lady speak. She was in 11th grade, and she had been to over 60 schools in her life. That's how often she moves around and gets switched to a different family. There are no constants, but the one thing that has been a constant has been Kids in the Spotlight. She had been a part of it since she was in seventh or eighth grade. And those are the people she knows that she's going to see every week. She knows that they're going to do something really special together every year.

“The children write, star in, costume design, and direct films. They're paired with real Hollywood directors and producers and actors, and they put us in their films if they need us. We're there to coach them, to help them figure things out. But, the film is really by them and they create some beautiful projects and they've gone on to win awards and do many other things in the industry as they graduate from high school.

“I love being a part of Kids in the Spotlight. You know, I'm supposed to be the ambassador that's supposed to inspire the kids, but I always end up being inspired by them because of the way they persevere, and they just keep going when there literally is no way.”

For PC students who are interested in a career in the entertainment world, Covington offered this advice:

“The business is full of ebbs and flows. I've had all the ebbs and some flows. I get a whole lot more nos than yeses when it comes to auditions and jobs. So, I am inspired by those kids to just keep going when I don't know how it's going to work out. Even with this job, this is my first television series, and I have been praying and working towards this for a very long time. It's ultimately been my break into the TV industry. This is my first, and it feels different. It feels like the things that I manifested, that I prayed for. And I'm just so glad I kept going.”



Aretha Franklin, played by Cynthia Erivo, recording at Fame Studios in Muscle Shoals, AL. (Credit: National Geographic/Richard DuCree)

As exciting as it has been to be in “Aretha,” she emphasized how much patience and resilience it took to get to where she is now, and how getting good guidance was key:



Aretha Franklin (L), played by Cynthia Erivo, and her sister Erma Franklin, played by Patrice Covington. (Credit: National Geographic/Richard DuCree)

“...for years I was always like, ‘When is it going to come? Why am I not in this? I'm perfect for this,’ you know...but this could not have been more perfectly ordained by God. It was just perfect for me. I felt at home. I had terrific guidance from people who are theater veterans like myself, so I felt super comfortable. And I mean, this music is truly embedded into the fabric of my life. So, I was always

familiar with that, but to get to learn more about this woman that we all feel like we know, was really an honor.”

Covington also shared a little about her hobbies and what she's been doing to cope with the pandemic:

“I miss doing so much because the world shut down and everything, but I have the best dog ever. And she and I, we like to kick it. We do all kinds of things all around LA. She's like the perfect GPS person—the perfect navigator. [laughs] But we do a lot. I take her with me everywhere in LA. Love to go to the beach, love to work out, to do yoga. I've recently started trying to learn how to do flower arrangements. I'm not that great yet [laughs], and I love to collect crystals like metaphysical crystals and stones.”

It was inspiring to speak with Patrice. Porterville College wishes her the best in her career and in her amazing work with individuals and communities offscreen. Besides seeing her in [Aretha](#), you can visit Patrice's site at PatriceCovington.com and connect with her online at [LinkTree](#).