

CLOSER LOOK — HELL'S KITCHEN

# Alicia Keys' high school music teacher now plays in the orchestra of 'Hell's Kitchen'

An inspiration for the character of Miss Liza Jane, Linda Aziza Miller plays the keyboard in the musical's pit.

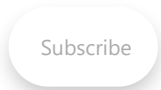
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(L-R) Linda Aziza Miller and Alicia Keys attend the opening night of "Hell's Kitchen" on Broadway (Credit: Michaelah Reynolds)

When Linda Aziza Miller attended junior high in the New York City Public School system, she had an instructor who taught music appreciation. Though many of her peers made fun of this teacher, Miller found something special in him. "He taught Broadway songs and I loved Broadway songs, and I never knew it until this teacher introduced me to [them]," Miller said. Years later, Miller went on to become a music educator, better known as Miss Aziza — also within the New York Public School system. Nearly two decades after hanging up her hat with the department of education, Miller has landed on Broadway as the second keyboardist in the band of "Hell's Kitchen."



But it's not a coincidence that Miller plays for "Hell's Kitchen" specifically. During her varied career, Miller taught music at Manhattan's [Professional Performing Arts School](#) (PPAS), and during her third year there, a young Alicia Keys walked into Miller's classroom. In fact, Miller is one of the inspirations for the "Hell's Kitchen" character Miss Liza Jane, piano teacher of the protagonist Ali. (Miss Liza Jane is played to Tony Award-winning effect by Kecia Lewis.) As part of the musical's orchestra, Miller is also the "fingers" of Miss Liza Jane.

"[Alicia] called me up and said one of the featured actresses was playing the character of the piano teacher, and she didn't play piano herself," Miller told Broadway News. "So [Alicia] envisioned me actually playing the [piano] parts that this Miss Liza Jane was supposed to be playing." The student has hired the teacher.

Miller's story is a bit like Keys'. "Music has always been a part of my household," said Miller. As is well-documented, Keys and her mother lived in artist housing in Manhattan Plaza; her mother was a performer and Keys grew up surrounded by music, arts and Broadway. Miller attended the High School of Music & Art; Keys attended PPAS.

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