

WANT TO KNOW who coached Golden Globe Award-winning and Academy Award-nominated actress Jennifer Hudson for her initial audition for that coveted "Dreamgirls" role as Effie? Well, look no further than the eta Creative Arts Foundation on the South Side.

Runako Jahi, the longtime artistic director for the eta Creative Arts Foundation, told me (and you know I'm not one to gossip):

"In October 2005, I got a call from Hudson's cousin, Marita Hudson, who was a former eta student in my teen drama class, which I still teach every Wednesday at 4 p.m. Marita informed me that she had a cousin who is a singer and needed some acting lessons and asked if I would help her," said Jahi.

"I told her, 'Of course I am willing to help anybody who needs assistance.' So Jennifer called me and we arranged to meet in the eta library to discuss how many sessions would be needed, and we agreed on three to four. I gave her some background info on the late Florence Ballard and the history of The Supremes in preparation for that major audition," Jahi told me.

"Jennifer possessed a fierce determination and a real desire to do good work. She was a natural. She called me a few months later to tell me she got the part. In early December, Jennifer invited me to one of the 'Dreamgirls' previews in Chicago with her family and friends. After the screening, she asked me what I thought of her performance. I told her, 'It was just magical.' "

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