

Elevating Black Designers

By Jazz Tangcay



Charlese Antoinette Jones with Joshua Joseph and April Walker at New York Fashion Week



Seeking to improve cultural diversity in film and TV projects and commercial shoots, “Judas and the Black Messiah” costume designer Charlese Antoinette Jones has established the Black Designer Database.

Launched last year, the database is a resource for costume designers, stylists and publicists, but Jones began compiling it in 2009 as a tool to reference for her own work. Directors even turned to her for the names of Black creatives. “Since I started, I would organize larger brands and their PR contacts, but I kept a separate tab for Black designers,” she says, “and when I was on projects, I would try to work them into anything I was doing for representation’s sake.”

Jones recently held a pop-up mixer as part of New York Fashion Week. “We had six Black designers come into that space and invited people from Estée Lauder and other brands who wanted to use those designers in their upcoming

campaigns,” she says. “The connections being made were amazing.”

She continues to add to the database, where streetwear designers such as Joshua Joseph, creative director of rebelstodons.com, and Walker Wear founder April Walker can be found. “With Joshua, he’s a newer designer and has found a lot of rappers and celebrities to put pieces on,” Jones says. “He designed the tracksuit in [the Spike Lee-produced] ‘See You Yesterday,’ and it was the first time he had had his product in a movie.”

While the database has been a success, Jones says she almost didn’t launch it because such resource tools were proliferating during the pandemic. But after meetings with team members Kat Contreras and Coach Codes, she narrowed down what the service would look like. “The decision was to have the point of view that the database would be about creating community,” she says.

Ultimately, she felt the Black Designer Database was both a resource and a call to action. “I often hear from my fellow costume designers, ‘I don’t know where to find Black designers,’” says Jones. “Well, now you can’t say that.”

A Clarion Call for Safety on Set

By Jazz Tangcay



Ever since 2014, when an on-set accident almost killed her, hair-stylist Joyce Gilliard has been advocating for on-set safety.

Gilliard, who was seriously injured in the train accident that killed her colleague, camera assistant Sarah Jones, on the first day of shooting Gregg Allman biopic “Midnight Rider,” founded the nonprofit organization iSafe in 2016. Its mission is to promote safety awareness on television and film production sets through education, training, awareness, accountability and visibility.

The organization provides stickers, sweatshirts and T-shirts bearing safety messages to crew members to help them feel seen. “Those things empower people to help others become safe on set,” says Gilliard.

Since a culture of silence still prevails on some shoots, Gilliard says

the apparel acts as a “silent voice,” serving as a warning to directors or producers who might not be following safety precautions.

Last year, the 60,000 film and TV union workers of IATSE turned the pressure on studios, demanding better hours and working conditions, saying that the surge in production over the past decade has led to long shifts and dangerous situations. Just last year, cinematographer Halyna Hutchins was killed by a prop gun loaded with live ammunition, and “This Is Us” costumer Jill Stager sustained serious injuries after falling through a hole on the show’s Paramount Studios set in Hollywood.

Gilliard says that since her brush with death, she has seen crew members take safety on set more seriously, but adds that “accidents do happen, especially when we work excessively long hours.”

With the continuing spotlight on set safety, Gilliard says union executives have started to reach out to her, wanting to talk about iSafe. “They’re asking what they can do to contribute and how to raise further awareness.”

Her goal is to make Feb. 20 — the day of the “Midnight Rider” accident — an iSafe “day of remembrance” for cast and crew members who have been seriously injured or lost their lives. “I hope people look at the safety guidelines [and] educate themselves, even if they’ve been in the business for many years,” Gilliard says. “It’s a refresher day to keep safety in their minds.”



Joyce Gilliard is flanked by actor Hoyt Richards, actor-producer Dana White, DP Christopher Knoblock and director Chris White at an iSafe event in Nashville in 2019.