

WHY I LOVE MY JOB

Alpha Tyler, Casting director, Tyler Perry Studios

By Karl W. Ritzler
for *ajcjobs*
Published on: 05/15/08

- **Job:** Casting director, Tyler Perry Studios, Atlanta



KARL W. RITZLER/Special
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Alpha Tyler worked at several studios in California and for Spike Lee's production company in New York before becoming casting director at Tyler Perry Studios in Atlanta. She says that giving actors a chance to appear on television and in movies is a rewarding part of her job. 'I want every actor who comes in the door to get the job,' she said.

• **What I do:** While Alpha Tyler is busy looking for actors to fill roles in the television and film productions of Tyler Perry Studios, she also is looking for fresh faces who might become the next Denzel Washington or Halle Berry.

"I'm in charge of all casting for the studio," she said, which created the popular Madea films and the "House of Payne" television sitcom.

But the decision as to which actor gets a role is not Tyler's alone. She works with the project's producers and reads the scripts to find out what types of characters they're looking for.

From there, she looks over notebooks filled with actors' photographs and résumés, submitted by them or their agents. Mostly, she's trying to find a look.

For films, casting also is handled in Los Angeles by a director who can see the actors in Hollywood.

Besides perusing her notebooks, Tyler, 36, also watches actors perform throughout metro Atlanta; she attends professional theater productions, community theaters and even church productions.

"I see a lot of actors that way," she said. "It's the best way to see talent."

She described her job as being like a human resources director or a headhunter — finding just the right person for the role. In addition to the right look, an actor for a Tyler Perry Studios production needs experience and training.

Tyler may see more than 1,000 résumés for a production that needs 20 actors, from the leading man and lady to a walk-on role with only one line. From those, she narrows the list to 200 to 250 actors, who are asked to audition for the roles. Some may audition for more than one role.

Tyler also oversees the auditions, often 35 a day at the studio. She gives the hopefuls their lines ahead of time and, on the day of the audition, sets up the role and the scene, and even provides rehearsal time. She videotapes each audition and then makes her recommendations to the producers. The casting process begins a couple of months before production is scheduled to start.

"I want every actor who comes in the door to get the job," she said.

- **What got me interested in this:** Tyler acted in productions at her high school, and she entered college knowing that she wanted to work in the entertainment industry.

While earning a bachelor's degree in theater arts at California State University at Northridge, near Los Angeles, she was looking for careers in the industry other than acting. Casting fit the bill, and she began looking for internships. With the Hollywood studios in her backyard, she soon had internships and, after graduation, jobs at major studios.

- **Best part of my job:** "I get to give [actors] opportunity," Tyler said. Some of the people she has cast never had been in the movies or on television before. "How do you beat that?"

In addition, "I get to go to all sorts of theater," she said.

- **Most challenging part:** "After seeing 250 people, seeing 35 people a day, I have to maintain the same energy with the last person as I do for the first person of the day," Tyler said. "Then I go to the theater that night and see the actors afterward."

"The days can be really long."

She also said it's more difficult to find a diverse group of actors in Atlanta than in Los Angeles. While there are plenty of white and African-American actors, she said, "I don't see so many different ethnic types — Asians and Latinos."

- **What people don't know about my job:** "That I go to the theater as much as I do — always looking for actors," she said.

"Actors don't know they can send a picture and résumé and it will get to casting."

Tyler pointed out that she casts for principal — or speaking — roles, not extras, who are cast separately. "Any warm body can be an extra."

- **What keeps me going:** "I really love what I do," she said. "I give a chance for actors to see themselves on TV for the first time. That's exciting."

- **Preparation needed for this job:** "It helps to have a background in theater and acting," Tyler said.

While a degree isn't necessary, experience is — particularly internships, she said.

She noted that few studios have casting directors on staff. Most hire casting companies for each project.

Tyler had internships and jobs at Warner Bros., DreamWorks, Paramount and Universal Studios in California and with Spike Lee's production company in New York.

Her credits include Lee's film "He Got Game" and Perry's films "Meet the Browns" and "Madea Goes to Jail," in addition to the TV sitcoms "Martin" and "House of Payne."

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