

PHOTOGRAPH BY **TINA BERNARD**

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## WHEN CHANDRA WILSON WAS CAST AS DR. MIRANDA BAILEY ON *GREY'S ANATOMY*, SHE NEVER DREAMED THE GIG WOULD BE THE START OF A CAREER-MAKING SEVENTEEN-YEAR RUN.

Or that she would get to direct the 2019 episode that made *Grey's* the longest-running medical drama in history, surpassing even *ER*.

"I am incredibly honored," Wilson says, "to be on one show for this many years."

The season that just ended posed unique challenges for cast and crew, as the staff of Seattle's Grey Sloan Memorial Hospital tackled the pandemic head-on. In episode five, Dr. Bailey lost her mother to the deadly virus.

"The overwhelming response we got was that we provided a place for people to mourn the loss of family when they hadn't really been able to," Wilson says. "In that regard, we provided a service this season."

Wilson, who has also played Dr. Bailey on the spinoffs *Private Practice* and *Station 19*, is a five-time Emmy nominee and a four-time winner of the NAACP Image Award. She says she has never tired of playing the same character. "Miranda is still as ambitious and strict and career-oriented as she ever was," Wilson says approvingly. "Family is still incredibly important to her — that's her rock, her anchor."

Born in Houston, Wilson made her stage debut in *The King and I* at age five. She credits her mother who, she says, "had me when she was very young [seventeen] and wanted to keep me engaged in as many things as possible." In addition to acting, Wilson grew up to become an accomplished singer, appearing on Broadway in such shows as *On the Town*, *Avenue Q* and *Chicago*.

# A LASTING CASTING

**CHANDRA WILSON HAS ENHANCED HER LONG RUN ON *GREY'S ANATOMY* WITH A SECOND CAREER AS A DIRECTOR.**

BY **GRAHAM FLASHNER**

On television, Wilson worked steadily through the early 2000s, landing small roles in series including *Third Watch* and *Sex and the City*. In 2005, while temping at a Manhattan bank, she flew out to L.A. to audition for an ABC pilot known only as "Untitled Shonda Rhimes Project."

The role of Dr. Bailey had been conceived for a petite blonde, but Wilson was undaunted. "The note that I received from my reps was to make sure I take command of the room when I walk in," she recalls. "That resonated with me, and I did that."

The doctor's tough but compassionate demeanor made her an instant fan favorite. By Wilson's fourth season, an executive producer suggested she consider directing.

"Not knowing any better, I said yes," she quips. "For the first time, I had to pay attention to why the cameras are where they are and what these setups mean." She directed her first episode in season six and has since helmed twenty more — as well as episodes of *Scandal*, *The Fosters* and *Good Trouble*. Still, she says, "I'm an actress first."

Over the show's phenomenal run, viewers have enjoyed Dr. Bailey's steady rise from resident to chief of surgery. The actress, who has three children with her husband of thirty-two years, is most proud that her character has served as a role model, especially for African-American girls considering careers in medicine: "To be a point of inspiration is a wonderful responsibility to take on."

Inevitably, *Grey's Anatomy* will come to an end, and when it does, Wilson is ready to embrace her next act, which could include producing and more directing. "It really is about keeping my mind open creatively to the things that come next," she says. "I want life to show me what it wants me to see." ©

Catch-up viewing of *Grey's Anatomy* is available on Hulu and on demand.