

## New and Next: Meet Broadway and 'Fela!' Star, Adesola Osakalumi

By Derrick Bryson Taylor



*ESSENCE.com's "New and Next" column spotlights the brightest new talents we think you should know. This week we meet Broadway actor Adesola Osakalumi, who currently stars in Fela, the musical produced by Will Smith, Jada Pinkett Smith and Jay-Z.*

### Who's Adesola Osakalumi?

This 36-year-old Brooklyn native currently stars in the Broadway production of *Fela!*, about the Nigerian singer and activist Fela Anikulapo Kuti. The musical originally debuted on the Great White Way in 2009 and won a total of three Tony Awards out of its 11 nominations. After running for nearly two years, it left Broadway and toured the world — making stops in Lagos, Nigeria and London. Now it's back for a limited engagement at the Al Hirschfeld Theater and its final set of performances are on Saturday, [August 4](#).

It's thanks to Osakalumi's artistic parents — both dancers with the Africa I Dance Theater — that he's such a lover of the arts. Growing up he fell in love hip-hop dance and began choreographing for music videos and films. He also tried his hand at acting, which led to a passion for theater. "It's been a progression," he tells ESSENCE.com about his fruitful career. "It's always something I've been around and have loved to do for a long time."

**Osakalumi's strong connection to Fela:** Osakalumi started off in the production as an ensemble actor and worked his way up to the lead role over time, and perhaps, it was destined to be so. His family knew Fela personally. His father and uncles owned a record company that imported and distributed Fela's music to the United States. "My family owed Makossa Records," he says. "My father and uncles did business with Fela. I did get to meet him once in passing. I didn't say anything, but he was very charismatic and very focused." When asked if he's experiencing a full circle moment now that he's portraying the legendary singer, he agreed. "It's a strange and ironic connection. Sometimes you're involved in things and you don't know what that next step will be, but it looks like some steps were ordained in advance," he laughed.

Despite the obvious pressure to do a great job, Osakalumi says he feels more responsibility to do Fela justice. "His family and children are still alive, they still perform his music. I feel responsibility to bring him to life in a way that's respectful, true and entertaining."

**Where you'll see him next:** Although he's making waves on Broadway now, Osakalumi has also appeared in a number of films, from *Idlewild* to *Sex and the City 2*. As for what's next, he hopes it's more film and TV projects. "I think those are good venues," he says. "I'm not saying that at the expense of theater. Theater gives you that immediacy. But I've always wanted to do film and television and it's something I'm always open and looking forward to."

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