

TWENTY4SEVEN

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KOUNTRY WAYNE

+ Karimah Westbrook. Mira Blues.
Randy Gonzalez. Christiana Danielle.
Sope Aluko. Zjál. #KanyeWest.

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PHOTO:
DIRKJE OOMS

MIRA BLUES

IT'S NOT JUST A WIG, IT'S A LIFESTYLE.

Words + Interview By: L.M.W.

Meet Mira Blues. “The one with the blue hair” loves sad emotions, traveling and funny meme pages. She just released her latest single, “Sleep” this past spring.

Tell us a little bit about yourself.

I am Mira Blues. I was born in Washington D.C. but I grew up in Maryland and now I live in Atlanta. I'm the youngest of three and I was very shy about singing in front of people growing up, my family included.

How long have you been singing?

I've been singing since I learned how to speak but I didn't start pursuing it as a career until a few years ago when I began posting covers on YouTube and Instagram. I enjoy connecting with people on the internet and getting their feedback.

You stand out in public. How did “blue” become your thing?

I've always loved to play “dress-up”. The wig is like my armor. Being different shades of blue is when I feel the most confident and comfortable. The blue also represents me taking a joke too far. Sad music and lyrical content makes me happy so I would always say I've got, “The Mira Blues”.

I write my own songs and can be inspired by anything but usually it's something painful. Writing about heartbreak, loss, confusion, addiction, depression, etc. makes me feel good. It is a release and a way to let other people know they are not alone.

What is “Monday Blues”.

I post a video every Monday on my Instagram called, “Monday Blues”. They are compilations of my week from behind the scenes footage, bloopers, thoughts, ideas, singing clips etc. It is very common to dread Mondays so I figured it would be cool to give my followers something to look forward to.

As artists and influencers, we like to post moments of our lives or performances that are deemed “good” or “our best”. I think it is also important to show that I mess up, I have messy hair sometimes and also that I struggle and am hard on myself because art can be hard as well. I also like laughing at myself and it is fun to share that with my fans too.

How do you continue to push forward when depressed?

I have a network of people I trust and can lean on and I try to help other people as well. Sometimes, being too wrapped up in our own heads can make our problem(s) seem worse/bigger than they are. I try to think of others and stay busy.

Why is the internet a gift and a curse for you in particular?

I think the internet is a wonderful tool but I also struggle with comparing myself to others.

Who/What makes you laugh, uncontrollably?

My boyfriend and things my teenage fans say. Also, anything posted by @wittyidiot and @heckoffsupreme (meme pages).

Why is @ctzn.killjoy “the best”?

It's difficult to put into words, but just trust me, he is.

What cities/countries are on your bucket list?

I've always wanted to visit Sydney, Australia and Tokyo, Japan.

Who are your “Top 5” artists (any genre)?

Lauryn Hill, Jessie J, Christina Aguilera, Pink and Tori Kelly.

How did your show with artist, Young Niyah go?

It was a lot of fun! Young Niyah is talented, sweet and hilarious. She brings so much energy to the stage.

What does it mean to be a “NONCoNfOrmiSt” to you?

It means being the best version of myself that I can be, regardless of whether that aligns with how society or other people want me to be. I want to inspire other people to find their own “Mira Blues”.

Tell us something about yourself that most don't know.

I can lick my elbow and whistle like a bird (not at the same time).

How can people contact you via social media?

Search for “Mira Blues” on any social media platform.

Any last words?

It's not just a wig, it's a lifestyle.



Break down your upbringing for us.

I grew up in Miami and I'm an only child who was raised by a single mother. I spent a lot of time watching cartoons growing up. Then when I was old enough, I started going to punk and hardcore shows and that changed my life.

Why is “Craigslis” significant in your life?

Once I got into the punk and hardcore scene, I started a band where we eventually got pretty big and started touring the world. At one point, the singer suggested we try acting. He planted that seed in my head and I searched for a cheap acting class in Miami. We didn't want to spend a lot of money on it in case we didn't like it. So, I turned to Craigslis for one. We ended up going and fell in love with acting.

What was the biggest misconception you had about Hollywood before you got there?

As a place, actual Hollywood is way dirtier than one would expect. And as an industry, once you have an agent and manager in LA, things will get easier.

Tell us about the film, “Peppermint” and your role.

I play a hitman for the cartel. I commit a heinous crime against the loved ones of Riley North (Jennifer Garner) which causes her to seek revenge. I'm really not a good guy by any means in this project.

As an actor, is it easy to be typecast or are various roles available? At any point, have you had to turn anything down?

Yeah, it's easy to be typecast. I feel like Hollywood is just really starting to write great roles for ethnic people. So you are seeing more minorities in the lead role as the love interest or the lead detective, as opposed to small stereotype. I've been lucky enough to go back and forth between bad guy role and “normal guy” roles as I call them. I have turned down roles if it's a role I've done before and on a project that I don't think has anything special to it.

What was it like being part of AMC's, “The Walking Dead”?

I got my first piece of fan mail for acting from being on that show. I also remember they would spray us with sunscreen to make us look sweaty while we were filming that. Also Andrew Lincoln, who's from the UK, would keep his southern accent in between takes.

The David Ayer film, “The Tax Collector” is coming up soon.

What is that film about?

It's going to be a cool one. He did *Suicide Squad*, which was a big studio film. So I'm sure he didn't have a lot of control over that film. This film is a much smaller film and it's more like his old projects like *Training Day* and *Harsh Times*. It's about a guy

RANDY GONZALEZ

Q&A BY: L.M.W. | PHOTO BY: SELA SHILONI

who collects taxes from different street gangs in South Central LA and his partner. They are badasses and everyone respects them but eventually they run into someone who comes and disrupts their business. It's gritty and dark.

Shia LeBeouf is a pretty interesting guy. What has your experience with him been like?

He is an intense guy. He's a great actor and I've been a fan of his work for a long time. I think he's the type of dude that eventually will land the right role and win an Oscar.

Which do you enjoy most between music and acting and why?

They are both great in their own way. Music was fun because I got to travel for free and see different parts of the world. It would be awesome to book a big film where you go around the world doing press for it. Acting is cool because you really get to explore humans and emotions/interactions so it never gets boring. You literally get to be a different person each audition.

Who are your “Top 5” artists/bands of all time (any genre)?

Metallica, Black Sabbath, Ozzy, NWA and The Beastie Boys.

Is writing/directing a film you are also acting in harder than acting alone or is there a certain freedom that comes with doing all three? Tell us about the short film, “Amigos”.

Yeah, it definitely is harder. You are wearing a lot more hats, especially if it's a small film. You don't have the luxury of hiring a huge crew so you have to do a lot of extra things yourself. Creatively, it's more rewarding. *Amigos* is my directorial debut. It will be screening at the official Latino Film Festival in Coachella, CA and Nightmares Film Festival in Columbus, OH. It's a dark comedy/horror. I'll definitely dabble more in directing and writing in the future.

What was the most challenging role you had to play?

The role of Hector on *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*. It was difficult because it was the largest project I had done and it was my largest role. It was directed by Ang Lee, who has won multiple Oscars for directing. I was intimidated on working with such a big director and my character had a monologue. It ended up going great but it's like diving into the deep end of the pool.

How'd you like working on Netflix's, “Bloodline”?

I enjoyed working with so many talented actors and actresses. The lead cast on that show was insane with Sissy Spacek, Ben Mendelsohn and Linda Cardellini. I got to work with all of them and held my own. I feel really lucky to have worked with some of the amazing people I have worked with so far.

What are “The Young Storytellers” and “826LA”?

They are non for profits that I volunteer with. With Young Storytellers, you help a fifth grader write a short screenplay over the course of a few weeks. Once it's finished, they bring actors in to act out the screenplay the kids wrote in front of the entire school. It's awesome when the kids see what they wrote come to life on stage. 826LA also deals with creative writing, so you help kids write a short book that is bound and pressed for them at the end of the session and they get to take it home.

Finish this sentence: “Who needs the Kwik E. Mart?.....

I DOOOOOOOO! *The Simpsons* is one of my favorite shows of all time and seeing Apu sing that last line on top of the roof was so heartbreaking.

What would you like to see happen for Latinos in entertainment within the next 10 years?

I would love to see more latinos writing and directing. I think this will lead to more latinos as leads in studio films.

Any last words?

Thanks for having me! Scope me out on IG at @Randy_G.



PHOTO:
MICHAEL D. JOHNSON



CHRISTIANA DANIELLE RESIGNATION

Words + Interview By: Tyrone Davis

Newcomer, Christiana Danielle is a singer and songwriter from Ft. Wayne, Indiana who completed NBC's "The Voice" (Season 14) as a top 10 contestant on "Team Alicia (Keys)" earlier this year. I recently got the opportunity to speak with her during a Fall shopping party and special in-store performance at Macy's in Castleton Square Mall in Indianapolis, IN. She has an amazing voice, bubbly personality and a promising career.

For starters, how did you grow up?

I grew up in church and started singing at around 4 years old in the choir, funerals and stuff like that. I was really outgoing as a little kid. As I got older, I realized my voice didn't sound like a lot of other people's and I became shy and went into my own little shell. I graduated high school in 2013 and then went to Huntington University to get my Bachelor's in social work and I graduated in 2017.

Speaking of social work, why is treating mental health (especially within our community) important?

Black mental health is so important on a personal level and for the black community to take our mental health seriously. If our leg is hurting, we're not ashamed to go to the doctor and say we're having leg pain so if something in our mind isn't going right, if our mental health isn't right, we shouldn't feel ashamed coming forth and telling somebody. There are a lot of things we internalize as black people. We go through a lot, you know. Racism is real! We go through a lot of stuff from society and it's important for us to embrace our mental health and love ourselves through that avenue.

Once you started really getting into the music side of things, what landed you on NBC's, "The Voice"?

When I graduated high school, I decided I was going to be more outgoing in singing and I ended up joining a worship team at Huntington University. That was the extent of what I did. I didn't do any shows or anything outside of school. It was just sing worship at chapel and that was it. When I graduated college, I felt like I really needed to go for it. I had already made a profile for "The Voice" a year prior but I was too scared to submit a video but after graduating, I went to St. Louis for an open call and the rest is history.

How does someone who was as shy as she was perform on TV in front of millions of people?

Just straight up GOD! I was super shy. Even before I would go on stage on the show, I'd be freaking out, talking to my friends and just trying to pray and calm down. I really do feel like GOD has blessed me with a gift and when I look at it that way, me singing and that being utilized for other people's healing or happiness, then I can totally zone in and go for it. So yea, all GOD, lol!

What was your favorite performance on the show?

My favorite performance was, "Ain't No Sunshine". That was a song that I really pushed for because a lot of the times, I was doing remixes of songs, which is cool but I really wanted to go back to my roots and that's the kind of music that I love. I love soul. I love blues. I love jazz. Doing that on stage, scatting with

the saxophone player on TV during the show, that hadn't happen on the show so I was so excited.

What was it like being on "Team Alicia (Keys)"? Is there anything you learned from her in particular that you will carry with you forever?

She never gave me specific advice on what to do to notes or anything. When we were together in sessions, she would always tell me, "Ok, let's paint a story. What story do you want to tell and how are you going to tell it? How are you going to tell it in your body language? How are you going to tell it vocally and musically?" and the most important thing I took from her is to always follow my instincts. I second-guess myself A LOT. I would be nervous A LOT and she would always be like, "Calm down. You got this. Follow your instincts." She's super Zen. She's super chill and that kind of rubbed off on me.

So, now you're working on a single?

Yessss! I'm working on my single and it's a song that I actually wrote. I'm super excited. This and the music industry is new to me. Honestly, I didn't think I'd be pursuing it full on like I am but I started writing when I got off the show. My single is actually a journal/spoken word piece that I wrote 2 years ago, not thinking it was going to be a song. I'm really excited. It's called, "Resignation" and it's talking about freedom and resigning from social norms, pressure and anything that tries to change you. We're all created perfectly in GOD's eyes. He was intentional when he made us.

Ok, random question: Your love-hate relationship with eggs?

OH, MY GOSH! So, sometimes I love eggs. I love breakfast food and then I don't even know I'm going to hate them until after I take my first bite. I'm like, "Oh, my Gosh." I just either throw up or gag so I really don't know, lol!

Other than your single, what do you have coming up next?

I have a show October 19th in Ft. Wayne, Indiana! Get your tickets! It's at the Clyde Theatre. You can go online and follow me on Instagram. I've posted the link. I'm preparing my first headlining show. It's going to be so fun. I plan on performing a couple of originals, my single, "Resignation" for the first time and I plan on doing a mini Nina Simone tribute. She is my ultimate inspiration for everything. She's amazing to me.

Follow Christiana Danielle on IG @ChristianaDofficial, on Twitter @ChristianaD or on Facebook: Christiana Danielle.



PHOTOS:
GRAY HAMMER

SOPE ALUKO

Words + Interview By: Tyrone Davis

Sope Aluko is a talented actress, originally from Nigeria. After growing up in the UK and getting her education, she later decided to leave an established career to pursue her dreams of becoming an actress. She has appeared in many projects and has joined the Marvel family, appearing in "Black Panther" and "Venom" which is due in theatres soon. We spoke about a lot but there was so much more I wanted to ask her. Maybe I'll get a chance at a later time.

What was childhood like for you?

I am very blessed to have had a wonderful childhood. I was born in Nigeria (West Africa), the third child of four daughters. Because my father was a Diplomat, we got to travel and live in various countries around the world, like Switzerland, Trinidad & Tobago, Indonesia, Kenya etc. So, I got to experience a very multicultural, educational and exciting upbringing.

My mother was in the military (Army) and we lived in Germany for about 3 years, starting when I was about 8 years old. She had an African friend that was in the Army as well and he introduced her/us to 2 of his female cousins who also lived there. They had no ties to the military and it confused me as to what they were doing living in Europe as civilians when they were from Africa. It blew my mind even more after we visited the UK and I saw there were a lot of black people living there. As an adult, I've learned how that was possible but in your experience, what brought you to the UK from Nigeria?

As you know, Nigeria is part of the British commonwealth even though we have been independent for 58 years now so that explains the large population of Nigerians settled in the UK. Initially, my sisters and I hopped around from school to school in the various countries that my father was posted until my parents felt it best to maintain more stability in our education. That was when they decided it best for us to attend private boarding schools in the UK while they were posted out. I started boarding school at 10 years old and did all my schooling in the UK right up until my Masters Degree. I also worked for a bit in London after University. So that's how the UK came into the picture for me.

How many languages do you speak and was it your goal to learn multiple or did it just happen when you relocated to different countries?

I speak 4 languages and other than my native language. I picked them up while living in the respective countries. I have lived in about 7 countries, I think. My father spoke 8 languages and I remember him sharing with me as a child that it was important to learn the culture, environment, food and particularly the language of people in the country we lived in. He said it was the best demonstration of love and respect for them.

What was your support system like from your parents in regard to you wanting to become an entertainer?

My parents didn't warm up to the idea of me being an actor only because they didn't feel that was a stable career path. As with most traditional Nigerian parents, especially with 4 daughters, they wanted us to pursue sustainable careers to help support us in the future. Sadly, both my parents are deceased and never got to see me pursue my dream of acting.

Was taking that leap of faith and giving up your day job to pursue your dreams an easy decision? Why or why not?

It was the hardest decision I ever made in my life, especially since I was earning a comfortable six figure salary. I not only gave up the stability of a consistent pay check, I had to humble myself and start from the very bottom of the industry in order to get a full understanding of how the business works. It was tough for sure. It also didn't help that my entire family and close friends thought I was crazy taking this step. So support was pretty much non-existent for a while, lol.

Why was the short film, "JOY" important?

One of the main reasons I chose to be an actor was to lend a voice to the voiceless which is why I am very much drawn to social awareness issues particularly pertaining to the African diaspora. As a young girl, I grew up 'casually' and unknowingly with other young girls who had been violated by FGM (Female Genital Mutilation). It wasn't until I was older that I fully realized the atrocity and I was both appalled and helpless. So, the short film *JOY* is a passion project I am very proud of. It was my hardest role because it meant a lot to me to honor the victims of FGM effectively and appropriately. Ironically soon after we shot the film, the Nigerian government announced the ban of FGM in Nigeria. Other sub-Saharan countries have followed suit, but unfortunately progress and education is still slow.

Being that acting is something you always wanted to do, who inspired you early on?

My first inspiration was a Nigerian Actress, Patty Boulaye who I saw play the lead in a film when I was 7 years old. I was absolutely enthralled. Coupled with a dear Aunt of mine (my namesake), Sope Sodeinde who was classically trained in the UK and worked very successfully in both TV and film. I so admired her for boldly going after her dreams even when others ridiculed her in our cultural environment back then. She was my supreme hero! Sadly she's deceased now and I never got to share that with her.

How did you feel when you earned the role in Marvel's, "Black Panther" and what did it mean to you, overall?

I was absolutely elated! I had auditioned for 4 roles prior so it had been a journey for a while. I am so grateful to the casting directors for continuously bringing me back in and I ultimately landed a role. The entire experience has been a huge blessing to me personally and professionally. I am now a "cool" mum to my teenage boys and their friends!

Acting in the film was one thing, but to see the finished product had to have been something completely different.

Were you able to enjoy it the same way the rest of us did? Absolutely! I enjoyed it over and over again at each of the many kids screenings I attended when it first came out in South Florida (where I live with my family). I still continue to enjoy it whenever I watch it on DVD, Netflix or on the plane...It's still all very surreal!

As a whole, black people were excited about the film and had something to be proud of and now "Wakanda" has become a thing. I'm bothered just a little bit because I'd hope we (African Americans) would take pride in Africa as a whole, rather than a fictional country. At the same time, it's a start. What's your take on it?

There's a lot I'd like to say here, but I think the key take away should be that although 'Wakanda' is a fictitious country in Africa, it clearly showcases all aspects of the African continent. The fact that Africa is rich in mineral resources, culture, tradition, ancestry, heritage at the forefront of cutting edge technological advancements/inventions, music, fashion and

the list goes on...You see that is the Africa I know, which I am excited the world finally got to see in the form of Wakanda. It's a really good thing for our black youth today to know they are descendants of Kings, Queens and all that greatness!

I think a lot of that stems from the fact that we've only been shown one type of Africa for most of our lives and haven't seen it being presented as an empire with Kings, Queens and royalty (aside from Eddie Murphy's Coming to America) Being that the continent of Africa is huge and contains many countries, what are many of the misconceptions about Africa that you can clear up?

Where do you want me to start? So many! In my opinion, in the past Hollywood has done a poor job of depicting Africa or countries within the African continent in film. It just never felt like they had done their homework. It felt like they were throwing stuff together and making it up as they went along for added value. That always bothered me and other Africans. We felt disrespected and that our opinions didn't count. So with *Black Panther*, for the first time in a very, very long time, Africa was thoroughly researched and given its just due. I believe that is one of the reasons why *Black Panther* has been so successful around the globe. I just hope the benchmark has been set and it doesn't slide back.

Let's talk about the relationship between Africans and African Americans for a bit. We (African Americans) have been told that as a whole, Africans don't necessarily care for us. Can you give any insight on that?

That's so funny, because I heard that African Americans don't care for Africans. One of those terrible myths started to create division amongst us I'm afraid. We should know better.

What can we do to improve our connection with each other? Are there any avenues that you know of that can aid in that?

I don't know about you but I see connections built around me all the time. I have such a diverse group of friends including African Americans, Jamaicans, Trinis, other West Indians...Intermarriages cross culturally both within my family and friends...I honestly don't see the problem. I guess it depends on where you live? I live in Miami and that's quite a "melting pot". But, if you have experienced some division then as I mentioned earlier, the best way to build a connection in my experience is to learn about your fellow brother/sister's culture. Travel if you can. Travel is such an overlooked educational opportunity. And if one can't afford to travel then there are so many other research resources.

Ironically, "Black Panther" touched on that relationship between us in a major way. How did you feel about Killmonger's methods?

That is the beauty in Ryan Coogler and Joe Robert Cole co-writing a story that addresses many questions or misconcep-

tions. I consider the role of Killmonger as "The Rebel with a Cause" as opposed to a villain. He had valid points which T'Challa painfully had to address. I feel *Black Panther* opened the dialogue for us to collectively discuss topical issues. This indirectly creates an opportunity for us to learn more about one another, embrace our differences and ultimately set us on a path for a stronger partnership.

Keeping it Marvel, you are next up in Marvel's, "Venom". I'm excited about this film as well. Tell us about your role.

Yes! I am so excited about *Venom* and I love being part of the Marvel family! Unfortunately at this time, I really can't say much about my role until the film is released on October 5th. You will have to wait and see!

Were you a comic book fan growing up? If not, how do you go about preparing for roles of this nature? I imagine you'd have to go back and research the main character's background and what the film is all about, just like with any other film but this being a little different than your norm.

Yes, I loved to read comics growing up and I had my favorites for sure. And you're correct, as actors, it is such an added advantage to be able to research old comics in order to get a better understanding and perspective of the characters we have to play. I also have the added advantage of having 2 teenage boys that are Marvel super fans so they were great resources for me if I ever needed their help as long as it didn't fall within my NDA contractual territory which I take very seriously (even with my immediate family).

Why is April 10th a special day?

Oh wow! You know about that? Well, I had the distinguished honor to have had the Mayor and Commissioners of Miami-Dade County pro-

claim April 10th, 2018 as "Sope Aluko Day"! Based on my years of work as a South Florida Actor and my role in *Black Panther*. I still have no words... God is amazing!

After "Venom", what can we expect from you? Anything special coming up?

I am in a movie called *Best of Enemies* with Taraji P. Henson and Sam Rockwell coming out in 2019. It's based on a true story and is really quite special. I also have a couple of upcoming projects, but due to NDA's and all that I am unable to share right now. Stay tuned!

How can people reach you on social media?

Please follow me and my amazing acting/life journey on Instagram, Twitter and Facebook @sopealuko.

Any last words?

Thank you so much for taking the time to interview me and for developing these thought provoking questions! God bless you.



YOU'RE DOING IT WRONG: COGNITIVE DISSONANCE

BY CORLETHA NORMAN BEY, MSW, LCSW

You do it. You hear it. You read it. You experience it! Mental health terminology being used absolutely incorrectly in an effort to converse or communicate a point. There are some words, phrases and diagnoses that are utilized incorrectly in everyday conversation. I want to address the misinformation surrounding mental health terminology in society in a multi-blog series.

Let's start here:

"See! You so cognitive dissonance!!" (Absolutely WRONG!)

"That's a clear case of cognitive dissonance!" (In some cases it is. In others, be all right with the fact that everyone will not carry or be bothered by your beliefs.)

"But those are two good choices! That can't be cognitive dissonance." (Yes it can be.)

Cognitive Dissonance is defined as, "the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, or attitudes, especially as relating to behavioral decisions and attitude change." Cognitive Dissonance is a noun utilized in the mental health world to describe a process when mental harmony lacks. It normally shows in a person in one of two ways: being dismissive or being on the fence.

When it comes to being dismissive an individual would refuse to acknowledge or take accountability for contradictory beliefs or actions. For example, a person could believe their lack of success in life is caused by growing up in the system. On the other hand they won't acknowledge that they flunked out of college for turning up too much. In this case, their refusal to hold themselves accountable results in a lack of mental harmony.

With being on the fence, a person will attempt to exist on both sides of a situation. Half of your mental being hangs on one side of the fence, while the other half of your being hangs on a contradictory side of the fence. For example an individual could secretly be in an abusive relationship, but urge and assist a loved one to leave their abusive relationship.

Generally, cognitive dissonance is a defense mechanism. The dissonant individual is trying to protect themselves from something they see as a threat to their belief system. They may not want to change, hurt, be honest with themselves, be vulnerable, etc. A person can also be on the fence when faced with choosing between two positive choices that create conflict in the individual's thoughts, beliefs or attitude.

Perception can make a world of difference in anyone's reality. It is all too common and easy for individuals to fall into a pattern of fallacious thoughts and feelings that turn into actions.

If you would like to read the full article, please check out my blog at www.bonhomielc.com.



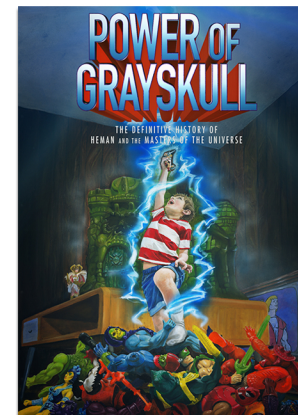
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80'S BABIES STAND UP!

JUST A LITTLE NOSTALJIA.





PHOTOS:
ELTON ANDERSON JR.

Kountry Wayne

Words + Interview By: Tyrone Davis

If you are a person who is active on social media, chances are you've seen or heard of Wayne "Kountry Wayne" Colley. Aside from comedy, we spoke about him growing up in a small town, racism, taking care of and empowering his family and being responsible for his actions and accepting the consequences of those actions all by putting God first and believing that, "Help Is On The Way".

How did you blow up on social media?

I started on Facebook in 2014 around September/October. I was putting up these videos and people started to follow me. Facebook pages had started to allow you to have followers and within 7 months, I had over 1 million followers. I stayed consistent and stayed connected.

Why did you choose Facebook over the other platforms?

I was already famous in my hometown on Facebook and I'd seen how Facebook worked. It had longer videos and Instagram only gave you 15 seconds. I wasn't really into Youtube like that and I just chose something different. Nobody was really paying attention to putting yourself on Facebook. It was an open market.

Facebook has made a lot of changes over the years, particularly with the algorithms that are limiting our reach. How is it working for you now with those changes in place?

Right now....I kind of got through that door, so I'm in. I'm on Instagram now so my engagement is more on Instagram. Facebook, not as much. It's like the algorithms dropped me way down. I did it when it was hot so you'll remember me even if I don't put nothing else up.

A lot of people are famous on social media but not making a living. How have you been able to do both?

You know, the road. I tear the road up. We're blessed. Over the last 2 or 3 years, I done made about 2 million dollars, just on the road. I transferred the energy from online to now I've got them in line. The stand up is where I make the bulk of my income right now.

A lot of the comedians we grew up on say that these new internet comedians have trouble when trying to do real stand up, because stand up is very different than doing a 15 second Vine video. In your experience, you're doing well. What made you focus on that craft instead of trying to get money via the internet?

Selling products online was never my thing. I believe in me more than I believe in a product. I took it serious and learned the craft and I learned it pretty fast. I took it to the road and they love it. I got better and better.

Speaking of stand up, you have a comedy album out called, "Help Is On The Way". Growing up, the only comedy album I had heard was "SNAPS: The Album Vol. 1", which was from a comedy album series where multiple

comedians would be on it "playing the dozens" with Hip-Hop music in the background. Some of the comedians on it were Michael Blackson, Talent, AJ Johnson, Faizon Love and also Coolio and Biz Markie. I listened to your project yesterday and one thing that intrigued me about it is that you were able to hold the attention of the audience for the entire album. They laughed the entire time and that doesn't even happen with major comedians all the time.

Over the last few years, I gave stand up my all. When people pay their hard earned money, I want them to remember Kountry Wayne. If you don't laugh, I take that personally. I'm trying to figure out, "how can I make this person laugh?". If I see a person in the crowd that's not laughing....I'm trying to keep everybody laughing the whole time.

How would you describe your stand up routine? Are you more laid back or are you more active like Jim Carrey, Damon Wayans or Katt Williams?

I definitely move and it varies, depending on the night. With a more corporate crowd, they want you to be more laid back. I adjust it according to the crowd because I know what people want. Most of the time, I'm more animated and moving. On the album, people can listen to what I said, but it just wasn't what I said, it was what I did when I was saying it that made them laugh.

Yea, I would have loved to see that, man because I laughed quite a few times. I was like, "Man, I don't know what's happening, but I can hear it!" People were howling in the crowd. Where did that particular show take place?

I did that one in Atlanta at the Atlanta Comedy Theater.

Lets take it back a little bit. You are from Georgia, right?

I grew up in a small town in Georgia (Millen) where there was a lot of racism and no opportunities at all. We had one or two red lights and me, my mom and my 2 sisters stayed in a trailer by a railroad track. My mom died when I was 11 and my dad was nowhere to be found at that time. We connected later in my life. I had a life that some people today will consider hard but to me it was a great experience because I feel like I have an advantage over 99% of the people in this industry. I got that grit and grind and come from a place where the average person can't come from.

People from NYC and stuff say it's hard to make it. No, even if you're in the hood in NYC, you're 30 miles or 10 miles or 10 blocks away from opportunity vs. where I'm from. It's 300 miles from Atlanta and impossible to make it out of there so if you do make it out of there, you'll never have to worry about nothing for the rest of your life.

You mentioned there being racism in the small town. My family is originally from Pulaski, TN where the Ku Klux Klan started and for a while when we'd go down there for our family reunions, we'd see them having rallies downtown. Did you ever experience any racism first hand or did you just feel the affects of it growing up in a your town?
Oh, nah. We had to deal with it personally. There were times where we'd get treated differently. They'd call you the N-word. I remember playing baseball and we had an all black team almost and everybody was expecting us to get last place. We ended up getting first place. I hit a ball and I ran home and I looked at the opposite team's parents like "Yeah!", you know? I was talking to them and this guy said, "You little N-word." I talk back. I was always like that. I use my mouth as my weapon and I will hurt your feelings with my words.

You're a big fan of the Dallas Cowboys. When Colin Kaepernick was blackballed from the NFL, I stopped watching. It was easy decision even though football became my favorite sport in college. What is your take on it?
Personally, I'm in a different position with it because my fans are going to expect me to watch it and do those videos because that gets them through a hard day. It's a blessing and a curse. I'm not a part of the world. When I did my videos, it was my skits. Kountry Wayne wasn't a character so when it comes to the NFL, it worked in my favor. I'm talking to my fans and they enjoy the Cowboys. Now if the owner is ignorant....it's like a child with an ignorant parent. The parent has nothing to do with the child and me not watching it is not going to help the real cause. Colin kneeled for racism.

We need to put more attention into ourselves. That's not the biggest problem. The biggest problem is what we do to ourselves, putting drugs and stuff into our temples. It's larger problems, so I don't get into that. When I do my cowboy videos, Wayne ain't in there anyway. I'm not on either side because I've been telling people that help is on the way and to love yourselves. I do it with actions. I hired my family as soon as I got on. My 2 sisters, they are retired, my brothers, my wife, her mom....whatever moves I make are for my fans and my people. We got our own world.

They like the Cowboys. I like the Cowboys. I'm going to do my videos. If somebody comes up and says, "Oh, you're a coon for doing that." Listen, man. Don't try me. I done blessed more people...I understand if people don't support it because it's wrong. He kneeled and I feel like he got the right to kneel but at the end of the day, let's be honest. If people want to be REAL real, that's their league and trust me, their numbers are not going to go down. That's why black people need to get more businesses so we can control the market and stop trying to push our kids just to go to the NBA and the NFL and be a rapper.

While we are focusing on that, there are still people going to jail. There is so much to focus on. I feel like we'll waste a lifetime trying to focus on one thing. We need to go back to the roots and that was GOD. That's all we got. We can fake like we can outwork...no. It's still their world. If you think it's not, that's when we're tricking ourselves. No matter how hard you work. No matter how much education you get. Your color is still the same and we was 1% of America's wealth 100's of years ago and we're still only 1%. We haven't made any progress.

I come from the streets. I've never got touched. I've never picked up drugs. It's not because I'm better than anybody. It's because I had the strength because I read that Bible and stayed connected with GOD and that's all we got. Somebody don't even believe in GOD no more! There is so much going on so I don't even get in it. I just do Wayne.....I know that was a long winded answer.

My goal with the interview was to not to focus strictly on comedy. I wanted to get your take on a few other things because I completely understand. Right now, we're living in a time with social media where people are doing a lot of complaining and not doing basic things like supporting black businesses. A lot of these problems would go away if we'd start to take action and get things done instead of arguing online and going back and forth with white folks about why they should be nicer to us.

It's too many people talking. That's what it is. You've got rappers telling people, "Don't do this and don't do that" but in the songs, you're telling these young people that drinking lean and popping pills is cool. You (rappers) stop talking. Its too many people talking and it's messing with our brains because now, we don't know who to listen to.

You mentioned that one of the things you're doing is changing the trajectory of your family by hiring them and bringing them along. The saying goes, "Friends and family are the worst people to deal with", but that's not always the case. Sometimes, people empower their families, they empower their friends and they make things happen. What has your experience been like?

It's been enjoyable, you know? We have our ups and downs. You've got to teach them. Of course, they aren't going to know off the rip because nobody has taught them. You've got to make sacrifices. They say, "don't hire your family" but you'll go out and buy a Lamborghini so if you're going to waste money on a Lamborghini you might as well waste that money on your family, teaching them. If you teach anybody, they will learn. People can't be telling me bout Colin Kaepernick but not looking out for the ones around them.

God says, "Help your neighbor". He didn't say help the guy across town. The guy across town ain't your neighbor. It's common sense. When you come up, touch the people around you first because that's going to be the example. That's like me helping a kid in the street, but I haven't helped my kids first. That's backwards. So ay man, I enjoy it. It's my family and they're going to ask you for money anyway so it's an investment. You teach them that system and that system can grow. One thing about family is at least you know them.

You don't normally see people having as many children as our great-great grandparents did. How many do you have and how are you managing?

I have 9 kids. I've been blessed. My dad had a lot of kids and he didn't take care of us like that and I noticed he used to have a lot of bad luck. I took care of my kids from day one. It's really blessings but in the world they'll call it luck. I've been a lucky Mother F'er. Every since I had those kids, I was in the streets and I didn't get touched and I made it out of the streets. I've been on probation for 10 years before and got off probation. It's been a great journey.

Your kids is like your business coming up because you're their hero. If you start a business, they're going to do what you tell them to so you've got some faithful people coming up around you. It's hard to find one friend. I got 9. It's a mess but everything is a mess until you put GOD in it, then it becomes a blessing. I'm the happiest man in the world. That doesn't mean I have the most money in the world. I figured life out and I've been happy before comedy. I was good. My kids were taken care of. I had 2 night clubs. My kids are a big part of that because they give me that energy. Me and my kids are cool. My wife, we have 4 kids. I moved the mother of my 3 kids 3 miles from us and my other 2 are still in my hometown. We are a big family. We all hang out at my house when I'm home. It's a dream come true.



Has dealing with the system, child support and things of that nature been an issue for you?

I think when you deal with a woman, you know who she is before you even deal with her. So, if she had an attitude or was kind of petty, you knew that anyway. I just take the consequences that come with it. As long as my kids are straight, I don't try to complain or shorten the household because they're going to take the money and by clothes with it for themselves. That's common sense. That's human nature.

With me, I still have a big part in what they do and how they handle my kids. As long as I got that, they're going to take a little extra money and get their hair done. That's why it's said to not have that many kids anyway but when you do something, it's consequences. To have multiple women and multiple kids, you have to make sure that you're that type of guy that can handle that person. You can't do it, then go to the system and cry. I already knew my baby mamas was ratchet and everything before I dealt with them so I expected them to go to child support, talk loud and put statuses on Facebook. I can't go to the system now like I'm spending too much money, nah man. I got that mentality about everything. Whatever I do, I accept the consequences. That's what we get. We shouldn't have done it.

There are a lot of issues between men and women, the #metoo movement is going on and people are having a hard time getting along.

Most of the time men and women deal with each other, some type of influence (drugs, alcohol, etc.) is involved. It's a bigger problem underneath that nobody ever talks about. We're real good at lying and they fall for it just like we fall for stuff. As a whole, that's something we need to be kneeling for. Black men need to start taking care of their kids instead of worrying about the NFL and them kneeling.

I got my brothers with me because my daddy wasn't there, but he was out there with a new car. He was out there with different women. A guy will lay with them but when it's time for them kids, they're doing the bare minimum. "Here go \$100" and they think that \$100 is going to last their baby mama a whole month. Come on, man. Let's be real. It takes money to raise these children. Stop having them. If you ain't no go-getter then man, step it on. Y'all kiss and hug and play house. Don't put no kids in your mess. You know, you're asking me a lot of questions. That's why I don't like answering these types of questions because I be telling the truth, lol.

Man, listen. This is exactly what I wanted from you. A lot of times, comedians are expected to be funny all the time and sometimes, you just want them to turn that off. I just wanted a conversation. I don't want you to crack jokes. That's what the stage is for. It's like growing up and going to school with the class clown who never wants to be serious. We know your comedy online so I just wanted to touch on some topics that really matter. In addition to being drug and alcohol free, you are also vegan. Elaborate. I kept seeing my grandma get their legs cut off and I was like, "Hell nah". When you grow up in the country, everybody got diabetes and is taking medicine. Something ain't right. I was on the rode with this power company and I was 22. I had went to the doctor and they said I had kidney problems. They gave me some medicine. I was like, "I'm 22!"



but what it was, was that I was drinking all of that sweet tea on the road. I just started drinking water at first but then I started seeing results with the change in my diet. Everything changed. My thought process is quicker. When I get sick, my body heals itself. I don't take medicine. It all came from me seeing my family having, as we call it in the country, "The Sugar".

Me personally, I love to be the best. I like to sneak and get good at something and let everybody see results. It's like my stand up. I don't even promote how good I am. I just like people to come see it. "How'd Kountry Wayne got good?!" It's because I've been putting in that work. People will ask me "How'd your skin get like that?" It's because I've stopped eating certain things. I don't tell people not to eat. I tell them to eat better. Eat organic chicken. I'm not a preacher. I don't push nothing on nobody. I just do what I do and hopefully, you'll be inspired to do what I do. The vegan thing changed my life. Not just physically, but spiritually.

What is the difference between a vegetarian and a vegan?

A vegetarian will still eat cheese (dairy). A vegan won't eat no dairy or anything that comes from an animal. No cheese, no milk, no butter. There are other things like almond milk, vegan burgers, vegan cheese, etc. Vegetarians just don't eat nothing in the form of the meat itself.

Alright, man. We're getting to the tail end of this thing. I want to touch on your faith. Would you consider your comedy, "Christian Comedy"?

People say the word "Christian" but I don't even go to church like that. I'm not religious. I just believe in God and I'm more transparent. I got 9 kids at the age of 30 so I don't even put that pressure on myself and pretend like I don't look at other women. Come on, man. I'm human. I'm just an example that God will meet you where you're at.

So, I don't be on the stage having everybody grab hands and pray. I go out there and do Kountry Wayne, just like Bernie Mac or Robin Harris. It's kind of confusing to people because I talk about God. I live it. God doesn't tell

you to wear a suit and hold a bible. God tells you to take care of your neighbors who are the people right beside you, the people that you love.

How have you handled fame thus far?

I'm handling it well. I'm dealing with the same people I dealt with before the fame. It really doesn't bother me. I've always been popular and I was the #1 person in my hometown. Fame didn't change me. I'm still the same Wayne Colley.

Lastly, let's talk about the phrase, "Help Is On The Way". What does that mean to you?

If you believe and you keep trying, help is on the way. If you have a car note and you don't have that money, all the way up to that day, believe that something is going to come through. If you believe and you wake up everyday with that attitude, It's going to be a lovely life. Help is on the way.

Follow Kountry Wayne on Twitter @kountry_wayne, on Instagram @KountryWayne and on Facebook: Wayne Colley (Kountry Wayne).



TWEET DAT!

@TAXSTONE: I was going through tragedies bitch i needed you drastically

@TPAIN: I made it!!14 day fast. No solid foods. No liquor. No sex (for most of the time). No drugs. Just water, coconut water, and herbal drops for 14 days straight. Lost 20lbs and I'm ready to stop pissing out of my ass. Couldn't do it without the wifey keeping me on track tho

@lilduval: What presidential alert? Bitch I got cricket

@AtlantaFilming: Michael B Jordan, talks to every random person on the sidewalk, takes selfies, signs autographs. Jamie Foxx & Brie Larson, completely ignore everyone, they seem upset there are other humans on the planet. Jared Leto yells at people ... for acknowledging he exists.

@tariqnasheed: If anyone here co-signs any person-Black or white- who promotes anti-Black male hatred (and anti-Straight Black male hatred in particular), please unfollow me

@Wayno119: Music Industry all about social media, labels not even caring about music just numbers & social engagement no development shit wack.

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THE BARBERSHOP



#KANYEWEST

@tariqnasheed: Kanye on SNL was cringeworthy. Kanye is doing these goofy gimmicks to make up for the fact that he is TRASH right now. He thinks if he can get ppl to focus on his #MAGA hats, ppl won't notice that he is falling the hell off. Get some real folks around you & get ya mind right Ye

@SpokenReasons: I Love Kanye but at this point in life it's safe to say the majority don't buy his weirdness anymore. He got so comfortable w/ the world calling him a genius that he's literally trying WHATEVER to gain some Respect that'll never be there. Chill Nigga

@AP4Liberty: Don't stop @kanyewest, don't back down. You're doing great! Keep breaking those chains. "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our minds."

@shakazulu2016: Leave Kanye West alone So what if one of your hero celebrities isn't a liberal/Democratic dick sucker.....the other 99.9% them are.....you'll be fine

@MichaelSkolnik: The Miseducation of Kanye West.

@aishames: IF YOU STILL SUPPORT KANYE WEST UNFOLLOW ME AND THATS THAT ON THAT

@67tiger3: I think @kanyewest means no one is ever really free. Freedom is an illusion. We are being controlled in one way or another. I don't think, we are really free to even think. A professor once said, "Everyone thinks education is good for you. Do you think what education did to you?"

@ali: How powerful Kanye West is: not one of his haters read the 13th Amendment. This man's IQ is literally crushing arguments before they begin. Power levels unknown!

YIKES!

MATADOR ANTONIO ROMERO GORED BY BULL DURING A BULL FIGHT IN MEXICO CITY





PHOTOS:
DAVID HIGGS

STYLIST:
BRITTANY DIEGO

HAIR:
ALEXANDER ARMAND

MAKEUP:
SARAH HUGGINS

KARIMAH WESTBROOK

Words + Interview By: Krystal Luster

Some time ago, Chicago native Karimah Westbrook made up her mind to relocate to LA and has been active ever since. In our interview, she talks about her early beginnings, crashing the audition that landed her the role in "Save The Last Dance" and her upcoming role as Grace James in the CW's, "All American". Enjoy!

What was life like before fame? How did you grow up?

I'm not for sure if I've received fame at this point but I grew in the west suburbs of Chicago. I was raised by my mom and I have one older sister. I was very active in the arts and sports growing up.

What are your thoughts on the crime in Chicago? Do you feel there is more good to the city than what is being portrayed in the media?

To hear about the crime that is happening in Chicago is absolutely heartbreaking. Unfortunately, crimes are on the rise and take place in a lot of other cities and states but Chicago seems to get the most publicity. I wouldn't doubt there are political reasons behind this. There is absolutely more good in Chicago than what is being portrayed in the media but unfortunately we don't hear about the good that happens there.

Have you seen Showtime's, "The Chi"? If so, do you believe it is an accurate portrayal of the city as a whole?

I love Showtime's, *The Chi*. I think the show captures the feel of Chicago very well.

In what way was getting the role in "Save the Last Dance" unique and how was the experience overall?

Getting the role in *Save the Last Dance* was very unique because I didn't have an official audition for the film. I crashed the audition and that led to me booking a role. The experience was great, all the actors were great and it was truly a dream come true. It also positioned me to earn enough money to relocate to Los Angeles.

Explain the process of relocating to LA. How was your transition?

I believe that when you decide in your heart and mind to do something and begin to move in that direction, things start to happen to help you along your journey to getting it done. I don't believe in coincidences and there were a number of things that happened for me and people I met that helped me during my transition.

The process of relocating to LA was surprisingly seamless from what I can remember. I did tons of research before moving and I had a checklist of things I needed to do to accomplish my goal of moving. The only thing I can remember that really sucked was getting my car to LA. I had my car shipped from Chicago through a shipping company and it took way longer than initially quoted to arrive. I learned my car fell off the thing they put the cars on to ship and they also had the windows down and it rained so everything inside of my car was wet. Thank God that it was still drivable by the time it arrived to LA but that entire situation was really stressful.

What was the biggest misconception that you had about Hollywood before you got there?

I didn't have any misconceptions about Hollywood before moving here. I didn't know what to expect. I honestly dismissed all the negative things I'd heard. I was walking by faith so it didn't matter what I'd heard about Hollywood. I believed my journey would be its own. I had heard things I knew were misconceptions such as having to sleep with people to work/make it in Hollywood. I used to also hear "it's who you know" all the time. Those were the biggest things I used to hear about Hollywood before I moved here. I didn't know anyone here and I totally dismissed the notion of those things having to be a part of the process and took actions that felt right as well as following my instincts on what I needed to do. I just stayed focused and whoever it was meant for me to meet, I did.

In the 2003 bio-pic, "Baadasssss!", you play the role of Ginnie. Tell us about your experience working on this critically-acclaimed project.

Working on *Baadasssss!* was a great experience. I cried when I read the script. I was happy when I booked the role. I was nervous when I shot the film. I was petrified when it released in theaters. I was proud of and inspired by the finished product. There were a lot of great actors in the film and Mario Van Peebles is a great actor/director. I also had a chance to meet and hang out with his dad, Melvin Van Peebles, whom the film is about when it played at film festivals. That was a real treat.

Name one thing you learned from Mario Van Peebles that has stuck with you the most.

I learned from Mario Van Peebles that as an actor you can write, star in and direct your own feature film. Mario did it with ease and grace.

What was it like working on "Suburbicon"? What do you remember most about your role as Mrs. Mayers?

Working on the set of *Suburbicon* was great. I always find the biggest celebrities are the most gracious and kind. The telling of the story didn't feel very good because I had to experience racism at a heightened level in the film. What I remember the most about my role as Mrs. Mayers is her quiet determination. She was determined to not be moved by the behavior of her racist community. The Mayers knew they deserved to live wherever they chose to live and no one was going to make or force them to believe otherwise. In real life, Daisy Mayers was known as the Rosa Parks of the North.

Tell us about your upcoming role in the CW's, "All American". What is this series about and in what ways is Grace James relatable to your real-life experiences?

All American is a new drama series on the CW about a

rising a football player from South LA who is recruited to play for Beverly Hills. The wins, losses and struggles from two families from vastly different worlds (Compton and Beverly Hills) begin to collide. I play Grace James, Spencer James' mother. It is inspired by the life of pro football player, Spencer Paysinger.

Grace James is relatable to my real-life experiences because I've struggled a lot, I love hard and I've lost a lot but I make the best of my/any situation. I don't give up easily and I do whatever it takes to get things done especially if I really want it. My children are my everything on this show. I would do whatever it takes to position them for success in life. I want the best for them in life. Although I don't have kids yet in my own personal life, I do want the best for my family.

How important is it for parents to support their children's dreams? Were your parents 100% into yours?

I think it's very important for parents to support their children's dreams. I grew up in a single household so my mother was very concerned, initially because to her, acting appeared to be a very unstable endeavor. She wasn't 100% on board but that didn't stop me. However, once I started booking acting jobs and being able to support myself, she felt more comfortable and confident in my decision.

How familiar were you with the story of Buddy Bolden prior to working in the film, "Bolden"?

I wasn't familiar with the story of Buddy Bolden prior to landing a role in the film but working on *Bolden* was one of the best experiences of my career so far. I can't wait for people to see the film once it releases!



We've spoken with Ser'Darius Blain who plays Willie Cornish in the film. Did you share any screen time with him at all? If so, what was it like working with him?

Unfortunately, I didn't have an opportunity to share any screen time with Ser'Darius. I did have an opportunity to hang with him and some of the other cast members when we weren't working. I really like Ser'Darius's spirit. He's genuine, very smart and talented. I hope to share some screen time with him one day. That will be fun.

List 5 things you are passionate about outside of acting.

5 things I'm passionate about outside of acting are writing, producing, being in nature/ocean, connecting with my loved ones and learning/experiencing new things.

What is your idea of a perfect vacation?

My idea of a perfect vacation is being surrounded by water or nature with no technology - only books, paper, canvases, pens, watercolor and acrylic paint and lots of organic fruit. A completely peaceful situation.

What are your thoughts on the portrayal of black women in television and films?

I think our portrayal has expanded so much in a positive light and I love it. Women from all walks of life stories are being told and that's refreshing. It's real.

What was it like writing and producing the short, "Best Kept Secret"? Were you a first-timer?

It was a liberating experience to star in, write and produce *Best Kept Secret*. I told the story I wanted to tell and yes, it was my first time writing and actually producing something.

What other projects have you written and/or produced?

I've written a number of projects, I have a few TV show pilots and web series I've created as well as a feature film. None of them have been produced, yet. I have produced other writer's material over the years, primarily short films. Some of those films, *A Fire in a Dovecot* and *Watts & Volts*, have won awards.

What has been your worst acting experience and why?

My worse acting experience was working on an indie film where I got fired. This was when I first moved to LA. The director had fired the girl before me and called me in at the last minute. It was a lot of material and at the time I couldn't handle it. There was a lot of pressure on set. I was so nervous, always fumbling my lines and I was eventually let go.

Are you into philanthropy? In what way do you give back?

I've given back in several capacities in my life. I've worked with at-risk youth before serving as a mentor and on the leadership council at an at-risk youth community center. I love being of service to the homeless community. I volunteer with several organizations that feed and provide clothing to the homeless. I also volunteer helping our veterans for time to time.

How would you describe the racial climate today? We are doing great things and doors are opening but at the same time, racism is becoming more "in your face" again.

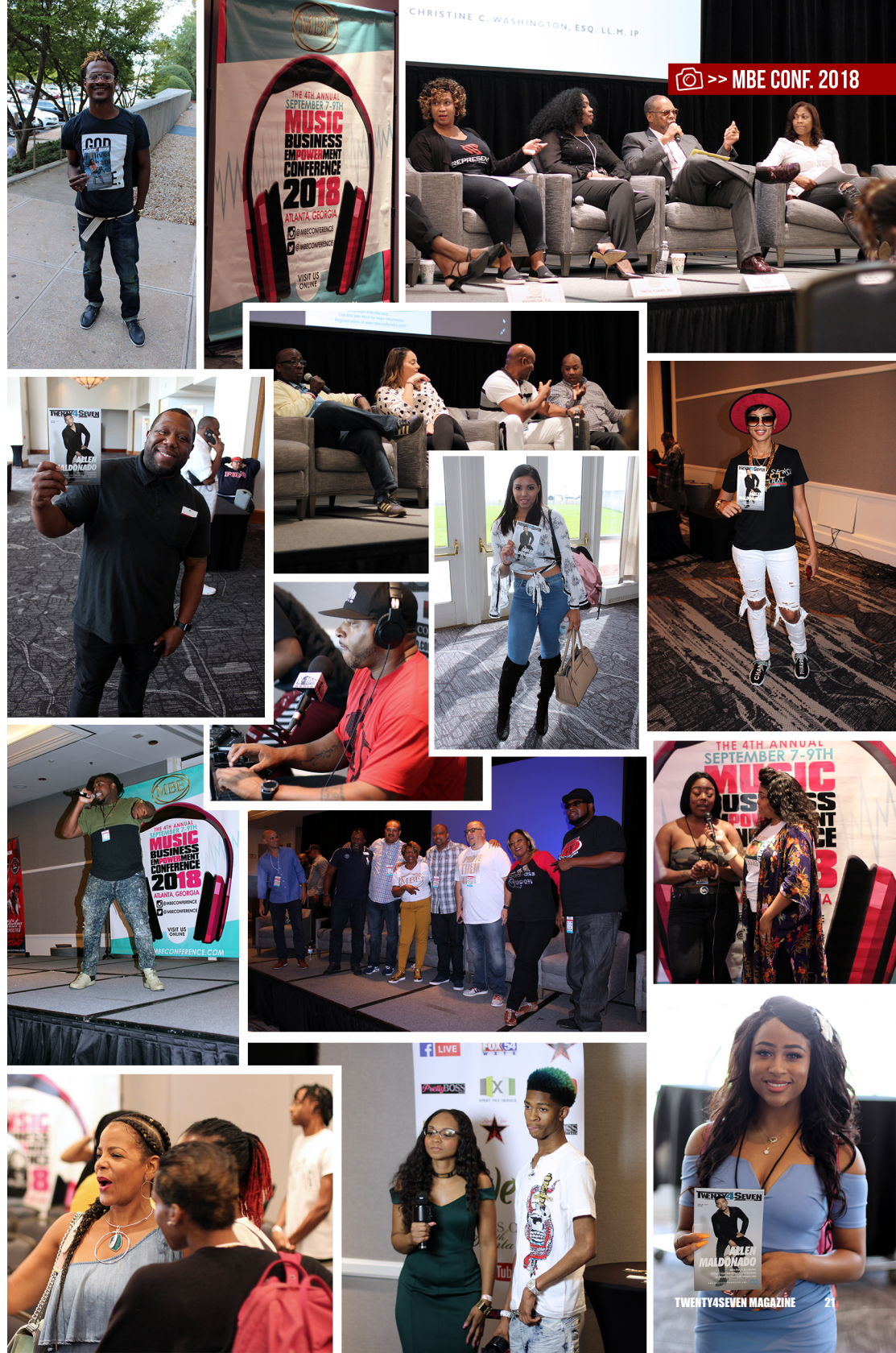
Racism is as sad today as it was when our ancestors experienced it. I still believe it's a spirit of some kind, living throughout generations and beliefs taught in households. It's a learned behavior embraced by spirits of the past. As I'm really thinking about it, it seems like a mental illness.

Yes, black people are and will continue to do great things. It's in our nature to do so. Today, technology can capture racist acts on video so it feels like it's more in our faces but racism has never not existed. Truth is, there has been tremendous progress in our society, people of all nationalities are waking up but you will never really see news stories reflecting this truth. I believe there is more light in this world than darkness. The negative news and social media posts of racist acts magnify things but you can't let it get you down. Choose your battles wisely, protect your mind, find a release and look for the good. At the end of the day, still we rise.

What's next for you?

Right now I'm still filming *All American*. I'm looking forward to the release of *Bolden*. During my break from the series, I hope to get back to writing a bit more, completing projects so they can go into production. It would be perfect if I can book a great movie role on my break. All in all, I'm looking forward to enjoying this next chapter of my life.

Follow Karimah Westbrook on Instagram and Twitter @Only1Karimah.



CHECK ME OUT

ZJÁL HOME



"Home" is a love song inspired by the yearning to be in the arms of the one you love after being apart. It came about at a time when I was at a very vulnerable point in my life. This release means everything to me because it's confirmation that I'm on the right path. This journey has taught me to be brave, have faith and continue to create fearlessly. Thank you Twenty4Seven for the love. — Zjál

About Zjál

Zjál grew up on a secluded farm in Adelaide, Australia. Her heritage is Lebanese, yet her family held a progressive outlook. Zjál naturally gravitated to the arts growing up. "Creating is my drug, words are my remedy." Needing a way to express herself and escape, music became the form of connection which breaks all barriers for Zjál.

Besides releasing her brand new single, Zjál is also working on her debut EP that will drop in 2019. The EP, also named Home, has a beautifully interwoven mix of sensual, strong, and fun elements. The first single off the EP, "Home" definitely shows Zjál's sensitive and vulnerable side. "Home is a love song, about longing to be back in my lover's arms after having to travel and be apart to follow my dreams, when the world gets too loud all I long for is being with the man I love. Nothing means anything without love." The song also represents Zjál's inner sanctuary and meditative state, the place she can retreat and feel safe.

"This EP has been a rebirth for me," Zjál shares. "Through the process of creating it, I've awoken to trust and faith—it feels like a rebirth. This music has helped me take walls down in order to make truthful music. Only when you're vulnerable can you connect with people, and that's all I've ever wanted to do." Zjál hopes for Home to be the first step of her music creating a career of longevity and connection with others. Above all, Zjál's main goal as an artist is to reach a position in her career where her presence "can elevate vibrations and contribute to a higher state of consciousness." She aims to live her truth and be a positive influence in the world. Staying true to her own beliefs, Zjál's message to her fans is to always stay unique to her you were born to be. "Rebel against programmed consciousness. Remain authentically yourself."

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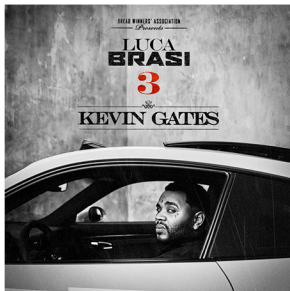
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