

# BRONZE

MAGAZINE

Celebrating  
Phenomenal Women!

Angelia Cabrera  
Khara Campbell  
Eleonore Hansson  
Trina Angela Purse  
Janelle Stein  
Christine Ann Vega  
Wayna

Special  
*Women's*  
History Month  
Issue

**PHENOMENAL WOMAN:  
CELEBRITY THERAPIST  
VLADIMIRE CALIXTE  
HER PERSONAL JOURNEY  
TOWARDS HELPING OTHERS**

MARCH 2014

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I'm a Woman

Phenomenally.

Phenomenal Woman,

That's Me.

-Maya Angelou

# BRONZE MAGAZINE

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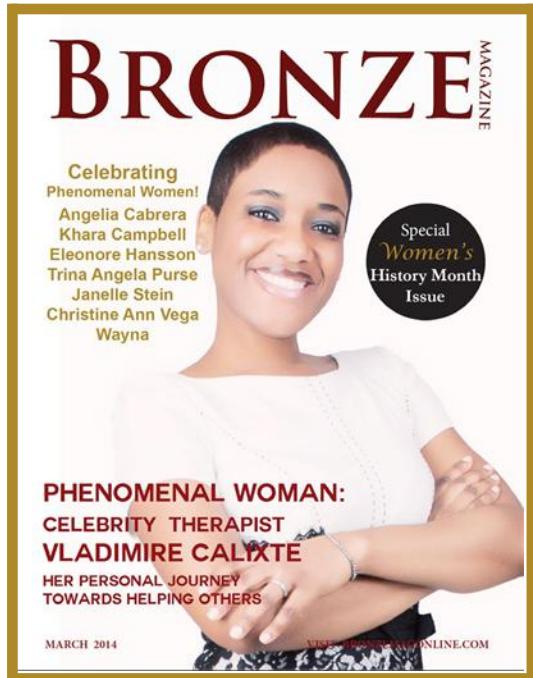
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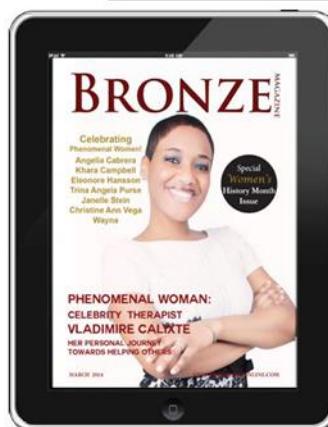
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# *Contents*



- 6 Cover Feature Interview: Vladimire Calixte**
- 9 Angela's Hair Studio**
- 10 Christine Ann Vega**
- 11 Khara Campbell**
- 12 Angelia Cabrera**
- 14 Janelle Stein**
- 17 Derrick Jaxn- “Real Men Cuddle”**
- 19 Lady Ele**
- 24 Wayna**



# *Editor's Letter*

## **Celebrating Phenomenal Women during Women's History Month...**

This month marks our 3rd issue in 3 years honoring Women's History Month. In 2012 we brought you the *Amazing Women Issue*, where we celebrated women in the arts who were taking their industries by storm; in 2013 we brought you the *Women Trailblazers Issue*, where we honored and spotlighted awesome women who were blazing trails across various industries. This year, we proudly introduce to you our *Phenomenal Women issue*, a celebration of remarkable women making extraordinary accomplishments! Although we celebrate awesome women year-round, our March issue is an opportunity to really focus on and spotlight several great women all at once.

Celebrity therapist Vladimire Calixte kicks off our Phenomenal Women's issue as our cover model and feature story. A licensed mental health counselor and certified rehabilitation counselor, Ms. Calixte was selected as our headliner because she embodies the elements of a phenomenal woman- remarkable, exceptional and extraordinary. From the work she has done with clients to overcome PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), to her work counseling celebrities, Ms. Calixte sets the tone for the accomplishments of all of the other amazingly phenomenal women who are also featured. I would also like to acknowledge our lone male gladiator, Mr. Derrick Jaxn, who bravely contributed his written article piece about how *Real Men Cuddle*.

I would personally like to thank each of you for reading this issue and for your overall support of Bronze Magazine's mission. It is my hope that you will find inspiration, motivation and empowerment in the pages that follow. My goal is to constantly provide our core audience with positive and uplifting content that encourages a sisterhood of support and respect for one another. I wish each of you the very best and may unimaginable blessings come your way!

XoXo,  
Shawn Chavis  
Editor In Chief



# **“Helping People Help Themselves: A Therapist’s Journey”**

by  
**Tanya Manning-Yarde, Ph.D**

**“When you come to know who you really are, it will change the way you live as well as the way you love.”**

In her recent Tweet, therapist Vladimire Calixte suggests that self-discovery shifts for the better the life we live for ourselves and with others. But some experiences can make such actualization challenging.

It is during such times that Calixte makes her services available. As founder of Life Rebuilding, LLC, Calixte, a licensed mental health counselor and certified rehabilitation counselor, created a private practice devoted to helping clients “overcome low self-esteem, PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder], trauma, and addictive behaviors that keep them stuck in pain and mediocrity.” Calixte divulges personal experiences that influenced her decision to

become a therapist, and discusses what she has learned from counseling celebrities. She offers advice for improving our mental health and maximizing the life we can live.

Calixte became a therapist because of an inner calling. “I always had a very strong passion to help people.” From very young, “I have always been told that I am not judgmental.” Consequently, “People would confide their innermost thoughts,” and “sought advice from me.”

Personal struggles honed Calixte's recognition of when others feel exposed and susceptible. "My father's absence was painful," she shares. When growing up, Calixte felt "worthlessness because maybe "I was not good enough for my father to stay around." For years, "Living that experience was a source of hurt, anger and feeling of diminishment."

But now, "I know what it feels like to muster the courage to be imperfect and be ok with that." A life-threatening incident culled her willingness to support others within their moments of vulnerability. At age 14, Calixte and her family came calamitously close to death when an apartment fire destroyed all their belongings.

"So when a client comes to me and states, 'I am down to nothing' or 'I am having empty feelings,' I can look into this person's eyes and know exactly what he or she is feeling because I have been there." These events Calixte credits with serving as points of empathy and entry with her clients. From these personal catastrophes, Calixte culled essential therapeutic skills, namely "empathy, active listening, compassion, courage and connection."

Calixte obtained her Bachelor's degree in sociology at Hunter College, her Masters in Applied Psychology from New York University, and certifications as a Licensed Mental Health

Counselor and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. For over a decade she has worked in various non-profit organizations and educational institutions, before opening her private practice. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Clinical Psychology. A married mother of two, she has been featured in several media guest spots on the radio, online, and on cable, most recently on TLC's series "Starter Wives Confidential," where she worked with celebrity wives and ex-girlfriends to help them move on with their lives. Working with celebrities has offered Calixte unique access and insight. While adoring fans place them on unalterable





pedestals, and scrutinizing critics knock them down, Calixte contends celebrities are human too. "The biggest misconception is that celebrities have it together." Being a celebrity does not absolve them from experiencing challenges and struggles. "A-list actors and professional athletes deal with emotional and mental health issues," presenting "everyday concerns such as relationship problems, job stress, and guilt about overworking (as it relates to spending time with their families)." Most commonly, she helps them work through addictions, depression and self-esteem issues. Calixte offers strategies and suggestions for healing our own personal struggles, and discloses the benefits of clinical services. Calixte beckons us to both guard and nourish our self-esteem. A "low self-esteem comes from the [negatively impactful] names we call ourselves and the opinions we hold of ourselves."

So, to combat low self-esteem, she challenges us to speak positively about ourselves, contending that there "is tremendous power in positive self-talk." One recommendation is daily to stand facing a mirror and recite "I am worth it." Another is to celebrate your qualities. "Maybe you are an honest person, compassionate, trustworthy, a great singer, a good writer." "As such, you have to

invest the time in identifying what they are and to celebrate them."

Carefully considering the words we speak to others, especially children, is another suggestion. "I cannot emphasize enough the power of our words. Our words are the most powerful gift we have as human beings. As parents, we have to be very careful how we speak and address our children because the way we talk to our children becomes their inner voice." Calixte extols the benefits of counseling as a vehicle to give voice to issues and worries, that "Talking about your thoughts and feelings with a supportive person makes you feel better." "It feels good to be listened to, to know that someone else cares about you and wants to help." Calixte also suggests participating in support groups as another outlet for garnering support. "The biggest advantage of support group therapy is in helping a client realize that he or she is not alone, that there are other people who have the same issues," which she often finds with clients to be a consoling revelation and huge relief.

Vladmire Calixte invests in supporting others' healing, deeming it an honor. "It is an awesome privilege—one I do not take lightly—to help people make better life choices and to help them consider how they can get better over time."



# Angela's Hair Studio Redefines Personalized Service



The price of beauty can be exhausting, even frustrating at times, especially when it comes to hair salon services. Just ask Trina Angela Purse, owner and operator of [Angela's Hair Studio](#), a full service mobile-salon located in the Bronx, NY. Tired of having to wait extended periods of time to get her hair done at a packed and overbooked salon, and unable to find quality human virgin hair extensions, Trina started her own company in 2012 in order to provide two very important key business traits to clients: quality and value.

Although she has no cosmetic background, Trina learned from and is inspired by her mother, a licensed stylist for 24 years. As a result, Trina knows how she and other women would like to be pampered and made to feel comfortable when getting their hair done. When asked how women can benefit from the services of Angela's Hair Studio she responds, "By having a convenient and comfortable location with complete focus on the client. There is no rushing you for other waiting clients. There are no traffic tie-ups, which saves on gas and time for those that drive to the salon. You can also call us and set up a date, time and place in advance and our

stylist will come to your home or place of work."

Trina also points out that there are barbering/grooming services offered for men as well.

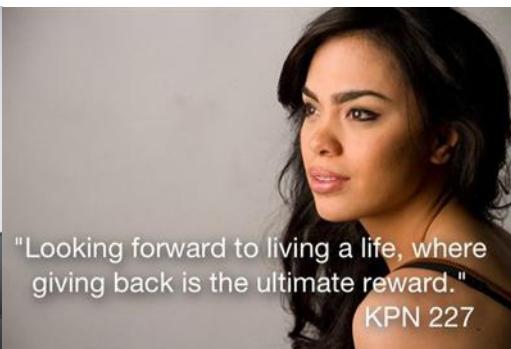
When it comes to Angela's Hair Studio extension line, Trina is quick to point out that it is different and unlike any other line because the hair is untreated with absolutely no chemical processing. The hair is in its rawest virgin state, also known as cuticle hair, and is only available in natural black or brown. Due to a strenuous selection process that the hair goes through, it can be bleached, permed, straightened, curled, flat-ironed or dyed and is guaranteed to be in correct cuticle alignment. The process also excludes irregularities such as dry/split ends and grey hairs.

Trina suggests regular shampooing, conditioning and styling for maintaining healthy hair extensions. "Don't go longer than a week without washing. Human virgin hair extensions should be maintained just like your own hair," she says. Some of Trina's favorite hair products for use on extensions include Garnier Fructis, Redken, Shea Moisture and Carol's Daughter. She adds, "It's all about keeping the hair healthy, just like your own natural born hair." Speaking

of natural hair, Trina suggests that women can also wear Angela's Hair Studio's extensions while transitioning from a perm or relaxer. There are also other style options during the transition phase such as a sew-in, clip-ins or a custom made wig made with their 100% Human Virgin Brand Hair. While Trina's own hair is relaxed, she fully supports the natural hair movement.

So what's the future like for Angela's Hair Studio? Trina foresees the company becoming well known for its hair extensions just like other popular hair brands. Her main focus now is on getting the word out about their services through trade and fashion shows. They received a great response recently for their participation in Shecky's Girl Night Out NYC and the Pink Alive concert where they served as a sponsor and donated wigs. Future plans include the launching of their new website and an Angela's Hair Studio Hair/Fashion Show supporting breast cancer which will showcase their hair extensions, their stylist and designers.

By Shawn Chavis, Editor in Chief



## The Many Faces of Christine Ann Vega

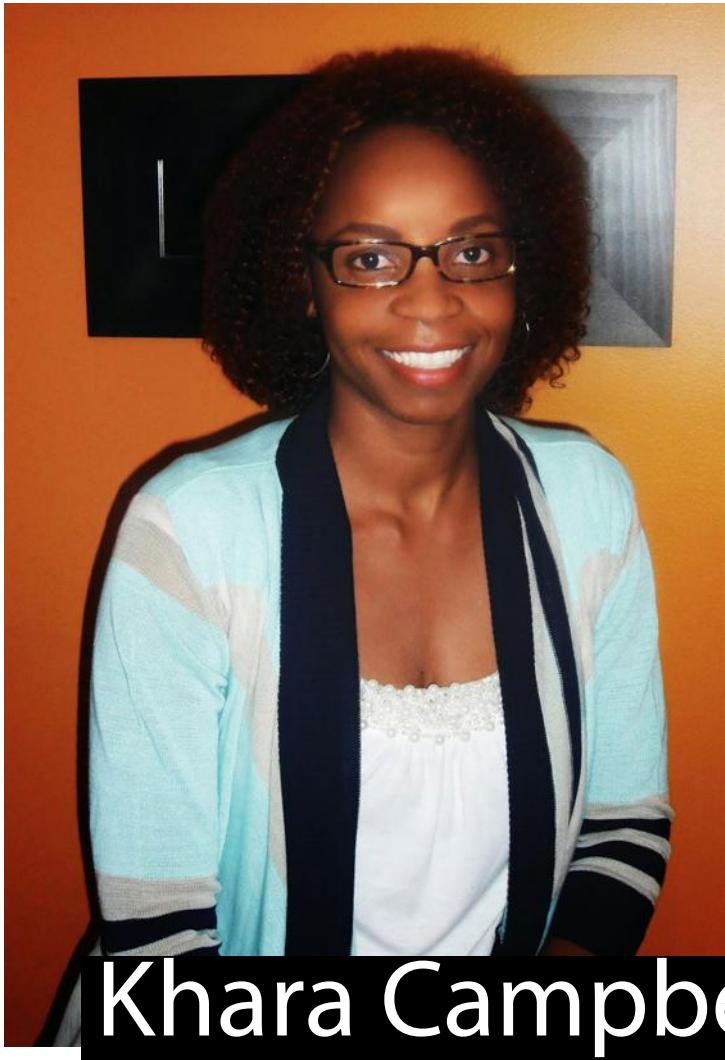
From the first time she sat on the edge of her seat in awe watching the Broadway musical *Les Misérables*, Christine Ann Vega knew she was destined to create the same type of magic for audiences. In order to set her dream into motion Christine rooted her path in reality by getting as much involved in the arts as possible. Christine can recall feeling empowered while working as a Production Assistant on set with the late actor Michael Clark Duncan. "I felt like I created my own path," she says. The self-made producer, director, writer, promoter, actress & model is a visionary with a make-it-happen attitude along with a high level of commitment and passion towards each of her unique talents. As an evolving artist, Christine believes that each of her talents brings along a new journey that she is eager to discover.

When asked what types of projects she would like to see for Latinas in arts & entertainment Christine replied, "Real. I want to see authentic characters that make me feel. I want Latina actresses to own their roles no matter what role it is. I want Latina Directors to direct timeless classics that

don't just cater to their culture but to a broader audience." As for her own future, Christine sees herself accomplishing many things including being a producer on Saturday Night Live as well as writing, directing and acting in her own one woman show. She also sees herself winning an Oscar for her work. How's that for being confident and empowered! Christine encourages other women to reach deep within them in order to find out what it is they truly want, and then make it happen!

Christine Ann Vega is definitely a talented woman to look out for. We asked her what projects she has on the horizon and she said, "I have a major project coming up, which is the launch of the Share Your Gift Foundation, which is an event where artists of all disciplines are in the same space sharing and exchanging their art for another's work of art. Think festival meets carnival meets surprises. Also in the works for me is the development of the original screenplay *Unconditional*, written by filmmaker/writer Kevin Patrick Nelson." We wish Ms. Vega all the best!

by Shawn Chavis, Editor in Chief



# INTRODUCING Khara Campbell

DELPHINE PUBLICATIONS

URBAN CHRISTIAN AUTHOR SPEAKS ON THE POWER OF A FAITHFUL WOMAN AND HER DEBUT NOVEL, NOT MY WILL

Never be fearful to follow your faith is one of the messages shared in Khara Campbell's debut novel "Not My Will" on Delphine Publications published this month. The Praying Woman guest blogger has garnered great success with more than 40,000 shares via social media on her "Is It Love or Lust?" post. The idea for her first novel came from her own personal struggle. "I wanted to abstain from having sex and honor my faith while dating, but the guys weren't having it." Khara says authors like Michelle Stimpson (Boaz Brown), Neta Jackson (The Yada, Yada Prayer Group), Bernice L. McFadden (Nowhere is a Place) opened the way for her in this genre and as a newbie,

she just truly hopes readers enjoy, appreciate and find encouragement from her novel.

"I found it very difficult to walk in faith with God and suppress my own sexual desires. I wished I had a book like this to read during my struggle. At that time I felt like I was alone, it seemed everyone else was having sex and my wanting not to made me feel like a black sheep. Also at the time I was just restarting my relationship with Christ and I just felt other "seasoned" Christians didn't understand where I was in my walk of faith. I needed a real life example of how to abstain while waiting for marriage, other than sending me to read a scripture."

"Not My Will" puts a face and personality to the struggle and will entertain but also encourage readers to stand up for their faith. In this emotionally charged, cautionary tale about faith and surrender, Virtue's commitment to God, her love for her boyfriend and her own hearts desires will all be tested. Examining the controversial topic of being single, saved and having sex, "Not My Will" tells the story of a love affair mired by an unexpected change of heart.

Having hooked up with her boyfriend Ty the same night they met in a club, two years ago, Virtue now wants to put a hold on their sexual relationship, but she is not sure how Ty will take it. In the midst of restoring her relationship with God, Virtue meets Terrance, an understanding new confidant who is everything she wishes Ty would be: a godly man.

Campbell shared that having "the talk" regarding abstinence until marriage landed her in the single box before meeting her husband. She says, many say it is mistake to try to introduce celibacy into a romantic relationship and that she has learned that if both people are equally yoked in their faith and relationship with God – then no, introducing celibacy should be a bit easier to discuss.

"What makes it difficult is when you're not in agreement as in any other circumstance. If you're not in agreement of course it will create friction."

Khara Campbell holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing from Midland Lutheran University. She enjoys blogging about the happenings of life, faith, parenting, her publishing journey, marriage, fashion, and her Bahamian heritage on [www.kharacampbell.blogspot.com](http://www.kharacampbell.blogspot.com). She was born and raised in Nassau, The Bahamas. She resides in the Washington, DC metro area and is an online contributor to Black Literature Magazine, The Literary Network and The Praying Woman.

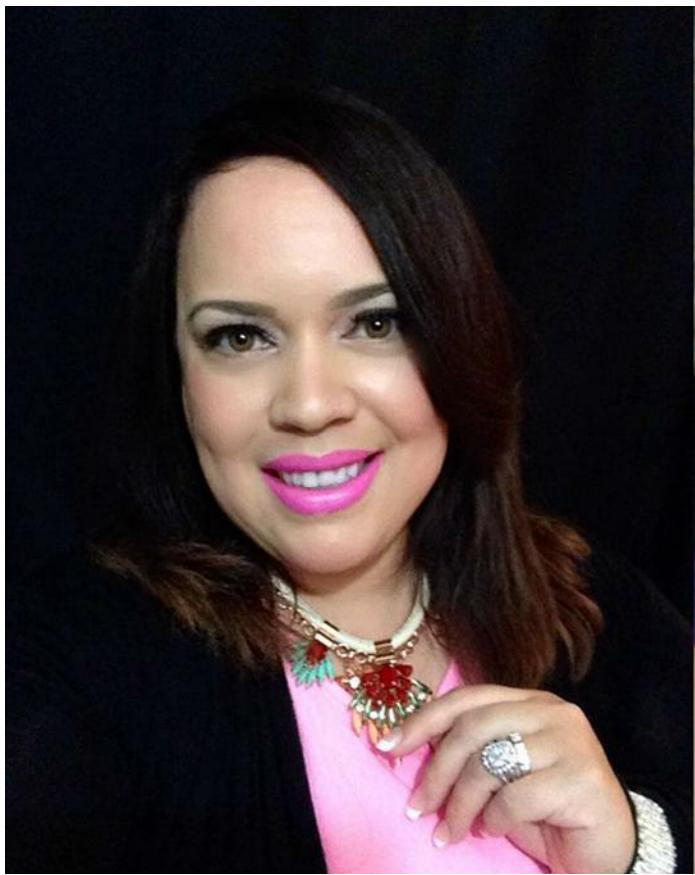


# Angelia Cabrera:

**Angelia Cabrera: The Oh So Trendee Fashionpreneur & Philanthropist by Tanya Manning-Yarde, Ph.D**

As President and CEO of So Trendee, Inc., Angelia Cabrera has made it her business to outfit women beautifully. Yet this savvy business owner attributes her achievements to humble beginnings. The Bronx, New York native of Dominican descent credits her childhood experiences of hard work and giving back as pivotal to her current success. Angelia's ethos of diligence and duty emanate from her upbringing. Modeled by her father, she learned to value hard work and to give her all. "My father instilled in us that we should earn everything we have.

To work hard because what is earned is more appreciated than what is given." Working alongside her five siblings in her father's several supermarkets, "I learned that you don't give up on a task because it is difficult or because you are tired." Long hours of stocking shelves and working the cash register built not only her resolve to work hard, but also instilled within her kindheartedness and the searching for ways to help others. She learned to be patient to others, particularly the elderly and young children, and to be compassionate "for those who came by asking for



from all over the world. Our social pages increased by 300,000 in a matter of days.” “It was then that we gained the resources to branch out and enter the worldwide market.” Angelia is very happy with the company’s growth and consumer recognition so far. “We have a very big following in Canada, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Australia, the U.K., Norway, Dominican Republic, Mexico, South America, Dubai, Switzerland and Germany to name a few. We also have over 2000 registered affiliates to our brand.”

Yet Angelia’s fervor does not stop with her company. Returning back to her roots, she is zealous in efforts to give back to others. So Trendee, Inc., is a sponsor of Operation Sandy Relief, Astraea Foundation (a philanthropic organization focused on advancing LGBTQI human rights worldwide), American Red Cross, PETA, and Dress for Success (an international non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of women). One organization near and dear to her heart is So Unidos, which she co-founded with a partner organization, REDDEHUAC, in the Dominican Republic. The mission of the organization is to provide “children of low income who do not have the means to attend school due to the lack of school supplies and uniforms.” “I have always felt a need to give back and this is my way of doing it.

I want to give children the one thing that can never be misplaced, the one thing that can never be taken away from them, an education. I want them to succeed, and if I am able to help them by providing them with uniforms, shoes and school supplies, then I feel I am supporting them to reach their goals.”

Looking to the future, Angelia projects several expansion initiatives. “We are very excited to introduce in the upcoming months the So Trendee Crop Tops and So Trendee Watches. We are also working on many exciting projects and events.”

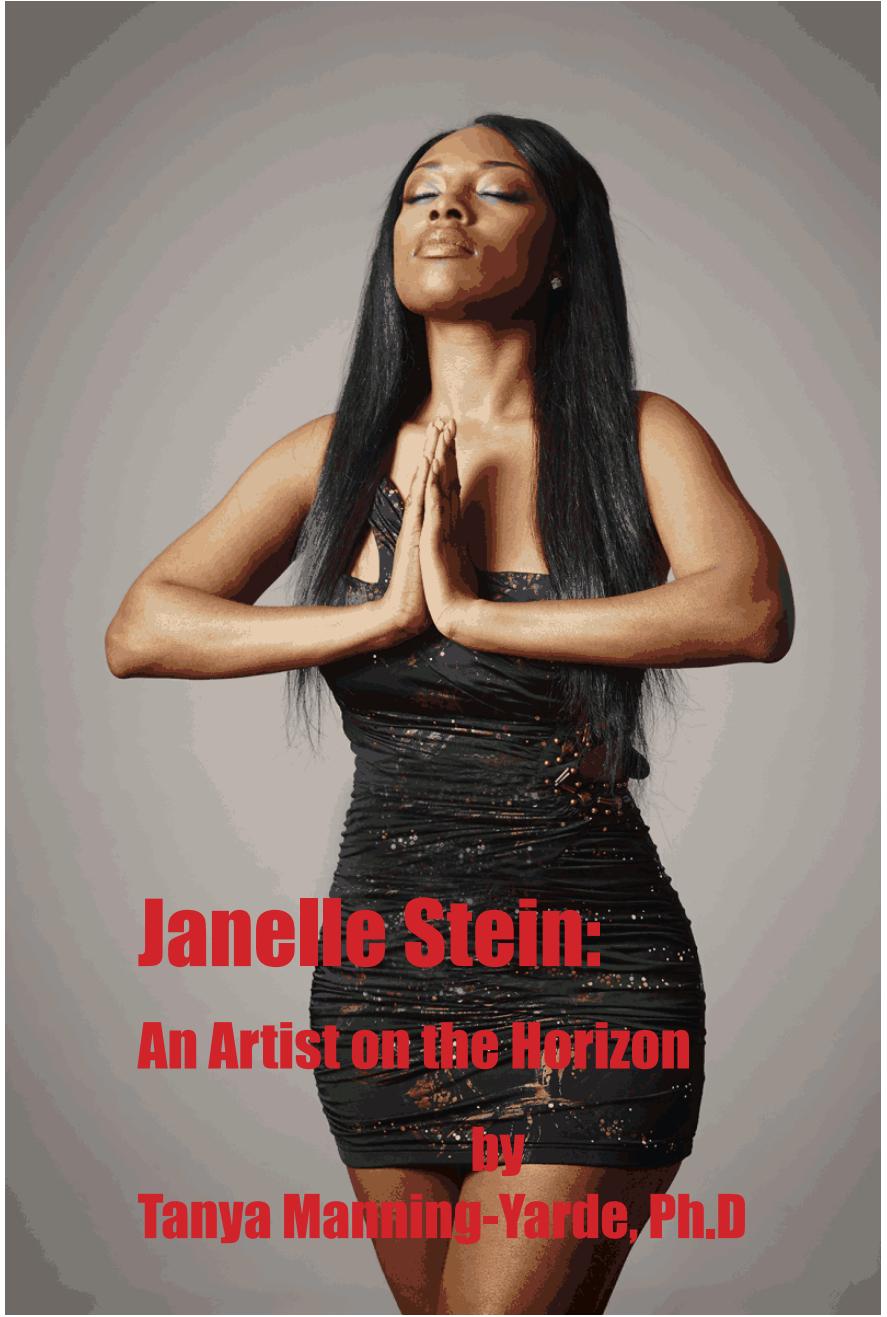
Angelia offers advice to others aspiring to fulfill their entrepreneurial dreams. “I receive many emails asking me for tips or what is the secret to succeeding. START. Don’t be afraid, and if you believe you failed, KEEP GOING. You will doubt yourself a million times but you should never give up on your dreams just because it’s hard.”

food.” “My father fed many hungry families and it is because of him that I acquired a passion for helping those in need.”

Modeling her father, Angelia pursued being a business owner. “I have always felt the need to be in charge, to manage and operate my own business.” Working as an employee for over a decade in several corporate

settings helped her to refine her skills. “I found that with each position I would always take charge and excel at every task.” However, working in such settings became mundane. “I also felt the need to be challenged. I felt bored after a while.” The boredom and lack of challenge fueled Angelia’s ambition to step out on her passion and become her own entrepreneur. She decided to create her own company, So Trendee, Inc., because she “Always had a passion for fashion, handbags, and shoes.” “I envisioned myself sharing the best trends with the world.”

So Trendee, Inc., a glamorous and chic fashion outlet that both is cutting edge and affordable, is now recognized internationally. But starting out, Angelia was strategic and cautious. “Starting a business can be scary but I took a leap of faith and started small.” Then a cast member from the Style Network’s hit show “Jerseylicious” started wearing So Trendee, and Angelia’s exposure and consumer base rocketed. “We received an overwhelming amount of orders



## Janelle Stein: An Artist on the Horizon

by  
**Tanya Manning-Yarde, Ph.D**

**M**odel. Dancer. Actress. These are the passions of Janelle Stein, an up-and-coming New York based artist who has big promise and big dreams. Janelle's mother instilled within her the importance of having diverse interests. "My mother always placed me in enriching activities as

a child." "She would always find different ways of exposing me to various aspects of life and cultures. She always stressed the importance of me becoming a well-rounded person." She also instilled within Janelle a curiosity about the arts, involving her in them to explore her interests and cultivate her



talents. "I studied ballet, African, modern and tap dance. During these classes I discovered my passion for the performing arts and creative expression. A few years later, I decided I wanted to try acting. I asked my mother to sign me up for drama classes and she did. My first acting class was captivating! I fell in love with the craft immediately." Janelle's passion for the arts has since informed her career path, intertwining modeling, dancing, and acting. "I believe modeling is a form of acting. Dance is intertwined with my modeling." She has enjoyed opportunities to model for several

major magazine publications, such as King and Black Men. She has performed in several music videos for artists such as Juelz Santana, Keyshia Cole, The Diplomats, N.O.R.E, Akon, Lloyd, and Lemar. She has appeared in promotional ad campaigns for Coors Light and Smoke Liqueur.

But for Janelle, "Acting is my passion and the medium in which I can express myself most authentically." She has performed in several university-based performances and student films. A graduate of Fordham University, Janelle is currently developing her acting chops through several local theatre and movie performances. "I try my best to expand my range with each project." Recently, she appeared in "The Ozark Mountain Holiday Legends Spectacular" and "Tompkins Square Park," a one act play about a woman who explores New York City's landmark park at 3AM. She also had a minor role on an episode of FX's "Rescue Me." She has performed in two of Wrong Way Production's features, as part of the ensemble in the 2011 award-winning video short "Greenback Boogie," and the

protagonist in the 2011 short film "The Call," in which a betrayed girlfriend exacts revenge. She is also in the film "Brooklyn Knights," written and directed by Domingo Martin, currently in post-production.

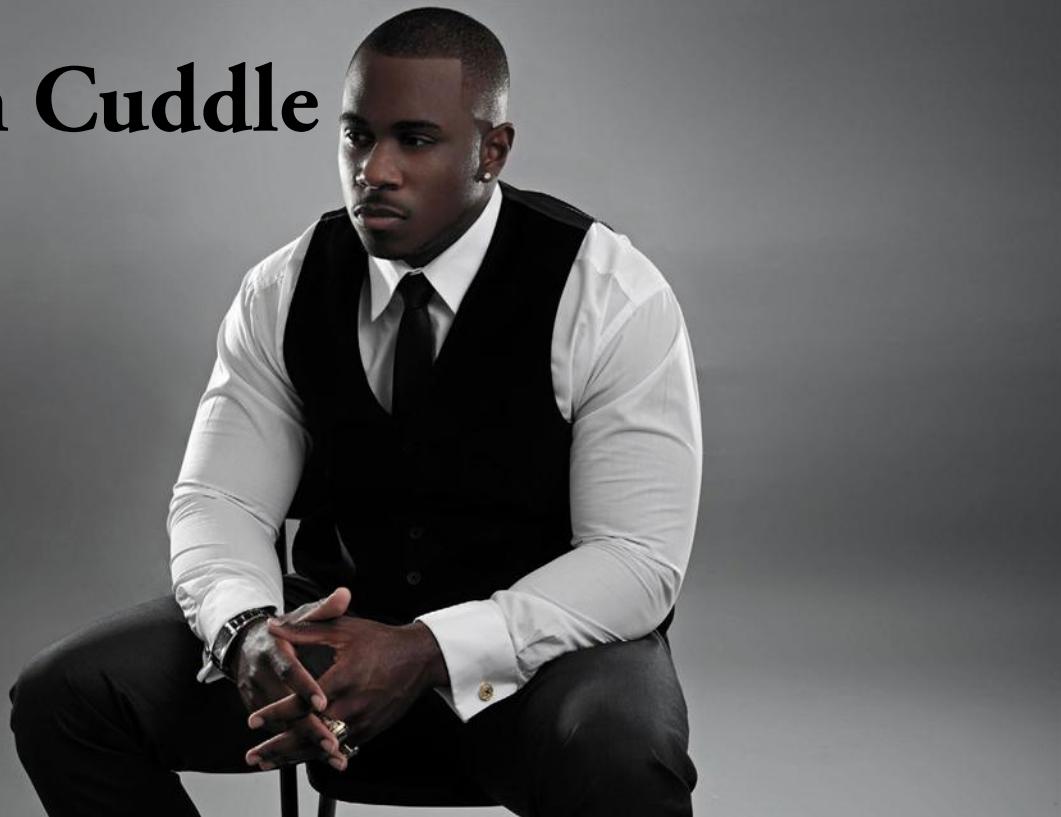
Janelle anticipates this exposure will lead to future projects. "I would like to continue to obtain roles that challenge me, and help me grow as an actor." Her goal "is to be highly skilled and versatile within the craft." She is continuously "looking for new opportunities to work with seasoned, accomplished actors and performers." Her hope is for opportunities where she can "help tell new stories that showcase an assortment of unique characters from different backgrounds in various scenarios." Some of Janelle's upcoming projects include a web series she is developing, being featured in a short film based on a play in which she previously performed, and several photo shoots in the spring.

Yet this aspiring actress, while looking forward in pursuing her dream, is reaching back to help

others do the same. "I believe it is a universal rule and extremely important to give to others." As a way to give back, Janelle works as a play director for a youth program. "I really wanted to find a way to merge my love for acting with my love for working with children." "I find it very rewarding to introduce children who come from similar backgrounds to the magic of the performing arts." Despite opportunities and successes that have unfolded for Janelle, she remains grounded in thankfulness for all her mother has done for her. "My mother is extremely influential in my life. All of the good inside of me comes from this incredible woman. She has instilled the importance of being kind and compassionate to others in me." "She has always set the bar pretty high for me in terms of morals, values and education, so I always try to reach it or go beyond. I'm still working towards it."

# Real Men Cuddle

Written by:  
Derrick Jaxn



I always find it interesting when I hear guys say how they don't like cuddling because of how soft it is. The word itself has a teddy bear-ish connotation but let's look at the logic of it. A man and a woman lie next to or intertwined with each other while doing some other intimate activity like talking, watching a movie, or just relaxing. So, it's safe to say that cuddling is the foreplay of foreplay which is the warm-up to having sex, which men claim to really enjoy right?

Now, I missed the part where it's soft but maybe comparing it to more acceptable "manly" activities can help clear up the confusion. By manly, I mean with a lot of men be-

cause when guys crowd around in a tiny apartment living room, almost lapped up on the love seat to play their new Xbox game they got from Santa while passing weed to one another (weed that's licked and sucked on by other men before it's placed on their lips), none of that violates the guy code. And then there are those who will slap each other on the ass after a good play but won't hold their lady's hand in public. But here's where it gets really weird.

Back in the day when I would go clubbing, I noticed how an R&B slow jam would come on and it literally pissed dudes off. They'd go sulk in the corner trying not to look awkward as they patiently awaited

its ending, no matter how many beautiful women would be in the middle dancing with each other due to the shortage of males. But the moment Chief Keef came on, they flocked to the floor to play with each other. I was baffled, and wondered if it was something I was missing.

The truth was that allegedly heterosexual men really hadn't changed much since the elementary days of pinching a girl to tell her we liked her. If it looked cool to other guys, it took precedence to what it actually made her feel like even though at the root of it, we all wanted the same thing; her. Call women hoes and bitches, get high-fives, but the moment we get respectful and start expressing emotion we're told we're acting like Drake. If we see a group of guys, we engage in complicated hand-shakes and warm embraces with each of them, apologetic if we missed one but we can't hold our woman just because without needing to punch a wall to re-establish our masculinity.

Men have a way of condoning really dumb shit while trying to oust that which makes more sense but then wonder why women seem so complicated. So, I realized quickly that it wasn't that I wasn't good at being "manly", it's just that my

definition was different.

## Whipped

Even if it didn't lead to sex, cuddling has always been fun if it was timed correctly (when I wasn't hungry or horny). Soft legs felt good against mine and a female's face lying on my chest just felt...right. The sex is better after cuddling and cuddling is better after sex. The only way you can go wrong is if you're just not that into the person you're cuddling with, but sex is always better with feelings involved so even that doesn't make sense.

Basically, there is nothing more masculine than a man who does what it takes to make his woman smile. If he can find a way to deal with his insecurities of being accepted by other guys, he'll see that a lot of those things will make him feel good too. Like kissing, cooking, and being a one-woman-man. And if he wants that one woman to stick around, he might as well get used to cuddling; because that's not going anywhere

- @DerrickJaxn

If you enjoyed the article, check out my new best selling book, A Cheating Man's Heart.

# Up Close & Personal with Singer/Songwriter Lady Ele

Written & Photography by Amina Touray

It's a pretty cloudy day in Los Angeles although the sun peaks through every now and then and creates silvery highlights in the sky. Singer and songwriter Eleonore Hansson, also known as Lady Ele, has invited me to her home up in the hills. As we're on our way to her house, we stop by a view point and she shows me glimpses over the valley and city of Los Angeles. As I watch the view, I can't help but feel like I'm on top of the world. When we eventually reach Ele's house, I'm embraced by a tropical feeling from the African and Caribbean paintings and sculptures that salute me as I walk through the front door. Ele's great energy and charisma is mirrored through her whole house with beautiful pictures and flowers that make one feel at peace. Brought up by a single parent Swedish mother and with a father of North African heritage, Ele was musically influenced by singers such as Bob Marley, Stevie Wonder and Whitney Houston.

As we walk through her living room, she stops and shows me one of her many water-colored paintings with a smile on her face. It leads me to think about her song Life is Good from her latest album Lady Ele - Coming from a Lady, and



abruptly it becomes very clear to me where Ele finds her inspiration to be so artistically creative.

We sit down on her big white couch, filled with smooth pillows and I'm treated with Jamaican ginger and mint tea. Ele begins to tell me her story and I'm taken on a journey that begins in a small suburb of Sweden, of a 3-year old that had a dream she never let go of. I sit back and listen as she explains what her key to a successful life is and where it all begun.

I begin by asking Ele to tell us about herself, who she is, where she comes from and what inspired her to pursue a career in the music industry.

**Ele:** I'm originally from Sweden; I was born

and raised there by my Swedish mother. My father is North African, Tunisian to be exact. I lived in Sweden until 2006, and then I moved here. I always knew that I wanted to sing as a child; I started talking about it as early on as 3-years old. When I started school I was exposed to choirs, talent shows, etc., because I went to a pretty artistic school where I had a chance to develop my vocal abilities; but I also played the violin for a lot of years and I think I decided to really whole heartily pursue a singing career when I was about 15.

**Amina:** Describe your music. What do you want people to feel when they listen to it?

**Ele:** I want people to feel good! I want women to feel confident; I want women to feel like, "I can feel like that, I can be like that, that's me, that's how I want to be or that's how I should be," or...I'm not saying that I'm a role model, I'm just saying that the message I'm giving in my music is positive, like "Life is Good," and there is love out there and there are good men, and you can believe in yourself and you can achieve your dreams.

**Amina:** You mentione that Sweden didn't have the type of urban music that you were feeling, like R&B Soul. Who were your musical influences growing up?

**Ele:** When I was young there were some Swedish artists that I really liked like Lili and Susie, Titiyo, and then of course my mom had a bunch of LP records back then of Stevie Wonder, Donna Summer, Bob

Marley and Barry White...

**Amina:** So you listened to a lot of soul?

**Ele:** Yes, I especially listened to Whitney Houston a lot.

**Amina:** What was it about them that you liked? Was it their sound or..?

**Ele:** Yes their voices, their voices just touch you, like you can't help but sing along. Nobody can sing like Whitney but we all try to sing with her when we hear her record, so just listening to that kind of vibration of a tone and of music just really vibrated with my soul and I just knew that that's what I wanted to do.

**Amina:** You have worked together with some of the biggest names in the industry such as Stevie Wonder and Sleepy





Brown. What impact has that had on you?

**Ele:** You know, I had a chance to sing with a choir called Hollywood Pop Academy Choir years ago and we did auditions and I finally got it and some of us got to sing with Stevie Wonder which was amazing; number one, because somebody told you that you were good enough to sing behind Stevie Wonder and you've got to be pretty darned good to sing behind him, so that felt like "wow!" you know, and secondly, I just felt if I could sing behind him even though I wasn't a hired background singer. I was a part of this choir and we're backing him up, together on a stage singing in harmony as a musical entertainment group for this big audience. I felt like if I can do that, I don't really see any limitations anymore. If a Swedish little girl can move all the way from her little small apartment with her single parent mother and the mentality that Swedes usually are

brought up under; if you can move away from that to be on a stage with Stevie Wonder, life is infinite, like possibilities are infinite; there is no, "You can't do this" or "You can't do that," that's just in your mind. So it inspired me to do more and to dream for more, to want more, to wish for more and to dare to visualize more and pray for more.

**Amina:** That's very inspirational. So what are you currently working on?

**Ele:** Currently I'm working on some collaborations. I'm eager to go into the studio and create some new songs with some major artists that I've also looked up to since I was a kid. I'm eager to present some ideas to some tracks of some big producers, and I'm just kind of seeing what my next step should be as far as my career because everything that I worked with and everybody I've worked

with up until now are great, but you know music is like any other business, you got to keep developing and you got to keep evolving and you got to network with more people and find new ways to express yourself.

**Amina:** What inspires you?

**Ele:** Hmm....so many things. One being I like to watch movies. I actually love going to the movie theater and sitting there, just being in the now of the movie. In my opinion, the feelings that they express in movies are sometimes a lot better than in real life, you know what I mean? So I like to see the things that they show in the plot of the movie and then go home and write something in accordance with that plot.

**Amina:** You were nominated for your album being an "Outstanding World Music Album" at the recent 2014 NAACP Image Awards, how did that feel? What was your reaction when you found out ?

**Ele:** It was a dream come true. All the years I've attended this event as an attendee I always said to myself and my friends, "One day in the future we're gonna be up on that stage doing something different than what we're doing now," and at the time I didn't have as strong ambitions as I do now; I was still learning and growing and daring to believe. So I remember I was thinking, "Maybe I can be the girl who gives them the trophy or maybe I can be the girl who shows people off the stage or maybe I can sing



Amina Touray & Lady Ele

background vocals for somebody". But I was nominated, and potentially a winner, and it was amazing. The people that I was nominated amongst such as Natalie Cole, Gloria Estefan, Emeli Sande and Laura Mvula are all great artists, and most of them are huge and known worldwide; and I mean that's just a super duper compliment because I feel like the fact that they put me in that category and said yes we're gonna nominate you shows validity as far as the actual level of my music and vocals. So I just felt truly honored and I take it as a sign that you just got to keep on pushing and reach for the moon and hopefully you'll reach the stars."

**Amina:** What advice would you give other young people who are trying to break into the music industry?

**Ele:** Don't think, "I'm going to break into the music industry," but think, "I'm going to do what I really love and I'm going to make other people feel and see that." If you don't focus so much on the results and keep grinding, the results will come.

# Lady Ele in the City...

Photography by Amina touray





## Musical Innovator: Singer/Songwriter Wayna

By Shawn Chavis, Editor In Chief

Ethiopian-born, Grammy nominated, singer/songwriter Wayna knew she wanted to be a performer from the time she was a toddler and heard American music for the first time. Although her family supported her performing as a child, there was always a certain expectation that Wayna would pursue a more financially stable career. Wayna recalls how much her mother sacrificed in order to provide her an education in the States. After earning a Bachelor's degree with a double major in English and Speech Communication from the University of Maryland, Wayna began her professional career as a Writer in the White House for the Clinton administration; but the pull of her true calling was undeniable, so she left her stable career to pursue her dream as a recording artist and focus on her music full-time. At this point, Wayna

found very little resistance from family about her decision because they believed in her talent and could see that she was wholly committed to her dream.

When asked how she cultivated her singing skills and talent, Wayna reflects, "In the beginning, I studied artists who I loved, and I imitated them. Donny Hathaway, Stevie Wonder, the Clark Sisters, Whitney Houston, Billie Holiday...I would memorize their work and do their lyrics over and over until I could find a way to make it my own or incorporate it naturally into whatever I was singing. This is still my strategy actually. The key is to not skip the last step of allowing whatever you study to go through the filter of you, that's what separates an imitator from an innovator." And an innovator she is, having

collaborated with legendary studio icon/producer Bill Laswell, with critically and commercially hailed producer Eran Tabib, Jive Records producer, Veit Renn, and former Touch of Jazz standout, Kev Brown. Wayna has also recently opened for a number of internationally recognized artists on the DC leg of their respective tours, including Fantasia, Amerie, Common, Bobby Valentino, Jaguar Wright, Kindred, and Chuck Brown.

With two Billboard chart-topping singles from her sophomore LP, Higher Ground, and a coveted Grammy nomination in the Best Urban/Alternative Performance Category for her remake of the Minnie Riperton classic, "Lovin You (Music)" featuring Kokayi, Wayna's star is on the rise. Her new album, The Expats, is the third and latest LP from this innovative artist and represents a new and daring departure from her previous work. The project is named after its Toronto-based backing band and production

team hailing from various parts of the world -- Ethiopia to Japan, Isreal to India, Germany to Jamaica. Their "world soul" sound as Wayna refers to it is a unique blend of African and Reggae-inspired soul, fused with classic and alternative rock. With this album, Wayna wants listeners to experience all the international sounds the group experimented with and all the traditional rock and soul elements they fused them with, and to feel like these expressions work together because they represent actual parts of their personalities, experiences and tastes. "I hope they take away a certain freedom that we felt in not limiting our work to a genre or particular part of who we are and feel compelled to be a bit freer in all the ways they express themselves," she says.

When asked what artists she would like to collaborate with in the future Wayna admits, "I would love to work with Cee Lo because, beyond being a total beast as a vocalist, arranger, and writer, he seems to really know and love so many different kinds of music, and I can't imagine anything being more interesting or inspiring. I'd also really love to work with a legendary Ethiopian artist like Aster Aweke or Mahmoud so I can learn more about Ethiopian music, which I'm planning to experiment with soon.

As an expectant mother, Wayna admits that maintaining balance can be challenging. "It's not easy, and I'm constantly learning new ways to balance all the dreams I want for my life. I think the key is to live from the inside out, which means not wasting time or energy doing things you don't really want or need to do. As a woman, that also means standing up to the many ways in which our world is trying to shame or control us with expectations that we don't even believe in. That takes regular reprogramming and for me surrounding myself with other women who share my ideals."

Future projects we can expect to see from Wayna include a few remixes and collaborations and a mixed tape. She also says she'd like to take the new groundwork laid on the Expats, hone it and shape it into what she feels like is 'her sound,' a sound that only she can do, with hopes that that means better songs and a wider, more inspired audience:)"



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