

Tasha Smith Humbles
Hollywood: Using
Faith Instead of Fame
to Stay Ahead of the
Game

By Nicole Holman

She's a familiar face, but after reading this you'll know everything and more about this Hollywood go-getter. You've witnessed her comedic roles in Tyler Perry's films, *Why Did I Get Married?* and *Why Did I Get Married Too* as well as the television spin-off series, *Tyler Perry's For Better or Worse* now on OWN, but this is Tasha Smith like you've never seen before. She's ready for her close up and to teach Hollywood a thing or two about getting ahead in the industry, the *right* way.

For Ms. Tasha's photo shoot, we brought Hollywood to Atlanta at the House of Peter Maxfield boutique. With endless racks of designer dresses, unlimited shoes and accessories, and almost every cosmetic brand at your fingertips, our set was fit for a Hollywood diva. However, we got the chick from around the way who loves cooking, says she's anything but a fashionista, and describes a dream as eating popcorn and Red Vines with her husband while watching a chick flick. Still, there's something absolutely regal and glamorous about the presence of Tasha Smith that reminds us of other superstar black actresses we all know and love like Angela Bassett, Viola Davis and Octavia Spencer. Tasha, dressed in a white button down and blue jeans with her hair wrapped up, picks up a wig head from the hair and makeup table and makes a joke with it causing the hair stylist, makeup artist, photographer and other bystanders to laugh hysterically. She walks in my direction and sits down in her hot pink director's chair and cheerfully says, "Hey baby," and introduces herself.

After a few questions her iPhone rings and she politely asks me to stop the interview for one moment. On the other end of the line it is none other than Tasha's identical twin sister, Sidra. She shares a brief word with her, says 'I love you,' hangs up and proceeds to tell a funny story about how the two recently played their first ever twin prank on the set of her show, *For Better Or Worse*. "When Tyler Perry came on the set, he was like, 'Ok. What we got, what we got, show me what we got!' That's what he says every time he walks on set," explains Tasha. To execute the trick, Tasha told her sister to change into the hair, makeup and wardrobe of her character Angela and act as if she herself was reading the lines. "My sister was doing the lines with the character that plays Leslie," says Tasha. "And he was like 'Cut! Wait. Tasha something seems different.'

And he gets all up in her face and looks her up and down and he turns around and he asks the people on set, 'Is something different to ya'll?' And after awhile I popped out and I'm like, 'It's something different because it ain't me!' As she grins, an echo of laughter from the crew and staff fills the boutique. "Everybody loved it!" she says. "I had to beg her and practically pay her to do this prank on Tyler. Sidra's just not the prankster. I'm the prankster, so I had to twist her arm to do it. Especially to put on the wardrobe and put on the wig, honey!"

ON HER SHOW MOVING TO OWN AND STARRING IN *ADDICTED*

As silly as Tasha can be, we're sure that there are more pranks on the set as she and the cast film the new season of *For Better or Worse*, which will be broadcast on its new home, The Oprah Winfrey Network, this fall. Lately, Perry and Winfrey have been conjoined at the hip and Tasha expresses her excitement about the two joining forces and the sitcom making the big move. Although the new season is sure to keep us laughing, we can expect the same tumultuous yet lovable relationship between Tasha's character, Angela and her husband Marcus (Michael Jai White). But we had to ask her if she's anything like her character. "About 10% of me and that's about it," Tasha replies. "Personally as a wife, I don't act like Angela, but I would say she's my alter ego. I might think some of the same things, but I don't know if I would say 'em."

We may be used to seeing the Hollywood actress portray more light-hearted and funny roles, but as of late she's changed it up for a new, more dramatic role. In the upcoming film, *Addicted*, based on the novel by Zane, Tasha plays a sex therapist, Dr. Marcella Spencer, who helps a young woman named Zoe (Sharon Leal) overcome her sex addiction. The movie will also star Boris Kodjoe, Tyson Beckford, and Kat Graham. "I think it was really a great opportunity because we haven't really dealt with addiction before in African-American film," says Tasha. "My character really tries to help Zoe so that she can save her family and

her marriage because addiction like that can destroy your life in many different ways. It's a great role and it's a different kind of role."

The role may be different, but the reality of addiction was familiar to Tasha. In the past, the actress has admitted to being a drug user and has also witnessed her mother battle with addiction. She shares the importance of being honest about her past by saying, "You empower people when telling the truth. Everyone has a journey. And I just feel like my lesson is not just for myself, but for other people. If I can inspire them in their own life by being honest about my mine, that's a great thing to be able to do and I thank God." She went on to say that her mother is her 'S-hero' and has gotten clean and has greatly inspired her by mentoring others who have had the same issues.

ON FINDING THE CURE IN COMEDY

During her darkest hours, she kept her family close, but it was her best friend, actress, Tisha Campbell-Martin, who helped her move from the rough neighborhoods of Camden, New Jersey to the land of opportunity in Los Angeles. Tasha had finally discovered her passion in stand-up comedy. She says that Tisha took her to the Comedy Act Theatre where other up and coming comedians at the time like Martin Lawrence, Jamie Foxx and Eddie Griffin all performed. She immediately fell in love with the idea of bringing joy to the life of others through comedy. "I realized that people were making other people laugh by sharing their own tragedies in life, so I was like, 'Wow let me do this!'" explains the actress. "I feel like I can talk about things that people can relate to and help them through their own journey through stand up comedy." Soon enough, Tasha was performing for *Def Comedy Jam* and *Showtime at the Apollo!*, but she decided at one point to put the comedy on hold to focus on a new career in acting. Now, Tasha says she's ready to go back to her roots in stand-up and plans to go on tour in 2014. "Yes, I'm going back to the stage!" exclaims Tasha. "A lot of people didn't know that I started off as a comedian, but I'm excited to be going back and exploring my stand-up comedy career."

ON HUMBLING HOLLYWOOD

Her comedic talents prepared her for a career in acting and along the way she's seen the good, the bad, and the ugly of Hollywood. Recently, there's been a huge discussion on the fate of black actresses and the number of roles in the film and television industries designed for them, thus creating a competitive environment. Tasha shares her thoughts on the *Oprah's Next Chapter: African-American Women in Hollywood* episode and how she refuses to let the industry control her feelings toward other black actresses and control her opportunities. "I'm not a victim and I can't even look at things from that perspective. I feel very grateful that I am here and I have such a huge expectation for my future," says the star. "We've heard that saying, 'To thine own self be true.' I feel that if we stay rooted in who we are and what kind of artist we are...then you just can't go wrong. I think that everything you do has to be by faith. I don't look at it like 'it's hard out here for a black woman.' Listen, it's hard out here period for people! For America! If we continue to do the best that we can do with the opportunities that we are given, we are going to continue to make ourselves important to this industry and that's that." She went on to praise her fellow actresses on the show, specifically Phylicia Rashad, about how they have stayed optimistic and created opportunities for themselves and other black women.

We all know that no matter the color of your skin, part of being a famous Hollywood actress is being a celebrity. With the paparazzi lurking at every corner and blogs and tabloids ready to judge your every move, it seems these celebrities have eyes of the world constantly watching them. According to Tasha, it's not necessarily about who's watching you but more so as a human being, how you portray yourself to the world. She's not the type of artist who wants to get her picture taken while shopping on Rodeo Drive and you won't see her on the cover of a tabloid or even on her own reality show. "I feel that you have, if nothing else, even more of a responsibility when you have a position that gives you a lot of visibility," says Tasha. "I don't feel that 'I've arrived.' I feel like I am still growing, learning and striving. I don't look at my life like 'oh I'm a celebrity,' I look at my life as I have a lot of work to do."

ON LOVE, FAMILY, AND HER PERSONAL STYLE

With the fast paced environment and temptation that's included in the glamorous Hollywood lifestyle, we wonder how she stays grounded and makes her marriage work. Tasha's been happily married to her husband of four years, Keith Douglas. She enjoys being Mrs. Douglas and a mother to her stepchildren that she loves to call her "bonus" children. The star-crossed lovers met on a blind date and Tasha described their first encounter as "the best date ever" and that they talked for 6 hours and practically 'shut the restaurant down.' "I was texting people all day talking about, 'I think I met my husband!" she laughs. "My husband is INCREDIBLE! Now he's my hero! ...and he's FIIIIINE!" So how do the two defy the love-destroying demons in the industry? "We keep God first!" says Tasha without hesitation. "He's the center of our marriage and our relationship. We believe in spending quality time and we don't let the industry take us away from one another for a long period of time. We believe in having a good foundation with one another and with God. That's what keeps us focused." The happily wed couple continues to inspire each other within their marriage by encouraging one another to take on new projects. They have a new fragrance available at JustTasha.com called "Us", and her husband Keith has a motivational book called, *The Power to Give Wealth: No Money Required* available at keithdouglas.org.

They even inspire each other before they go out to red carpet events. Tasha admits that her husband is more of a fashionisto than she is a fashionista and always asks him what he's wearing before she calls a stylist to help her out. Nonetheless, the actress likes to believe she has personal style as well. Three things she can't live without? Lashes, lip-gloss and blush. She also says she has a weakness for designer handbags, specifically the timeless and ever popular purses by Louis Vuitton.

ON TSAW AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In addition to her work in the industry, Tasha also finds the time to teach her God-given talent, acting. Through the Tasha Smith Actor's Workshop (TSAW), the superstar has been teaching aspiring actors and actresses about the art of theatre for over 10 years. Her classes are based in Los Angeles, but she also holds seminars in Atlanta. Tasha touches on her reasoning for starting the classes by saying, "I wanted to empower people to pursue their purpose in the arts and give them some techniques and tools to help them do that...and I *love* it and I feel that I am gifted at it. I enjoy encouraging and empowering other actors!"

With all that she has accomplished coinciding with a strong sense of awareness regarding her platform, Tasha is confident in her purpose to inspire others. "I feel that more opportunities are going to come that reveal more of the person that I am—my humanity, my love for people, my desire to make an impact," says Tasha. "I want to make a difference, but I feel the best is yet to come and I haven't even scratched the surface."