

VOL 2 ISSUE 4 2012

MAGAZINE

Fabulous. African. Black.

In with
the New
Spring's
Best
Beauty
Buys

Move into Spring:
FAB Trends
& New Season Style

New African
Hollywood

Rita
Dominic

on Success, Stardom
and Secrets of Steady
Relationships



Tuface Idibia, Les Nubians,
Muntu Valdo



THE NOIR ISSUE

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Rita Unwrapping

Sinem Bilen-Onabanjo unwraps the past, the opinions and the ice queen image of the talented Rita Dominic, revealing one of Nollywood's finest as Nigeria's Sweetheart.

Photographer: Obi Somto | Art Director: Lola Maja-Okojevoh | Styling: Sharon Ojong | Styling Assistant: Charles Etta & Vivian Okafor | Hair: Ugo for Make Me Salon | Make up: Lola Maja-Okojevoh for Sacred Artistry

Black Turban: Ene Maya - N7000 | Fox Tail: Retrospective Shop - POR | Earrings: Retrospective Shop - N5000 | Silver amber rings: Retrospective Shop - N7000 | Black dress: Rita's own

There are Nollywood actresses - flirty, flighty and, pardon me if I am a little blunt here, flimsy - then there are

Nollywood actresses, and not many of them (In fact think Nollywood, their names are the first four or five that come to mind) who have reached the top of their game. No prizes for guessing which category our cover star falls into. So excuse her, if at first look she may come across a tad distant and intimidating. The real Rita, however, can't be further from the image.

"Rita is an absolute sweetheart," says make up artist and our contributing beauty editor Lola Maja-Okojevoh who art directed our cover shoot - an appraisal seconded by Mildred Okwo, the actress's manager and co-producer on *The Meeting*, who describes Rita as "intelligent, intuitive, kind" and someone who "has a kind heart, is a beautiful human being and a joy to work with."

Glowing testimonials aside, who really is Rita Uchenna Nkem Dominic Waturuocha? "Ah, you start off with my favourite question to hate," Rita protests, "I've answered that question so many times before and I guess it changes depending on what is going on at that time in my life. Right now I think I am a restless actor/woman ready to get to the next level of my life both professionally and personally. I am confident at times and mostly unsure a majority of the time."

Mildred also speaks of this lack of confidence during their work together on the pair's joint co-production *The Meeting*, "Initially she didn't want to be in the movie as she had never done that kind of role before, but once I saw her getting into character, I knew she could pull it off. In fact the first time Femi Jacobs, the male lead, saw her, he couldn't believe it was Rita."

The kind of acting prowess to completely assume a character with their persona, mannerisms and



back story - a rarity for most in Nollywood - not surprisingly comes naturally to Rita who has been in the game for 12 years, and unlike most, she has studied the craft of acting as opposed to stumbling taking it up out of sheer boredom or lack of other lucrative career options.

Born on 12 July 1975 in Mbaise in Imo State (Nigeria), as the youngest of four siblings to medical practitioners, after completing her primary and secondary education in Abia State, Dominic attended University of Port Harcourt and graduated with a BA (Honours) in - wait for it - Theatre Arts.

"Thank God for my late mother who encouraged me greatly," Rita says, "Even my two sisters indirectly encouraged me by having me perform for their friends when I was young. I have never wanted to be anything but what I am today."

While the actress, unlike most in the industry, was fortunate enough to have her acting credentials

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Despite limited budgets, resources and time ("Sometimes you would shoot in the hot sun for hours, change costumes, get your make up done, eat and rest in the car just to get the work done. You had very little time to rehearse or memorise your lines but you had to deliver once the director yelled action.") Rita is keen to stress "those of us who had passion for the arts didn't really see things as challenges. We were happy to work 24 hours just to make a career out of it."

And a career was built in the 12 years (out of which she only had two off) following Rita's first

certified with a diploma, it wasn't a walk in the park to success and stardom. "I had to make my own way in this industry when I first started. Then, we had no mobile phones so we depended on word of mouth to get information about jobs and auditions," she reminisces, "I remember I would spend my last Naira to get to an audition or meet with a producer only to find out that the job was gone because I did not get the message in time. When

role in 1998's *Children of Terror* through "sheer hard work, passion, dedication and the grace of God" – the key essentials, according to Rita, "anybody coming [into the industry] must have in order to survive" alongside "plenty of patience" and the knowledge that "making it to the top is only 50% of the work, the other 50% is working hard to stay on top and not losing your soul while you are there."

"So stay well away from the casting couch?" I tease the actress; her response is typically Rita, typically blunt: "It is no different than it is in other areas of Nigeria where men constantly try to take advantage of their positions of power to get sexual favours. The thing is that some women in our society have become so used to being used that way they offer their bodies even before they have been asked."

Having not only grafted to get to the top but staying there and proving her longevity, Rita Dominic is one of the most noted actors in Nollywood – a status acknowledged by a generation of change makers when she was granted audience – as part of the Light Up Nigeria movement, alongside a certain Mr. Jonathan to discuss how the Nigerian film industry can create opportunities for Nigeria's youth.

"There are so many jobs related to making a 'quality' movie which needs lots of people to put it together," Rita explains, "Young people tend to gravitate towards our industry and you can keep them off the unemployment circle by putting them to work. I am not asking for government money, but for them to help us put structures and laws in place and enforce those laws. It is like dragging teeth to get any of the government agencies to even help and I learned this the hard way while producing *The Meeting*. And yet these agencies were created to help us."

It was not only the scarcity of support from government agencies but also the challenge of juggling acting with co-producing that made *The Meeting* – "a romantic comedy with a conscience" in Rita's words – that proved a test as the actress

took on producing for the first time. "It was very tough wearing two caps in a production and I'm still deciding if it's something I want to do often," Rita says – but somehow, going by Mildred's words, I feel she may have just pulled it off.

The Meeting, of course, is not the only project Rita has recently wrapped, as she is still recovering from a gruelling schedule filming in Kenya with Carol Nguta. "I tell you that film stretched me till I almost dropped," Rita says. "It is based on a true story about this young girl from a middle class family who had been molested from the age of three by men who were supposed to be protecting her. I had never played that kind of role and I had to go very deep to pull out some acting demons to play this character. There were days I would get back to my hotel room crying for this character Keziah, knowing that there are young women going through the same thing. By the time we were done I had nothing else to give."

Fortunately the experience of shooting in Kenya proved much more uplifting than the story line. "Kenya is a lovely country and I feel so much at home there. They even had me speaking Swahili in the film," Rita muses. While there, the actress also had the chance to do a charity walk with the paraplegic association in Kenya. "It opened my eyes to the challenges they face in Africa. Now, I want to work in that area in Nigeria, but it's proving difficult finding a comparable association like the one in Kenya. I would love to help raise awareness for such an association and also advocate for laws that make our society conducive for paraplegics."

Notoriously private about her charitable acts, the actress is keen to lend her name to a worthy cause or even one day establish her own foundation. "The truth is that I wish I could have one right now but I am not yet ready for it," she admits, "When I start a foundation, I want to involve credible and competent

experts to make sure that we truly achieve our goals."

Another part of her life that is sealed tightly shut is her private life. "Over the years I have learnt to keep my private life to myself because that is the one piece that is remaining and I guard it jealously. I am a loyal person and I have little tolerance for people who betray that loyalty," she says, explaining the reasons behind her discretion.

"Is it more difficult to be in a relationship when you have reached a certain level of fame, or does the yardstick of the kind of men who can handle that sort of fame change?" I pry gently. "You may be right on both observations," Rita responds graciously, "At the end of the day, you want the man in your life to be able to understand and handle well the things that go with being in the public eye. The man has to be strong to understand the ever-changing demands of the profession. I've come to realise that there is no ideal partner. The idea is to fall in love and be loved by a man that is willing to make you happy and that you are also willing to make happy."

With that little insight into Rita's perspective on love, it's back to the business of Nollywood. With over a hundred movies on her acting resume, Rita can afford the luxury of being picky and choose to work on productions that either will add to her acting credentials or will in some way contribute to the bigger picture that is the Nigerian film industry. "New Nollywood is about improving the quality of films so that anybody in the world can watch without compromising their standards. We will soon be competing on the world platform," she states with conviction.

And as for Rita Dominic, one of the pioneers of the Old Nollywood Order who is now busy cementing the way to international recognition for New Nollywood? "Hopefully I will still be on your big and small screens breathing life to new characters as I am still creating the reel of my career highlights," she assures us. If the last 12 years are anything to go by, we're in for a long

FAB Qs:

FAB movie of all times?

■ *The Usual Suspects*, *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and my Nollywood classic *Living in Bondage*.

FAB line/scene from a movie?

■ The reveal scene in *The Usual Suspects*.

FAB dream co-star?

■ Male Johnny Depp, female Angelina Jolie.

FAB dream producer/director to work with?

■ In Hollywood, Steven Spielberg, Quentin Tarantino; in Nollywood, Izu Ozukwu, Tchidi Chikere. Mildred Okwo.

FAB shoot destination?

■ Kauai in Hawaii.

FAB read?

■ Anything Chimamanda [Ngozi Adichie] writes I will read.

FAB designer?

■ Michael Kors; there are too many talented African designers to pick just one.

FAB way to relax?

■ Clear waters, white sands, exotic foods.

FAB African dish?

■ Afang soup.

FAB thing about being African?

■ Whatever "it" is, we have "IT"; plus Africa is the continent of the future.

reel of blockbusters and box office hits. After all there are actresses, then there are actresses **FAB**



“New
Nollywood
is about
improving
the quality of films
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We will soon be
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world platform.”

■ Pink Dress: Total Wrap Boutique - POR | Belt: Total Wrap Boutique - POR | Daffodile 160mm Christian Louboutin Pumps: Rita's own | Telephone: Retrospective Shop - POR