

TAMYRA GRAY

words: Diana McClure | photo: Smallz and Raskind

It's more than good looks that has gotten Tamyra Gray where she is today. And where is that you ask? An album on deck with Universal Music and her first film, *The Gospel*, in theatres in October. Gray gets her acting feet wet opposite an all-star cast that includes Idris Elba, Nona Gaye, Omar Gooding, Fred Hammond, Boris Kodjoe and gospel superstar, Donnie McClurkin. Gray also enjoyed a successful stint on Broadway last year in the musical *Bombay Dreams*, and has a new H&M Clothing commercial currently playing in both Europe and the US, directed by creative craftsman, David LaChapelle. As I spoke to Gray while she prepped for her sexy *UNleashed* photo shoot, it was clear that she's all fire! This Leo's talent, determination, and faith, along with the ability to work a camera to death, have put her in a position to solidify herself as an entertainer with appeal, integrity and longevity, not just another *American Idol* runner-up.

Her spirit is strong and magnetic. For this reason, LaChapelle knew that Gray was the one for the H&M Clothing commercial despite his production team's desire for someone with a higher profile. Gray shut down all her detractors on the LaChapelle project, showing her skills as a multi-talented entertainer, dancing, singing, acting and modeling for the spot. On working with LaChapelle, Gray says, "His energy, his spirit, his focus, his attention to detail...he's on it. That's why he's so great. It was just an incredible experience."

After years of hard work, record deal teases under the tutelage of the late Lisa "Left Eye" Lopes, and watching her peers sign record deals long before her star began to shine, Gray's faith remained strong, but not without some hard times. Even Gray's mom threatened to kick her out of the house when the Hollywood dreams seemed unobtainable. Of this period in her journey Gray says, "It's such a hard life, just trying to get a record deal and trying to get into entertainment in general, that you want to give up. It's designed for you to give up. Praying and believing that God would not have given me my talent for me not to be able to use it is what helped me get through it."

But prayers are answered and blessings do come; and for Gray, not just in her career. Although she has yet to speak publicly about her pending nuptials, Tamyra was recently engaged. She gets bashful and giggly when she says, "He's the best!" Obviously, he's keeping her happy. She adds, "He writes me poems. He's just super romantic. He's not afraid to tell me or show me that he loves me."

On filming *The Gospel* she says, "It was great working with Boris. He was the nicest person ever and was very helpful in getting me along with my scenes." Gray appreciates the opportunity that film provides to develop a character. In the future she would like to work with Morgan Freeman; an actor she describes as "one of the best of our time."