

Tatyana Ali

Contributed by Chris Yandek
 Thursday, 24 April 2008
 Last Updated Sunday, 29 August 2010

Tatyana Ali is all grown up from her teen years as Ashley Banks on the Fresh Prince of Bel Air

For all the stories you hear of child actors going bad when they get to adulthood, Tatyana Ali is not one of them. The 29-year-old actress and singer best known for her role as Ashley Banks on the Fresh Prince of Bel Air decided to go to college after the hit NBC show ended. She enrolled at Harvard University and in 2002 received a degree in Anthropology. Today she is working on her latest album The Light that will be out later this year and you will see her in the soon to be released flick Hotel California besides her work this election cycle. Ali admits she'd love to do Dancing with the Stars, has sympathy for Lindsay Lohan, and that the Fresh Prince of Bel Air cast are all still very close among other things.

Listen to the Tatyana Ali Interview<http://thesportsinterview.com/mp3/Tati.mp3>{/audio}

Chris Yandek: How is life going? We haven't seen as much of you in the mainstream in recent years.

Tatyana Ali: "Yeah. Life is good. It's going really good."

CY: I understand you are working on your latest CD that will be released later this year, correct?

TA: "Yeah. Exactly. It's called The Light. I am working with a producer Johnnie J and he is responsible for a lot of Tupac's music. It's like kind of hard hitting hip hop beats, but the music is R&B, soul, pop. I am really excited about it. I am writing this album myself so I am real excited to have people hear it and see what everybody thinks."

CY: What is the sound like or what should people expect from it?

TA: "R&B. Soul. You definitely could call it alternative R&B. Definitely pop. Everything from dance songs to ballads to mid tempo songs. I am just talking about my life in general. What I've been going through. What's happened since the last album which is a lot."

CY: On the acting side you star in Hotel California alongside Tyson Beckford. Can you tell me about the project and any idea when it is expected to be released?

TA: "Yeah. They're finding the distributor as we speak. It's an independent film. It's definitely an artsy movie. It's different from anything than I've ever done before. It's a dark movie, a thriller revenge story. My character goes through a lot. It's a deviation from the work I'm better known for in comedy. I am really excited about that movie."

CY: When it comes to politics you've also been lending your hand to Barack Obama's campaign as well as doing registration drives through the United States. Tell me about why it was important for you to be involved in this election?

TA: "I feel like there is a candidate out there that is very special, completely different from other candidates before him. It's my first time volunteering in a campaign. I got a chance to speak to him, and to hear him speak in person, and to hear his wife speak in person. You get the vibe that they really actually want to help, that they're not just career politicians. They're not just in it to win. They're in it to make things better. Especially with voter registration and for young people I've been going to colleges all over the country. My parents are immigrants. I am the first generation born here and it's an amazing blessing. It's an amazing freedom we have here to be able to vote and be part of the process. I think a lot of times we do get apathetic and feel like we can't change anything. It's so important for us to be involved in the system otherwise you can't complain when things go wrong you know?"

CY: Yeah. I agree with that. How would you contextualize the campaign of Barack Obama so far?

TA: "It's historic for a lot of reasons. He is very much a reformer. I think one thing that is incredible about his campaign is that it is so grass roots. When he graduated from Harvard Law School at the top his class, he could've gone anywhere making six figures. Instead he went to the South side of Chicago and was a civil rights organizer there. He knows something I think other candidates don't know which is change comes from bottom up. You have to get the people excited. He's doing that. He talks about hope. He talks about dreaming big. I think that's important. I think that the cynicism that we usually hear and we usually see – I think we've had enough of that."

CY: You were on a hit TV show. You made your life on a hit TV show. You made the transition from the childhood actress to the adult actress. Was the transition hard for you after the Fresh Prince of Bel Air looking at your future in the entertainment industry?

TA: "Actually, not really. Obviously it matters what other people think. I am in entertainment, but I was more concerned with the work. Right after Fresh Prince of Bel Air, I got my first album Kiss The Sky and it did really well. My single "Daydreaming" did very well. I toured around the world and around the country and then I decided to go to college. I've been lucky. I've always worked. That time that it seems I kind of disappeared and took off actually was when I was in school."

CY: The fact that you went and got a degree from Harvard after the show, did you decide that you were going to have those college years and that social experience was something that was important to you no matter where you ended up?

TA: "Yeah. I did because it's so important. It's something nobody can take away from you. Beyond that, I don't know. Getting to really know yourself in life it kind of really doesn't matter what job you get or what jobs you don't. It's empowering. You feel like it's ok to go on your own path."

CY: What do you think it was for you besides that; that made you keep it altogether and avoid what many of these other child stars have gone through?

TA: "Oh my gosh, my family, cause they would not stand for that. I'd be locked up somewhere in my grandma's house. (Both laugh) They would've sent me to Trinidad for a year, like get it together. It's definitely my parents. They don't – even though I was making money when I was young and working, I wasn't treated any differently from my two middle sisters. I still had chores to do when I got home. I was still able to be a child. The way my family feels they want me to be happy. Being famous? That is not really the important thing."

CY: What is your take from someone who is a fellow actress/singer with what happened with Lindsay Lohan this past year? I am sure she had similar experiences to you growing up in this industry. What did you make of all this craziness?

TA: "I don't know. I feel like it's sad. So much about it is sad. The way we feed off it is sad especially young women. These are young women. I don't know. I kind of feel like everybody else I am sure like I wish I was her friend. I'd tell her whoa we don't have to go and hang out. Lets just hang out at home, watch movies and paint our nails. It will be cool. We don't have to go to the club tonight."

CY: Looking back at the Fresh Prince of Bel Air, what was your take on Will Smith's career and did you just say to yourself that this guy is going to be something special? Was it easy for you to see early on or are you surprised still by the things he does?

TA: "Oh my gosh! He constantly gets better and better and better. He is always setting the goal higher and higher and higher for himself, which is so cool to see. He definitely has that thing, that personality. Just the drive and the spirit and he is a really good person. One thing that's awesome about him is that all the people he was working with even Jazzy Jeff on the Fresh Prince he is still working with today. I mean yeah. Not surprised at all. Really happy for him."

CY: Do you still keep in contact with him?

TA: "Yeah, Everybody from Fresh Prince. We are there for each other for weddings, births, and when babies are born. Yes."

CY: Is there a day that goes by when you say I'd love to work with Will again. I'd to love work with some of the other [Fresh Prince of Bel Air] cast in other projects?

TA: "Oh absolutely. We have so much fun together. We had so much fun that I worked on other shows since then and you kind of get spoiled. It was special in a lot of ways. Not just the work that we made, but also the feeling making it."

CY: Would you ever consider doing Dancing with the Stars?

TA: "(Laughs) You know what? I think I would because, ok, this is a really stupid reason, but everybody comes off this looking so good. You realize that?"

CY: Yes.

TA: "Everybody comes out totally buff. I wouldn't mind that and I really like dancing. I love to dance. I think I'd be fun."

CY: Tatyana you look great. I haven't seen a recent picture of you, but I am sure you look great. Better than the average looking woman in America so I would say to myself when looking at you that Tatyana Ali is a beautiful, smart, educated, talented individual.

TA: "Oh! Thank you Chris."

CY: In closing tell me something else that's going on in your life that we might not know about?

TA: "Well, I have actually been working on Young and the Restless. I have a reoccurring role. It's my first time on daytime television. Her name is Roxanne. It's a lot fun. I am having a really good time in Genoa City. That's pretty much it. You kind of touched on everything."

CY: You do have a My Space that's keeping the guys informed on the music as well correct?

TA: "Yeah I do. My url is www.myspace.com/tatyali. I know a lot of my space sites use my name, but mine isn't really a glossy picture. It's actually a picture of me and my sister working at the campaign headquarters for Obama. We're on the phone. It's not a glossy 8 x 10, sexy shot, or anything like that."

CY: And you are continuing to go through the USA spreading voter awareness and you're going to do this through the entire general election cycle as well?

TA: "Yeah. Sure. I'd love to. I am a volunteer. I also make phone calls and canvass neighborhoods and knocking on doors. Anywhere they need me to go I go."

CY: Thanks for joining me today. We'll have to do this again soon, thanks for the memories, and nice to see what is going on with you.

TA: "Thank you Chris! It was nice to meet you."

You can check out Tatyana's official website at <http://www.tatyanaonline.com/>

Her official My Space page is: <http://www.myspace.com/tatyali>