

## Rashida's rhapsody

Written by Kam Williams

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Born in L.A. on February 25, 1976, Rashida Leah Jones is the younger daughter of jazz icon/composer/arranger/record producer Quincy Jones and actress Peggy Lipton of *Mod Squad* fame. Rashida was raised in Bel Air and attended the prestigious Buckley School where she was a member of the National Honor Society and voted the “Girl Most Likely to Succeed.” The academic overachiever also received religious training at a Hebrew school en route to Harvard University, and she continues to practice Judaism today.

Not one to shrink away from controversy, the brainy beauty came to the defense of her father as a teenager when he was criticized by Tupac Shakur in a 1994 interview with *Source Magazine*. During a rant against interracial relationships, the late gangsta’ rapper specifically indicted Quincy Jones for marrying a white woman, adding that his children were “all mixed and [expletive] up because they were biracial.”

Although some might question the wisdom of even getting into a pissing fight with a gun-toting, convicted felon who advocated selling crack to kids, Rashida nonetheless summoned up the gumption to confront Tupac, publicly taking him to task for his scathing remarks. His curious response, however, was to woo her big sister, Kidada, and by 1996 the couple was engaged and planning their wedding when ‘Pac was blown away in an ambush which remains unsolved to this day.

The next year, Rashida graduated from Harvard before kick-starting her acting career in the TV miniseries *The Last Don*. Since then, she’s been a staple on the tube, appearing on such shows as *Freaks and Geeks*, *Boston Public*, *Chappelle’s Show*, and most recently, *The Office*. And her new sitcom,

*Parks and Recreation*

, where she will co-star opposite SNL alum Amy Poehler, is set to premiere on NBC on April 9th.

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Although twice named to *People Magazine's* 50 Most Beautiful People in the World list (in 2002 and 2007), Rashida remains grounded, having been romantically linked not only to heartthrob Josh Hartnett, but also to relatively homely-looking guys like Tobey Maguire, SNL's Seth Meyers, Mark Ronson, and John Krasinski, a fellow cast member on *The Office*

Here, she talks about her new movie, *I Love You, Man*, a romantic comedy where she plays the fiancée of a nerdy loner (Paul Rudd) desperate to make a friend (Jason Segel) to serve as best man at their impending wedding.

**KW:** Hey Rashida, thanks for the time.

**RJ:** No problem.

**KW:** What interested you in making *I Love You, Man*?

**RJ:** First of all, the script was hilarious, and it was just really nice to find a female character that was dynamic, outspoken, interesting and actually an important part of the plot.

**KW:** How did you feel about the picture's bawdy brand of humor?

**RJ:** I'm not easily offended. I have a pretty high tolerance for raunchiness or shock value, so I'm the wrong person to use as a gauge. I just liked the fact that the comedy, for the most part, is definitely based in reality which naturally lends itself to making crazy jokes.

**KW:** I'm probably a little more prudish than the average person, because I will admit that at the screening I attended, the rest of the audience was howling from beginning to end, and they even gave it a hearty round of applause at the end. I loved it, too, but I was certainly shocked here and there.

**RJ:** That's great!

**KW:** How did you like working with Paul Rudd and Jason Segel?

**RJ:** They're both absolutely just the most generous, kind and hilarious people I've ever worked with. It was really a treat.

**KW:** I see that your new sitcom, *Parks and Recreation*, will be premiering soon. Will you continue to appear on *The Office*?

**RJ:** It's not looking that way at the moment, because I'm playing a different character, and those shows are scheduled to come on back-to-back.

**KW:** You've got a new movie and a new TV show. Which medium do you prefer to work in?

**RJ:** It's nice to be able to do both TV and film. They both have their advantages and disadvantages. Hopefully, I'll be able to bounce around in both.

**KW:** I was very impressed by your performance and chemistry with Paul in this film. So, if it's a big hit, as I suspect, I'd guess this is going to be a real breakout role for you.

**RJ:** Thank you. I hope that that's the case. If not, at the very least, I'm really proud of it. I think it turned out really well.

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**KW:** I know that you also sing. Any plans to pursue that further right now?

**RJ:** Music will always be a part of my life, but career-wise, acting is where my heart is.

**KW:** I heard that you have a photographic memory. Is that true?

**RJ:** No. I don't know where that came from. I think my dad might have said that in a moment of pride, adding to the list of things he's proud about.

**KW:** Speaking of your father, is there any truth to the rumor that he was the taxi driver for the Fresh Prince of Bel Air?

**RJ:** No, that's not true. Who told you that?

**KW:** My son, who knows every episode inside and out. It sure looks a lot like your Dad in that opening sequence. And his name comes up as executive producer right after the cabbie's seen on the screen. [ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F4BQxpXYPk8&feature=related> ]

**RJ:** I know.

**KW:** Incredible! I always thought that I had a piece of inside knowledge that the cab driver was Quincy Jones. But you would know. Do you think the actor even looks like your Dad?

**RJ:** Kind of. I can't really remember, but kind of.

**KW:** I've always told people that it's Quincy Jones, but I guess I've been wrong all these years.

**RJ:** I don't know, maybe I'm wrong.

**KW:** Well, it'll be interesting Googling to get to the bottom of it now. You've made *People Magazine*'s 50 Most Beautiful People twice, five years apart, most recently in 2007. How does that feel?

**RJ:** It feels really nice. Maybe I'm getting better with age.

**KW:** What I find just as interesting is you're making *Harper's Bazaar's* Best Dressed List.

**RJ:** Yes, thank you.

**KW:** How would you describe your sense of style?

**RJ:** I like to wear what makes me feel great, which can mean the color, or that the fit's right, or that it's just an interesting piece of clothing. I like to change it up.

**KW:** Do you have favorite designers?

**RJ:** I do have designers that I love to wear, like Philip Lim and Marc Jacobs whose stuff I know will look good on my body. But still, I always like to express myself by changing things up.

**KW:** What was the idea behind that series of hilarious public service announcements you and Natalie Portman made together? I saw them on youtube. [ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7xT3eiX35w&feature=related> ]

**RJ:** It was right before the election, and we went to the writers of Funny or Die because we basically wanted to do something poking fun at those political commercials which we felt were way too serious. So, we decided to do something really stupid.

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**KW:** How do you feel about Obama's winning?

**RJ:** I'm elated! That was the only hope we had left in this country. It made me feel really proud to be an American for the first time in a long time.

**KW:** In terms of Judaism, are you Orthodox, Conservative or Reformed? Do you keep a kosher kitchen?

**RJ:** No, I do not keep kosher. I grew up reformed. I never had my bat mitzvah, but I still practice and go to synagogue on high holidays.

**KW:** Who are you inviting to your Seder this year at Passover?

**RJ:** You know, I don't have a Seder. I always have to piggyback on somebody else's. I'll probably go to my friend's parents' house.

**KW:** I'm not Jewish, but I wrote a piece about a Seder I was invited to that looked like the United Nations, since they had invited a motley group of people of every color, creed and ethnicity. There were more Gentiles there than Jews.

**RJ:** How nice. That's real the spirit of Passover.

**KW:** What was the source of your beef with Tupac?

**RJ:** He did this interview in *The Source* Magazine in which he started ripping on interracial relationships, saying that they ruined the Black race and stuff like that. I got pretty irate and frustrated, so I wrote him an open letter.

**KW:** When he was murdered, did the police come to speak to you?

**RJ:** No.

**KW:** Just kidding. How did you feel when your sister, Kidada, started dating him?

**RJ:** He apologized a lot, but we had to work through it.

**KW:** Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

**RJ:** That's a good question, but no, I can't come up with an answer to that, because I'm so used to being asked everything. [Chuckles]

**KW:** The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

**RJ:** That's really sweet. Yes, I actually am happy. Thank you for asking.

**KW:** The Laz Alonso question: Is there anything your fans can do to help you?

**RJ:** Not for me particularly, but something that irks me is the crazy, stalker-ish, aspects of this voyeuristic culture. People are never really satiated by looking at celebrities whose lives have nothing to do with their own. It's just supporting this really awful culture where people are being harassed and stalked every day, every minute of the day. I don't think that's what people bargained for when they decided to become an actor or singer. It can start with people not supporting that tabloid culture.

**KW:** That's probably why the WASP philosophy is that your name should only appear in the paper twice, when you're born, and when you die.

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**RJ:** There you go. I like that. That's a very good philosophy, but I think I'm way beyond that now. [Laughs]

**KW:** The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

**RJ:** Yeah, definitely. I'm afraid of roaches.

**KW:** Then don't move to Manhattan.

**RJ:** I know. I've lived in New York, so I already went through that.

**KW:** The "Realtor to the Stars" Jimmy Bayan question: Where in L.A. do you live?

**RJ:** I live in L.A., but I'd rather not say where.

**KW:** I understand. Teri Emerson would like to know, when was the last time you had a good belly laugh?

**RJ:** During the entire filming of *I Love You, Man*. It was incredible how much I got to laugh on the set.

**KW:** The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

**RJ:** I am reading this book called *Human Smoke* by Nicholson Baker. It's an account of the events leading up to World War II from different perspectives of people around the world.

**KW:** What was it like growing up with such talented and well-known parents?

**RJ:** I don't know what it's like to not grow up with that because I don't have the other experience. But my parents made a concerted and effective effort to really keep us normal. I had a wonderfully loving, supportive and sheltered childhood, so it never really occurred to me that that was an issue until I went to college.

**KW:** How did you like Harvard?

**RJ:** It was great. I had a wonderful experience there.

**KW:** Have you ever traced your ancestry?

**RJ:** Yeah, my dad had our family tree done a long time ago. My great-great grandmother on one side was a slave. We were able to trace our ancestry back through her owner's lover and her owner who gave her his last name. On the slave owner side, there was a long lineage which included American presidents and Winston Churchill. I don't know a lot about my mom's side, but she's Irish- Jewish on one side, and Russian-Polish-Jewish on the other side.

**KW:** The music maven Heather Covington question: What music are you listening to nowadays?

**RJ:** I'm a big Kanye West fan. And I really like this singer/songwriter named Bon Iver.

**KW:** What was the biggest obstacle you've had to overcome in life?

**RJ:** I would say dealing with sickness and death.

**KW:** I'm sorry to hear that. Thanks again for the interview, Rashida, and best of luck with both the new movie and new TV show.

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**RJ:** Thank you.