

Oscar-Worthy!

Written by Kam Williams

Mo’Nique Imes was born on December 11, 1967 in Baltimore which is where she started her showbiz career as a stand-up comedienne on a dare a couple of decades ago. From there, she gained visibility and immense popularity with performances on “Showtime at the Apollo,” HBO’s “Def Comedy Jam,” “Apollo Comedy Hour” HBO’s “Snaps,” BET’s “Comic View,” The Montreal Comedy Festival and Uptown Comedy Club.

Her big break arrived in 1999 when she landed a starring role on the television series, “The Parkers.” During the show’s five-year run, Mo’Nique earned numerous awards, including four NAACP Image Awards as the Outstanding Actress in a Comedy Series. Her film credits include Welcome Home Roscoe Jenkins, Two Can Play That Game, Hair Show, Three Strikes, Baby Boy, Beerfest, Phat Girlz, Soul Plane, Irish Jam, Domino and Shadowboxer.

As a voluptuous role model for Rubenesque females Mo-Nique wrote the best-selling book “Skinny Women Are Evil,” as well as an equally-funny follow-up entitled “Skinny Cooks Can’t Be Trusted.” She also created, produced and emceed “Mo’Nique’s F.A.T. Chance,” America’s first, full-figured, reality beauty pageant. Struck by the skyrocketing number of women behind bars, she brought her act to a prison to tape a comedy special called “I Coulda Been Your Cellmate” which aired on TV before later being released on DVD. Then, she delved further into the issue as the host of “Mo’Nique: Behind Bars” for the Oxygen television network.

Here, she talks about “The Mo’Nique Show,” her new late-night talk show on BET, and about her Oscar-worthy performance in Precious, Lee Daniels’ spellbinding screen adaptation of Sapphire’s novel, “Push.”

Kam Williams: Hi Mo’Nique, thanks so much for the time.

Mo’Nique: Hey Kam! Thank you, baby!

KW: Congratulations on the new TV show.

M: Thank you!

KW: How would you describe the format? How are you dividing the time among monologues, interviews, and musical and other performances?

M: I can’t give you those numbers, baby, because the show is so unpredictable. We’re just having a great time.

KW: What interested you in doing a talk show?

M: Well, I’ve always wanted to do a talk show. That was the whole focus from the very beginning. First, I thought it’d be like Oprah Winfrey, but the comedienne in me wouldn’t let me do that. So, when my husband [Sidney Hicks] and I spoke with Loretha Jones [BET’s President of Programming], we said, “We want to do late-night. We want to have a party.”

KW: Speaking of partying, you were recently spotted in Manhattan partying at Nick Ashford and Valerie Simpson’s Sugar Bar with Lee Daniels, Andre’ Leon Talley and some other folks. Did you have fun?

M: I had a blast, Kam. When you go to the Sugar Bar, the kid in you truly comes out.

KW: When you mentioned Oprah, it reminded me that I told my readers I’d be interviewing you. And one of them, Laz Lyles, was wondering how much it means to you to have Oprah personally get behind the film in such a strong way.

M: It was a pleasure. She’s a powerhouse. She’s Oprah Winfrey. You know what that means. So, when she said, “I dig this,” I was very appreciative of it.

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KW: Attorney Bernadette Beekman asks, how do you do it? You're already a mother, actress, author and comedienne, and now adding late night TV host. So, she wants to know how you keep sane and healthy and how you manage to juggle everything.

M: There is a great group of people that surrounds me, starting with my husband, who is my business partner and executive producer of the talk show. With our assistants and our staff in our home, we have a great team. So please believe me, I'd love to say, "Oh honey, I'm a superwoman!" But I'm so far from being a superwoman. It's all the people who surround us are what make Mo'Nique work.

KW: Laz also asks, was it hard for you not to take you character home with you at the end of the day when you were shooting Precious?

M: It wasn't hard at all. We left it on the stage. When Lee said "Cut!" that's what it was.

KW: Schoolteacher Erik Daniels says he really enjoyed I Coulda Been Your Cellmate, your stand-up show shot inside a women's prison. He's curious about whether you've stayed in touch with any of the inmates you met.

M: Tell him, that to my surprise, when I was at the Sugar Bar the other night, I bumped into a woman who was in that prison when I was there. We hugged so tight, and she introduced me to her son.

KW: Erik also wants to know if you have plans to do something like that again.

M: I don't think I'll do another one, because I think it was special in the moment for all of us.

KW: Marcia Evans says that she wants you to know that this fan of yours gained more respect for you after your opening up to Oprah about the sexual and emotional abuse that happened to you. Just let her know that I'm so proud of her stepping up. She goes on to say, "I want Monique to know that she has probably healed some women by sharing her truth. Monique you are looking beautiful!" I guess she didn't exactly have a question.

M: Well, tell that baby, thank you very much!

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

M: [Laughs] No!

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

M: No.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

M: Have you ever seen a light bulb when it's at its brightest but getting ready to burn out?

KW: Yeah.

M: That's how I feel.

KW: I can understand, between the new TV show and the movie. I was totally blown away by your performance when I saw Precious. And I've never heard so much Oscar-buzz so far in advance of a picture's release. Everybody's been talking about your Academy Award -worthy performance since last January when the film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. How do you feel about all the buzz?

M: You know what? I'm excited about any buzz. I was excited when Lee Daniels first called me up. Just for the movie's message to be told, that's where the real excitement comes in for me.

KW: Bookworm Troy Johnson wants to know, what was the last book you read?

M: Oh my God, I love Troy for that question. I just completed Diahann Carroll's "The Legs Are the Last to Go." Kam, after reading that book in three days, I have such respect for that woman. Oh my God! That book will blow you away, because she's so brutally honest about who she is. It's incredible!

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0060763272?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&ca>

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

M: The last thing I listened to was Whitney Houston at about 6 this morning. I'm also listening to Maxwell a lot, but I'm really excited right now for Whitney.

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

M: Kam, my favorite dish to cook is macaroni and cheese.

KW: The Laz Alonso question: How can your fans help you?

M: By realizing that they're not my fans, but my bosses. I want them to know that I'm just as excited as they are when they ask for an autograph or take a picture with me, because I'm still that little girl who used to practice in the mirror.

KW: Speaking of mirrors, when you look in the mirror, what do you see?

M: [Laughs] I see somebody, baby, that's full of life. I see somebody that still has a lot more growing to do and is willing to take it on. I see somebody that the universe said to her, "We're going to give you this and see how you deal with it." I see somebody who has an incredible husband, amazing kids and great people around her. So, when I look in that mirror, I be like, "For real?"

KW: The Flex Alexander question: How do you get through the tough times?

M: Bless my brother Flex's heart. Fortunately, I don't have no tough times.

KW: Thanks again, Mo'Nique and I'm expecting to be congratulating you on your Oscar, the next time I speak to you.

M: Thank you so much, Kam. Bless your heart, sugar.

To order a copy of Mo'Nique's book, "Skinny Women Are Evil," visit: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001PO6A0Y?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B001PO6A0Y>

To order a copy of Mo'Nique's book, "Skinny Cooks Can't Be Trusted," visit:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0061121053?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=0061121053>

To order a copy of Mo'Nique's DVD, I Coulda Been Your Cellmate, visit:

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000MQ4WL0?ie=UTF8&tag=thslfofire-20&linkCode=as2&camp=1789&creative=390957&creativeASIN=B000MQ4WL0>

To see a trailer for Precious, visit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b5FYahzVU44>