

* Southeast Stylings: Northeast Flair

Putting DC in a 'Choke' Hold

ARTICLE BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN | PHOTOS BY SHAN 'TA MONROE

During this past summer, visual artist Marina "Choke" Munoz had seen advertisements for the Summer Spirit Festival in Maryland, which featured such popular neo-soul acts such as Erykah Badu and Raphael Saadiq. One of the things that stood out to Choke was that there was going to be an artist market on site during the concert.

"I knew I had to find out how to get my work out to that festival, so I decided to make some phone calls. Finally, after a valid number was found, I took all of my work to this show and met tons of great artists. The coordinator for this show was Juanita Britton – better known as Busy Bee. She owns the Anacostia Art Gallery and Boutique in DC (2806 Bruce Place SE). Since that show in Maryland, we have since built on a great relationship. She is not only a great inspiration to me, but many folks in this area."

Who is Choke?

Upon meeting Choke, her intensity is immediately apparent. Marina "Choke" Munoz, 22, is the epitome of the artist on the grind, often seen in a flurry with her canvases under her arm or toting around artistic gems she's created, whether it's the butterfly-adorned journals or the mirrors meticulously detailed with Choke's signature use of the color palette – bold colors that reflect her Puerto Rican heritage – bright greens, oranges and deep red hues.

Whether she is doing live art – painting on display while some form of entertainment is taking place – or setting up shop at a local festival to sell her artistic creations, Choke is taking care of business. She has been in the East of the River area a lot this past summer – doing live art at the Capital Hip Hop Soul Fest and selling her wares, and engaged in numerous outdoors activities in the area all summer.

"I have a serious obsession for the sun," Choke gushes. "When I am out in the sun, I just want to paint. I love how the sun can take me back to the better times

in childhood, fun summers and living in Miami. Colorful memories like those are always inspiration for my creations."

In the Works

Choke has also submitted work to the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities to be considered as part of a team to do commissioned artwork for the new Benning and Anacostia libraries. A woman of many talents, she is always into something.

"I can't just choose one form of art to be my specialty," she admits. "I have a serious love and passion for photography, sculpting, painting and hair design."

Choke's eighth-grade art teacher in Alexandria, Va., told her that she had never seen such unique natural talent in her years of teaching. Choke loved to draw even then, and her artwork was often praised for its appearance of professional art. With her teacher's encouragement, she applied for a one-year scholarship to Duke Ellington School for Arts (there is a tuition requirement for non-DC residents) and was accepted. Spending a year at the prestigious school has been Choke's only formal training as an artist. Regardless, she is poised to make big moves in the coming year.

"I like to have tons of little goals, like 'Wake up' or 'Call Mom,' that way it makes me feel better when I look at my list and it looks like I've done a lot," Choke laughs. "But on a serious note, I'd like to set the bar high and say that in the next five years, I want to have opened the necessary doors that will allow me to bring my paintings to the next level and make them larger than life. I'd like to collaborate with all of my favorite artists, take my photography skills around the world, and I'd like to possibly acquire a gallery of my own. Think big and you will live even bigger."

Visit Choke's blog online at chokephotography.blogspot.com. Her work is currently exhibited in the exhibit "Celebration of Freedom" at the Potter's House, 1658 Columbia Road NW, Washington, DC. For inquiries, contact her at 571-278-8932. ★



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Marina "Choke" Munoz

Getting to Know VH-1 Reality Show's Wil 'Onix' Lash

Star of New Web Series 'Anacostia'

BY KHADIJAH ALI-COLEMAN

Reality-show junkies are all too familiar with the television menu of popular reality show fare. From the early days of the Real World series on MTV, we've fast forwarded to today's pop culture phenomenon of American Idol and reality shows that can be found on almost every network and cable channel. One star of reality television, Wil "Onix" Lash, 35, has seemingly easily transitioned from the controversy of reality television to the legitimate world of arts and entertainment that includes new projects and ongoing work.

Lash became known to viewers of the popular VH-1 reality television series "I Love New York," which featured Tiffany "New York" Pollard, a woman who had been rejected on the reality show "Flavor of Love." Pollard was given her own show to find love, and Lash was one of her suitors. Lash later appeared on the VH-1 reality series "I Love Money."

Muscular, charming and attractive, Lash is anything but the eager playboy that Pollard initially took him to be when she gave him the nickname "Onix," which he still uses as part of his stage name. Instead, Lash is a working performer, currently set to appear in upcoming features, and is a spokesperson for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

"I'm part of a team of 21 Northern Virginia and DC men and women who have joined efforts to work tirelessly to raise money for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the world's mission to find a cure for blood cancers," Lash writes on his MySpace page.

Lash spoke with East of the River newspaper to dish about his new work on the hot new Web series "Anacostia," which is shot in DC and is set in the east of the river community of Anacostia. He also shares a bit about his upcoming plans in entertainment.

EOR: Tell us about your character in the new Web series "Anacostia." Will we love him or hate him?

Wil: I play Scott Taylor. He's an average everyday man and loving husband. He's simple and hard working and just wants nothing

more than to raise a family with his wife. The viewers will empathize with this character. They may not agree with some of the choices he makes, yet they will possibly understand why he makes them.

EOR: Why should viewers tune in for this season of "Anacostia"?

Wil: Because it's hot! It's well-written, and there is a lot of talent associated with this project. You will be hooked. It's funny, it's sexy, and there's intrigue, suspense and mystery. It will definitely keep you coming back for more.

EOR: You are new to the DC area, what led you to this part of the country?

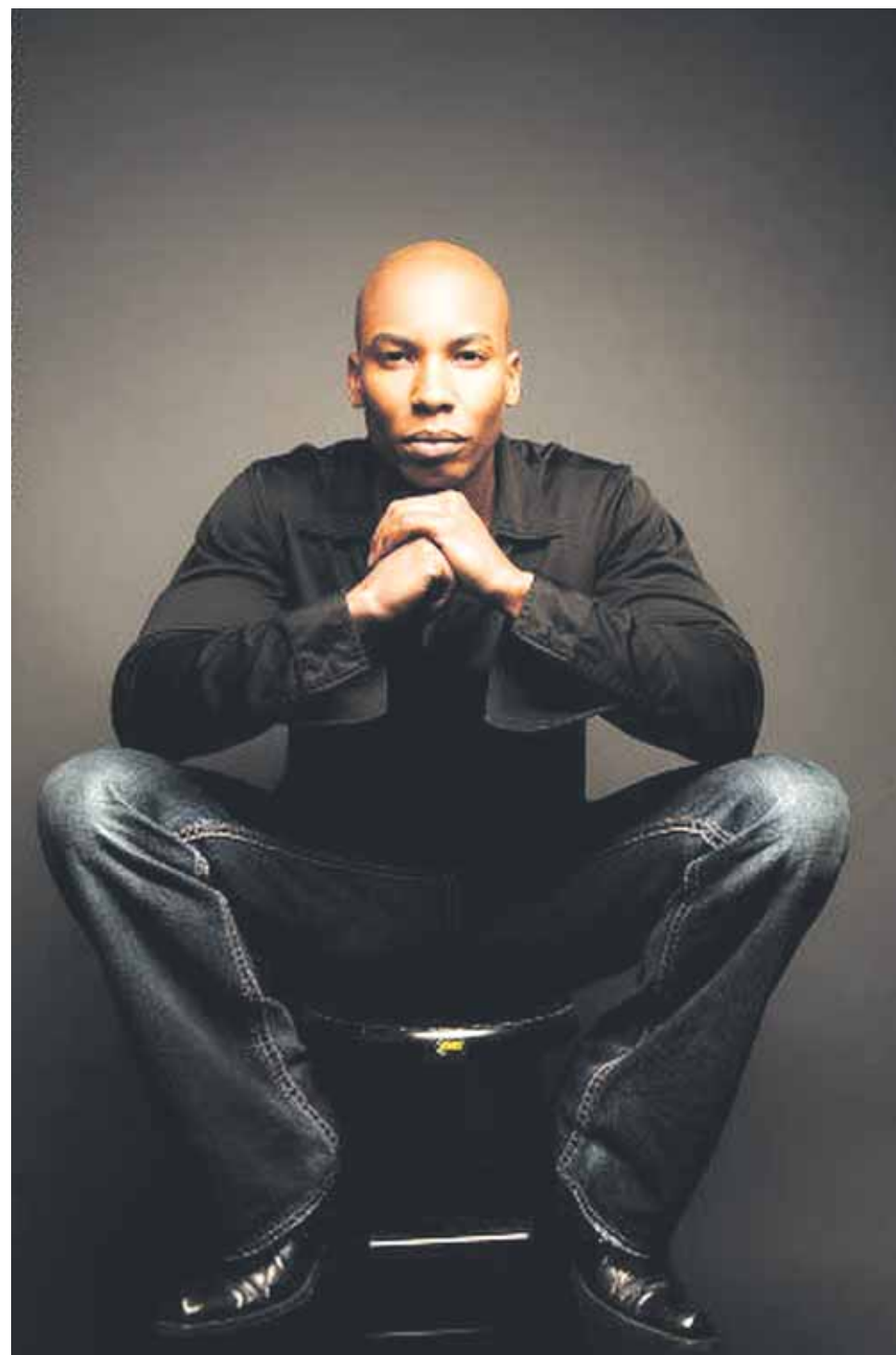
Wil: Well, I'm not all that new. I've been in the DC area almost eight years now. I relocated from Miami, Florida, for work. I'm a corporate recruiter by day. I'm originally from Indianapolis, Indiana, but spent the majority of my childhood in Mount Vernon, a small mid-western town in Southern, Illinois.

EOR: Many of us know you from the popular reality show "I Love New York." What was your most memorable moment from the show?

Wil: My most memorable moment was the night I walked out of that house. I was so happy to be eliminated. I couldn't take it anymore. Once I realized that there was no attraction or chemistry it was time for me to go, especially after Pootie had a nervous breakdown. I just wished that I had made a bigger scene when I left and said what was really on my mind.

EOR: What are some things we need to keep an eye and ear out for when it comes to Wil 'Onix' Lash?

Wil: Besides Anacostia, I'm working a project called "The Average Joe Movie Show." It's a movie critic show featuring four "average Joes" who watch crappy movies so that you don't have to. Even before "I Love New York," I was an actor and model. But I've always been a vocalist. I am featured on



Wil "Onix" Lash. ©Roy Cox Photography

two singles recently released. Both are collaborations with local rap artists. The first is called "Everything I Like" with the rap group Chop Shop Cartel. You can listen on my MySpace page at www.Myspace.com/TheRealOnix. The second is a track named "Showoff" with Rafael "RD" Diaz from his new album "Dreaming in Stereo."

Visit www.anacostia-thewebseries.com to view episodes of the show and in mid-October, Anacostia can be seen on DCTV in Washington DC on Comcast channels 95 and RCN Channel 10 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. You can listen, download and comment on Wil "Onix" Lash's new single Showoff with Rafael "RD" Diaz by visiting www.zshare.net/audio/6570532063325a8d. ★