

MAY/JUNE 2025

ISSUE 10

# ESCAPEMAG



## AFRICAN SCREEN STARS ON THE RISE

Inside Guguru's Powerhouse: Icons,  
Breakout-Acts & Game Changers



Uzor Arukwe | Omowunmi Dada | Jude Chukwuka | Najite Dede | Iremide Adeoye | Sharon Rotimi | Kanyin Eros | Obi Maduegbuna | Bizzle Osikoya | Akinola Davies Jr. | Wale Davies | Funmbi Ogunbanwo | Rowlene | Runda | Joshua Olusanya & More.



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# From the Editor

Issue 9 was a proud moment for us, one that saw EscapeMag reach a new milestone of over 60,000 reads, with fresh eyes, new subscribers, and a growing community of readers who care about African creativity. Thank you for showing up.

This new issue, our tenth, takes things further, offering something bold, rich, and from a different perspective.

For this edition, we partnered with Guguru Studios to spotlight their incredible lineup of talent as our cover stars. It was a major production. We brought the cast together for a dynamic studio shoot and one-on-one interviews, all in one unforgettable day. The energy was electric. On set were Omowunmi Dada, Uzor Arukwe (Odogwu), Jude Chukwuka, Najite Dede, Iremide Adeoye, Kayin Eros, Sharon Rotimi, and Obi Maduegbuna, a powerful group representing different generations and styles of African storytelling.

We also looked outward, across borders and creative disciplines. We sat down with Rowlene, a voice reshaping South African alt-R&B, and spotlighted Akinola Davies Jr's film *My Father's Shadow*, the first Nigerian title selected for the Cannes Film Festival. We celebrated Joshua Olusanya, the Guinness World Record-breaking trumpeter, and caught up with industry heavyweight Bizzle Osikoya, who shared a few key thoughts on music and longevity.

This issue is a celebration of African excellence, loud, thoughtful, and inspiring.

Huge thanks to the full team at EscapeMag and Digital Escape Africa for putting in the long hours to make this happen. And a special shoutout to OneRPM and Guguru Studios for trusting the vision.

As always, we hope this edition inspires you to see the power, brilliance, and beauty of African creatives, in their purest form.

Enjoy the issue.

THE ESCAPEMAG TEAM



BY SAM  
PHOTO SOURCE - ONERPM

# ROWLENE

## THE SOUND OF SELF-REBIRTH

In a music world where trends shift quickly and artists often chase the next big thing, Rowlene stands out by staying grounded in truth. From her breakout on “SMA” with Nasty C to her most vulnerable solo projects, she’s consistently led with heart and intention. In this exclusive EscapeMag interview, Rowlene reflects on her journey, the beauty of cross-African collaboration, and why emotional honesty remains at the core of everything she creates.



EscapeMag: Your journey from “SMA” with Nasty C to your latest single shows clear growth.

How do you stay connected to your core while constantly evolving your sound?

Rowlene: That journey feels like a full-circle moment for me. “SMA” introduced me to a broader audience, and even then, I was tapping into vulnerability and real emotions. What’s helped me stay connected to my core is remembering why I started making music in the first place — to feel, to process, and to connect. I try to never chase trends but instead focus on telling the truth in whatever form it takes. Whether the sound evolves from R&B to Afro-fusion or something more experimental, the core remains the same: it’s always coming from a real place.





**EscapeMag:** You've worked with artists across different African countries—WurlD, Blaqbonez, Oxlade, and more. What do these cross-border collaborations mean to you as a South African artist in the broader African music space?

**Rowlene:** These collaborations mean everything. Africa is so rich in sound, culture, and story, and I feel like we're finally entering a chapter where borders don't define or limit the music. Working with artists like WurlD and Oxlade exposed me to new ways of writing, performing, and even feeling the music. It's taught me that while we may speak different dialects or come from different cities, our hearts beat to similar rhythms. It's unity through sound, and as a South African woman in this space, I'm proud to be part of a generation that's connecting the continent in such an organic, powerful way.

**EscapeMag:** Your EPs, from *Frequency* to *Moments In Between*, feel like music diaries. When you release personal projects like these, what emotions do you hope to stir in your listeners?

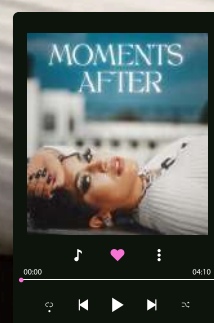
**Rowlene:** Honestly, I hope people feel seen. That's the goal. I want someone to play a song and say, "Wait... she put my exact feeling into words." Whether it's heartbreak, healing, joy, confusion — it's about reminding people they're not alone in what they're experiencing. Each project is a timestamp of where I was emotionally, spiritually, creatively. So when I release something that's vulnerable, it's me giving a part of myself away in the hope that it helps someone find a part of themselves.

**EscapeMag:** "PLAYING GAMES" gave fans a raw, unpolished version of your process. Why was it important for you to share that side of your art?





Because perfection isn't always relatable. I think in the age of polished visuals and glossy production, people forget that music starts off as a voice note, a mumbled melody, or even a broken idea. Releasing "PLAYING GAMES" was my way of pulling back the curtain. It's messy, yet cinematic and it's real. I wanted my supporters to feel closer to the process, to know that the beauty of creation doesn't come from flawlessness — it comes from honesty and having fun.







**EscapeMag:** With “Moments After” on the horizon, how are you approaching this next chapter? Is there a theme or sound you’re particularly excited to explore?

**Rowlene:** “Moments After” is about freedom. It’s that space you enter after the pain, after the letting go — where you finally breathe again. Sonically, it’s still rooted in R&B, but I’m experimenting more with space, tempo, and layered vocals. It’s reflective, but it’s also bold. There’s a lot of lightness in this project — not because everything’s perfect, but because I’ve made peace with the imperfection. I’m especially excited about the storytelling here. Every track feels like a page torn out of a journal I didn’t know I needed to write.

**EscapeMag:** The South African music scene evolves constantly — Afro-pop, Amapiano, alternative R&B. Where do you see yourself fitting into this movement, and what space are you carving out that’s uniquely Rowlene?

**Rowlene:** I’ve always felt like a bit of an in-between — never quite boxed into one genre, but always carving out my own space. I love that the South African scene is evolving and becoming more fluid. I see myself as part of the alternative R&B wave, but with a soulful, Afro-emotional edge. I’m carving out a space that centres emotional honesty, vocal excellence, and sonic experimentation. I don’t want to just fit in; I want to shift perspectives — to show that vulnerability is powerful and that South African women can lead with both softness and strength.

**EscapeMag:** For young women navigating the music industry across Africa, your consistency stands out. What’s one lesson or truth you’ve held onto that helps you stay grounded in an industry that always changes?

**Rowlene:** Protect your peace and know who you are before the world tries to define it for you. That’s the biggest lesson. This industry will test your confidence, your patience, even your sense of worth. But if you know your “why”, and if you’re anchored in something bigger than applause or algorithms, you’ll move with purpose. I’ve also learned that rest is part of the work. You don’t have to burn out to prove your hunger. Consistency isn’t just about showing up — it’s about showing up as yourself, over and over again, no matter what.



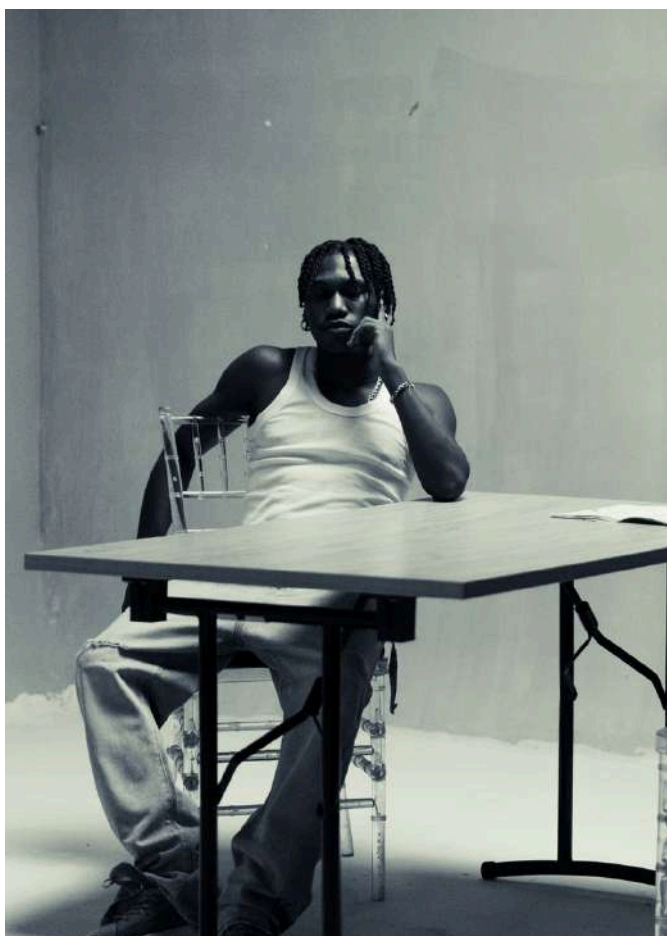
# Runda

Melodies Don't Lie



BY SAM  
PHOTO SOURCE - ONERPM





**EscapeMag:** Your sound is described as both emotionally rich and melodically sharp. What personal experiences or life phases do you draw from the most when creating music?

**Runda:** Man, that's a deep question! I'd say my music is heavily influenced by my experiences growing up in Nigeria, the struggles I faced, and the people I've met along the way. I've always been drawn to storytelling through music, so I tend to tap into my personal life, relationships, and observations.

My songwriting process often starts with reflecting on memories, emotions, and lessons learned. I draw from moments of love, heartbreak, self-discovery, and growth. I'm also inspired by the world around me – social issues, cultural nuances, and the resilience of the human spirit.

When creating music, I'm often in a space of introspection, allowing myself to be vulnerable and honest. I believe that's where the most authentic art comes from. My goal is to craft songs that resonate with others, sparking emotions and connections that transcend borders and backgrounds.

**EscapeMag:** You started as a shy rapper and poet in secondary school. What was the moment or turning point that made you believe music was more than just a hobby?

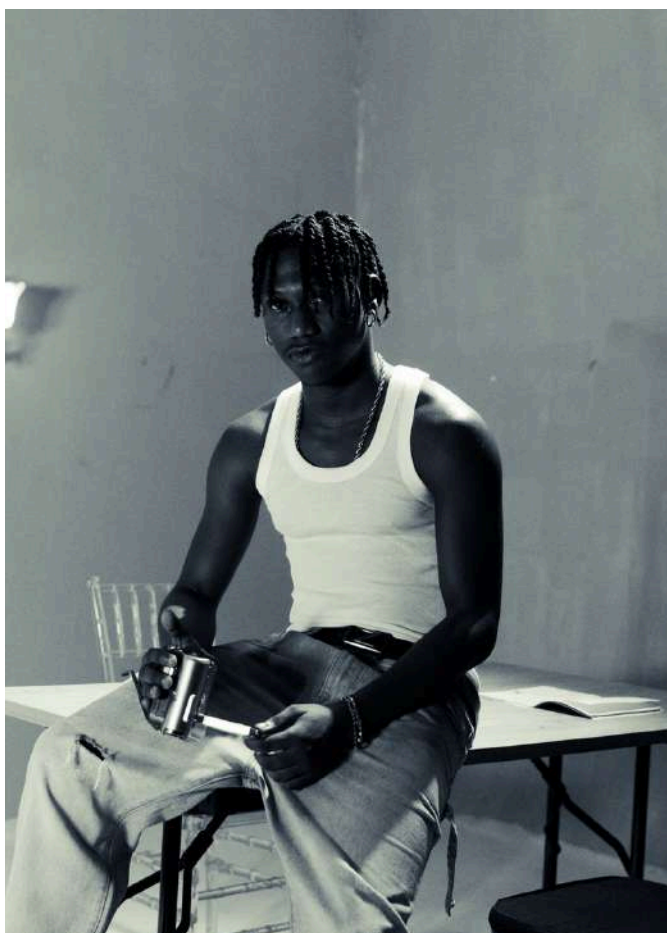
**Runda:** Lmao, you know this is one thing I hate talking about. I used to be super shy, and I wouldn't even speak up in class. But when I started writing rhymes and poetry, I found my voice. I remember even writing poems and notes to a girl I liked then—fun fact: it worked, lol.

The turning point for me was when I performed to a few of my friends at school. I was nervous, but the energy from them, their applause, and the feedback I got afterward made me realize that music could be more than just a hobby.

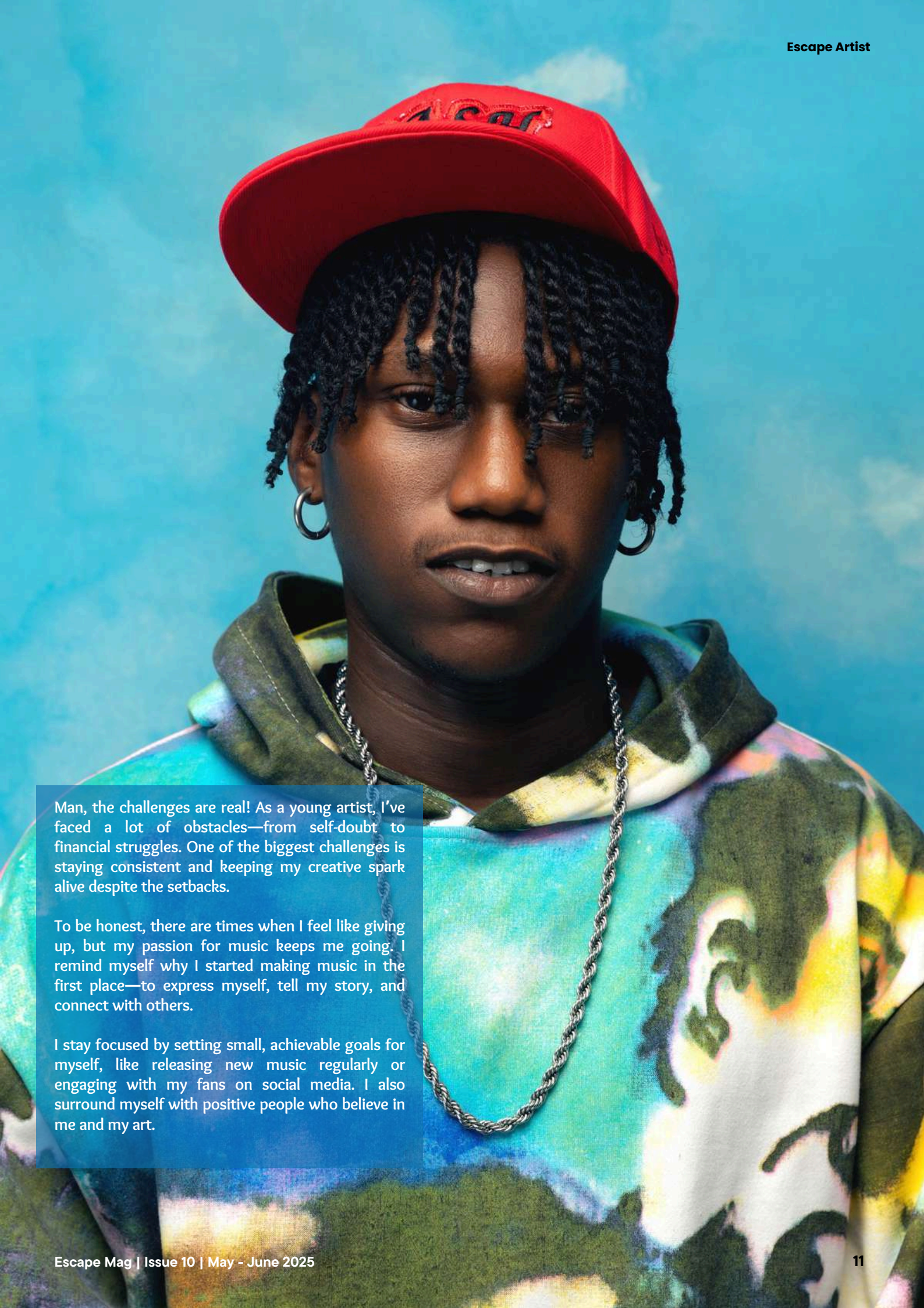
It was like a switch flipped, and I knew I wanted to pursue music full-time. I started taking it seriously, honing my craft, and experimenting with different sounds. The more I created, the more I felt like I was tapping into something special.

From there, I began to post song covers on Instagram, collaborated with other artists, and slowly built a following. The response was overwhelming, and it gave me the confidence to keep pushing forward. Now, I'm living my dream, and it's surreal. Music has taken me on a journey I never thought possible.

**EscapeMag:** As a young artist trying to break through, what are some of the biggest challenges you've faced so far, and how do you stay focused on your goal to "blow"?







Man, the challenges are real! As a young artist, I've faced a lot of obstacles—from self-doubt to financial struggles. One of the biggest challenges is staying consistent and keeping my creative spark alive despite the setbacks.

To be honest, there are times when I feel like giving up, but my passion for music keeps me going. I remind myself why I started making music in the first place—to express myself, tell my story, and connect with others.

I stay focused by setting small, achievable goals for myself, like releasing new music regularly or engaging with my fans on social media. I also surround myself with positive people who believe in me and my art.



When I feel stuck or uncertain, I take a step back, recharge, and refocus on my vision. I remind myself that success isn't overnight; it's a journey. And I'm willing to put in the work to make my dreams a reality.

"Blowing" in the music industry requires dedication, resilience, and a willingness to adapt. I'm learning every day, and I'm excited to see where this journey takes me.

**EscapeMag:** What does success look like for you right now—not in terms of fame, but in terms of what you want your music to do or say to people?

**Runda:** For me, success is about creating music that resonates with people on a deeper level. I want my songs to inspire, uplift, and connect with others, especially those who may be going through similar experiences.

I hope my music can be a source of comfort, motivation, and joy for my listeners—especially my community, "Gvngsta City." I want people to feel seen, heard, and understood through my art. If I can make a positive impact on someone's life, even if it's just one person, then I'll feel like I've succeeded.

Ultimately, I want my music to leave a lasting impression, to linger in people's minds and hearts long after the song is over. I want to leave a legacy that reflects my values, my story, and my passion for music.

**EscapeMag:** A lot of young artists feel pressure to switch up their sound to fit current trends or what's "hot" at the moment. Is your goal to ride the wave, or are you more focused on carving a unique sound and converting people to your style?

**Runda:** For me, it's definitely about carving a unique sound and converting people to my style. I've always believed in staying true to myself and my art. I don't want to compromise my vision to fit someone else's idea of what's "hot" or trendy.

My goal is to create music that's authentic, innovative, and reflective of my experiences and perspectives. I want to push boundaries, experiment with new sounds, and evolve as an artist.

I'd rather build a loyal fanbase that appreciates my unique style than try to fit into a specific mold or genre. I'm not interested in chasing trends; I'm focused on creating something timeless and meaningful.

My music is a reflection of who I am, and I want people to connect with that. If they do, they'll be with me for the long haul, and that's what it's all about for me.

**EscapeMag:** If someone listens to Runda for the first time, what's the one song they should start with, and why?

**Runda:** If someone listens to me for the first time, I'd recommend starting with "Beautiful Lies." This song showcases my style, energy, and storytelling ability. It's a representation of my artistry and gives listeners a sense of what I'm about.

"Beautiful Lies" has a catchy melody, and the lyrics are relatable and authentic. It's a song that can resonate with people on different levels—whether it's the romantic vibe or the emotional depth.

Starting with "Beautiful Lies" will give new listeners a good introduction to my music and a sense of what to expect from my art.







# Joshua Olusanya

## Trumpet Marathon into the Record Books

BY SAM | PHOTO SOURCE - DAW EMPIRE

When sound becomes a language, and perseverance becomes a performance, you get the extraordinary story of Joshua Olusanya widely known as The Trumpet Influencer. From humble beginnings in Nigeria to becoming a Guinness World Record holder for the longest marathon trumpet performance, Joshua's journey is one of grit, grace, and global impact. A seasoned music educator and cultural advocate, he has taught students from over 35 countries, fusing classical mastery with Afrobeat flair to inspire a new generation of artists. In this conversation, we step into the world of a musician who plays far beyond notes, he plays with purpose.



**EscapeMag:** You didn't just set a Guinness World Record—you pushed past the limits of endurance, sound, and spirit. What did those 25 hours and 30 minutes teach you about human will, and about yourself as a musician?

**Joshua Olusanya:** It was a testament to the human spirit's capacity for resilience and determination. Those 25 hours and 30 minutes taught me that with unwavering passion and dedication, we can overcome even the most daunting challenges.

As a musician, I discovered newfound depths of physical and mental endurance. I learned to harness my inner strength, to adapt, and to persevere. This achievement reaffirms my mission as a Trumpet Influencer to inspire others to push beyond their perceived limits, unlock their full potential, and chase their dreams relentlessly.

**EscapeMag:** You play classical, Afrobeat, Broadway, and jazz music. At a time when many artists focus on just one style, how have you managed to stay open to different sounds? And what does mixing genres mean to you as an African artist?

**Joshua Olusanya:** As a versatile musician, I believe that music is for the listener and artistic expression knows no boundaries. Embracing multiple genres – classical, Afrobeat, Broadway, and jazz – allows me to tap into diverse cultural narratives, forging a unique sound that resonates with global audiences.

As an African artist and a cultural ambassador, mixing genres is not only a reflection of my cultural heritage but also a deliberate attempt to bridge cultural divides. By fusing different styles, I aim to create a distinct African voice that transcends geographical and cultural borders.

My music is a testament to the beauty of cultural exchange and the power of art to unite. By staying open to different sounds, I continue to innovate, push boundaries, and inspire new generations of artists and music lovers alike. Being versatile requires lots of practice and patience as an artist.

I've discovered that true mastery requires embracing a language, rather than superficial imposition. With over a decade of experience, I've been able to open up my learning skills to different genres and master the language for my artistic expression, which stands out with a unique approach.

**EscapeMag:** You've taught students from more than 35 countries. How has working with such a diverse group shaped the way you teach music? And what have you learned about how music connects people, no matter where they're from?





Music is the universal dialect that transcends cultural and geographical boundaries. As the Trumpet Influencer, teaching students from over 35 countries has profoundly shaped my pedagogy, illuminating the importance of cultural sensitivity and creativity.

This diverse cultural tapestry has taught me that music is a powerful catalyst for connection and understanding. I've witnessed students from disparate backgrounds unite through melody, rhythm, and harmony, forging a sense of community and shared humanity.

As a teacher, this experience has refined my mindset and my approach, emphasizing the value of empathy, adaptability, and innovation. By embracing the richness of cultural diversity, I empower my students to become global ambassadors of music, spreading unity, creativity, and inspiration.





**EscapeMag:** Your first Guinness attempt didn't count, and many people might have given up. What gave you the courage to try again, and win? And beyond recognition, what does true success mean to you?

**Joshua Olusanya:** Defeat is not a detour, but a stepping stone to triumph. My disqualification fueled my determination to shatter records and stereotypes. As the Trumpet Influencer, I proved that adversity can be a catalyst for greatness.

The courage to try again came from my purpose-driven mission to inspire and unite people through music. Winning wasn't just about setting a record, but about spreading hope and resilience.

As the Trumpet Influencer, true success to me means harmony beyond the stage. A happy home, built on love, support, and mutual respect, is the greatest symphony of all.

**EscapeMag:** Your music stands for activism, education, and cultural connection. Looking ahead, how do you think African instrumentalists can help change how the world sees African identity and talent?

**Joshua Olusanya:** As the Trumpet Influencer, I believe African instrumental musicians can revolutionize global perceptions of African identity and talent by showcasing the continent's rich cultural heritage through music. Through my Trumpet Influencing movement, I'm bridging cultural divides, challenging stereotypes, and inspiring a new generation of African musicians to take center stage and not backstage.

By fusing traditional African rhythms with modern styles, we can create a unique sound that resonates globally, redefining African identity and talent on our own terms.

Let's harmonize our differences, amplify our voices, and trumpet our excellence to the world! As my popular quote say: Remember, your dreams are worth fighting for.







# PUMA X DAVIDO

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# Bizzle Osikoya

Vision, Legacy, and the Blueprint of Modern African Music

BY OKIKI LAOYE





***From backroom strategist to cultural architect, Bizzle Osikoya has quietly shaped the rise of Afrobeats—now, his blueprint is inspiring a new generation of global tastemakers.***

**EscapeMag:** You've helped shape the sound of modern Afrobeats long before the world caught on. What's one early moment in your A&R journey where you knew this movement was going global?

**Bizzle:** The moment I knew the movement was going global was when I had A&R's from international labels and publishing companies reaching out to me to collaborate on projects.

**EscapeMag:** From Storm Records to Mohits to The Plug and Mainland Block Party, you've built legacy platforms. What's the mindset required to move from 'behind-the-scenes' to 'architect of the culture' on an international scale?

**Bizzle:** Ownership of Vision (From executor to visionary), you need to stop seeing yourself as just someone who supports a vision, but as someone who sets it.

**EscapeMag:** The word "visionary" gets thrown around a lot, but in your case it fits. How do you spot timeless talent in a world driven by virality and fast trends?

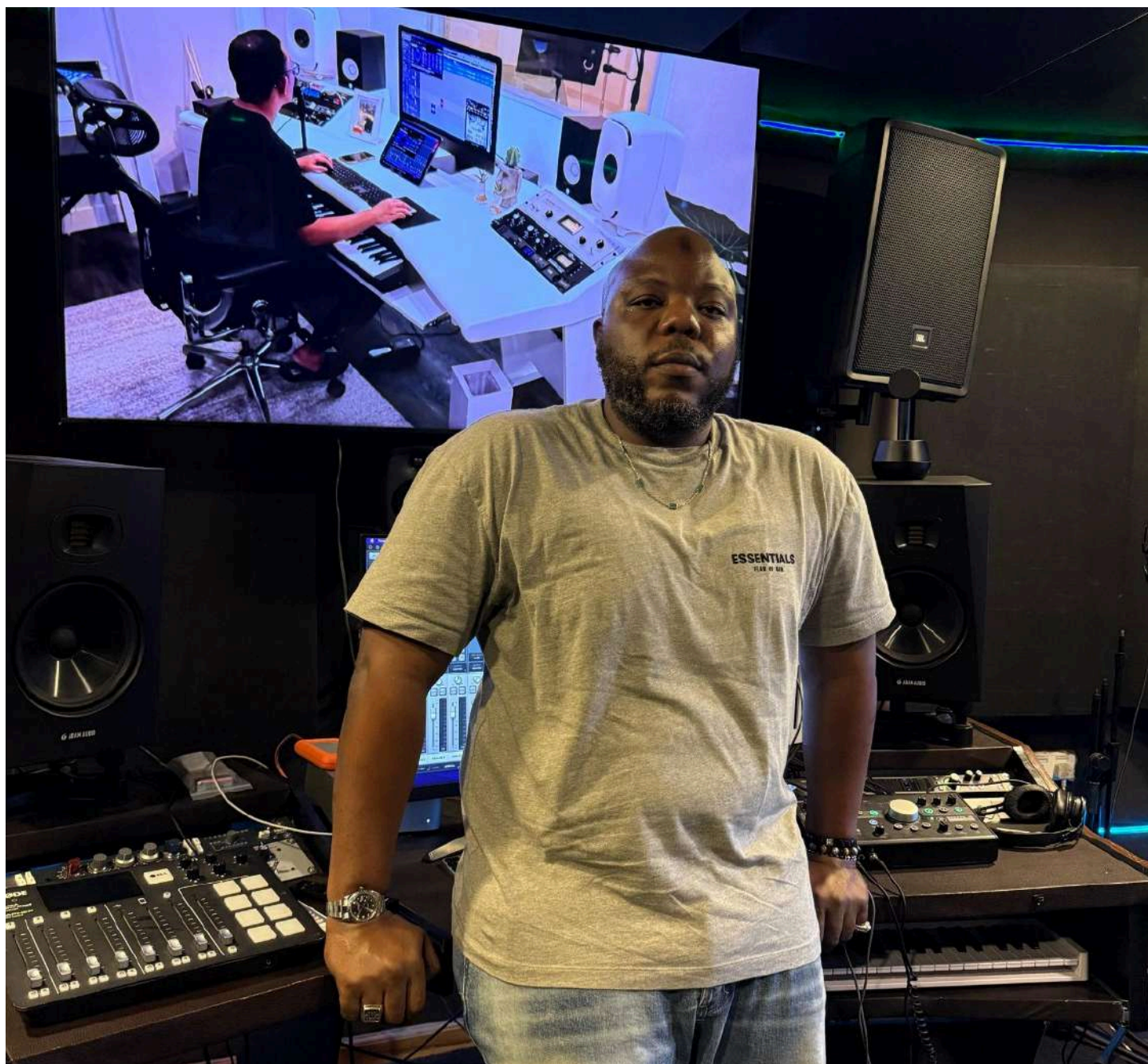
**Bizzle:** It's a very difficult task, but I always like to look out for people who are hardworking and super passionate, because it takes more than talent to be successful.

**EscapeMag:** Looking at the global success of Afrobeats today, what do you think the world still misunderstands about the genre, and what's next for its evolution?

**Bizzle:** The world sees us as a collective and we need to let them know that just because we are from Africa, doesn't mean we all make Afrobeats music, there are so many other genres and they need to be properly explored. I think what's next for Afrobeats is a Pan-African sonic identity where regional sounds retain uniqueness but collaborate and cross-pollinate more frequently, where African artists remain in lead roles.







**EscapeMag:** You've worked with some of the most influential artists in African music history. What do you believe makes an artist truly global, beyond just streaming numbers and chart placements?

**Bizzle:** I believe it's their drive and their ability to connect across cultures, languages, and borders with authenticity and impact. A global artist tells stories that resonate universally emotions like love, struggle, joy, and identity, while still honouring their unique background. Their influence isn't just in how many people hear them, but in how deeply they're felt.

**EscapeMag:** There's an entire generation of music execs and creatives who look up to you. How do you balance building your legacy with making space for new voices in the industry?

**Bizzle:** I am constantly trying in my own little way to educate the next generation. We have regular internship programs at The Plug Entertainment, we have had students from Nigeria, France, Canada, Belgium and the United Kingdom participate.

**EscapeMag:** What does impact mean to you now? Is it still about the hits, or has your definition of success evolved over the years?

**Bizzle:** Impact to me is beyond hits, I think over the years we have seen people who didn't have global hit records, but have made heavy impact in the music industry and are still very relevant.





# My Father's Shadow

## A Family Story That Made History

BY OKIK LAOYE  
IMAGE SOURCE - FOLA PR

There are films that make noise, and there are films that make history. *My Father's Shadow* is the latter, a subtle yet powerful story that signals a new era for Nigerian cinema on the world stage.

In May 2025, the film did what no Nigerian production had ever done: earn an official selection at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival. More than a slot on the lineup, it received a *Caméra d'Or* Special Mention, a rare recognition reserved for standout debut features. But beyond the accolades, *My Father's Shadow* is a deeply personal story, shaped by the real-life bond between siblings Akinola and Wale Davies, and brought to life in creative partnership with producer and longtime collaborator, Funmbi Ogunbanwo.



Mention spéciale  
Caméra d'or

# My Father's Shadow

AKINOLA DAVIES JR





Set in Lagos during the chaotic hours surrounding the annulled 1993 Nigerian presidential election, the film follows a father and his two estranged sons navigating a city on edge. It's political without preaching, emotional without excess. And its power lies in its details, the rhythm of Yoruba and Pidgin, the street names familiar to any Lagosian, the quiet grief of a family trying to find its way back to itself.

"We set out to make a film we could be proud of, one that shows the Nigeria we grew up in," says director Akinola Davies Jr. "I'm excited to be an ambassador for arthouse film in Nigeria, and even more excited for our cast and crew, whose talent and hard work truly deserve this spotlight."

For Akinola and Wale, this film was never just about the script. It was about memory, the kind that lingers across cities, timelines, and family archives. Originally envisioned by Wale as a short film, the project blossomed over years of creative retreats, often by a river in Ghana. "We wrote it in pieces," Wale shared. "Sometimes it was just watching old films, listening to music, debating ideas. It was slow, but honest work."

The emotional weight of the film is tethered to their own story. The Davies brothers lost their father at a young age, and in many ways, this film became their way of reconnecting with him, with each other, with a past they never fully got to understand. "It made me weep," Akinola once said about reading the early drafts. "I had never conceived of a story about our lives, fictionalised in this way."

**"It's an incredible feeling to see our fully Nigerian story, rooted in Wale and Akin's experience of losing their father at a young age, come to life on a world"**

**— Funmbi Ogunbanwo**



L-R: Akinola Davies Jr., Rachel Dargavel, Wale Davies, Sope Dirisu, Funmbi Ogunbanwo



L-R: Wale Davies, Akinola Davies Jr., Sope Dirisu.



*L-R: Wale Davies, Funmbi Ogunbanwo, Akinola Davies Jr., Sope Dirisu*

Alongside them is Funmbi Ogunbanwo, the CEO of Fatherland and the producer who helped bring their vision to life. Originally trained as a barrister, Funmbi has become one of the most important creative forces in African film today. With this film, she saw more than a cinematic opportunity, she saw a cultural responsibility.

"It's an incredible feeling to see our fully Nigerian story, rooted in Wale and Akin's experience of losing their father at a young age, come to life on a world stage," she said. "We hope people who watch this film will discover who we are as a people, understand where we come from, and see how far our stories can go."

My Father's Shadow is proof that collaboration, when rooted in love, culture, and clarity, can move mountains. Over 80% of the crew were Nigerian, with a diaspora cast and team that echoed the global African identity. "The world sees us as a collective," Wale said. "But this film reminds us that African stories are varied, specific, and capable of global resonance."

Film critic Robert Daniels described the film as "a first-feature masterwork" and "a new high for African cinema." And for good reason, this isn't just a story about a family. It's about absence, memory, political tension, and ultimately, hope.

At Cannes, as the film drew standing ovations and praise from names like Nicole Kidman and Angelina Jolie, it wasn't just Fatherland's win. It was Nigeria's. It was Africa's. And it signaled something bigger, that authentic storytelling, when done well, doesn't need to shout to be heard.

"It's a privilege to have the first Nigerian film selected," Funmbi said during a Vogue 100 panel at Cannes. "But it must never be the only one."

With My Father's Shadow, they've opened the door. Now it's time for the rest of the continent to walk through it.



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LET'S BEGIN.







# Inside Guguru's Powerhouse: Icons, Breakout-Acts & Game Changers

Guguru Media has become one of the quiet forces behind today's Nollywood, a studio, a talent house, and a creative engine powering many of the stories shaping African cinema. From gripping dramas to viral digital campaigns, chances are, if you're watching something unforgettable, Guguru is involved.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
 INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
 OYINKANSOLA (BUMII)  
 PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM  
 VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALAMI  
 OMOGBOLAHAN, INSIDE PHOTOGRAPHY  
 BY PHALOREY, JOSH OYEBANJI  
 STYLING BY BLVCKSUN, BLACK ALBINO,  
 FRAIM'D, STEFAN.  
 HAIR BY OPE SMADE

STYLING ASSISTANTS: SOMA, BERRY  
 KOOKAVELLI, OBILERI, MARIE PETER  
 OCHEI, AYOBAMI.  
 FIT TAILORING BY AXM, SOFT AIV, BAYO  
 BAZZA, ANNA'S TREND NG, SAMMIELLE  
 LUXE



PHOTO BY SALAMI OMOGBOLAHAN

Headquartered in Lekki, Lagos, Guguru Media blends media production, brand strategy, and talent management to build lasting careers and craft standout content. With an eye on culture and a hand in both the traditional and the digital, the company tells stories that connect, through commercials, virtual events, editorial films, branded content, and across every screen that matters.

Representing a cross-section of Nollywood's finest — Uzor Arukwe, Omowunmi Dada, Adunni Ade, Obi Maduegbuna, Najite Dede, Jude Chukwuka, Sharon Rotimi, Kelechi Udegbe, Kanyinsola Eros, and Iremide Adeoye, Guguru is behind the faces, voices, and performances audiences keep coming back for. Some are industry legends. Others are just getting started. All are shaping the culture.

For this special feature, Escape Mag goes deeper. We sit down with eight actors from the Guguru fold, the icons, the voices rising, the genre-shifters, to talk about craft, identity, range, and what it takes to make your mark in today's creative landscape.



# JUDE CHUKWUKA

## Legacy, Limits, and Longevity

With decades of screen time under his belt and an unmistakable presence, Jude Chukwuka is one of Nollywood's most respected character actors. Known for his command of dialogue and emotional precision, he brings lived experience and sharp insight into every role. In this conversation, he reflects on craft, evolution, and the kind of stories he's still yearning to tell.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
OYINKANSOLA (BUMIII)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALAMI  
OMOGBOLAHAN  
STYLING & CREATIVE DIRECTION BY  
BLACK ALBINO

STYLING ASSISTANTS: BERRY  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI



**EscapeMag:** You've had a rare and impressive career resurgence. So, how do you keep up with such force and frequency?

**Jude:** I wouldn't ascribe it to anything in particular, but to God. Because there's no stopping a dream or a vision whose time has come. That is where the younger acts miss it. They don't want to wait for their time. They see that others are thriving, so they must thrive along. Everybody has his timetable. So I wouldn't want to ascribe it to anything but to God.

**EscapeMag:** Still holding that thought, what do you think actors of nowadays are getting right and what are they still missing?

**Jude:** Quite frankly, it's difficult to know the difference between an actor and a model today. You know, in our time, an actor will act despite what a model will not act. Okay, let me break it down. An actor will act despite the fact that the conditions are not right. Because he lives for acting, right? But a model will not act because there's heat here. So the model wants a perfect situation before they can deliver. But an actor will look at it and say, "Okay, despite all of this, we can still get this done."

I remember—don't let me begin to mention dates so you won't run out of here.

I remember I shot somewhere some 25 years ago. And you know the kind of nights you have where Redhead lights and all of that. But we shot day-for-night, which means they blocked every space where daylight would come in. And we had to use Redheads in that space. But I still delivered, you understand? And I look at this young generation put in that situation:

"Ah, we must change the scene. I won't do it," and all of that.

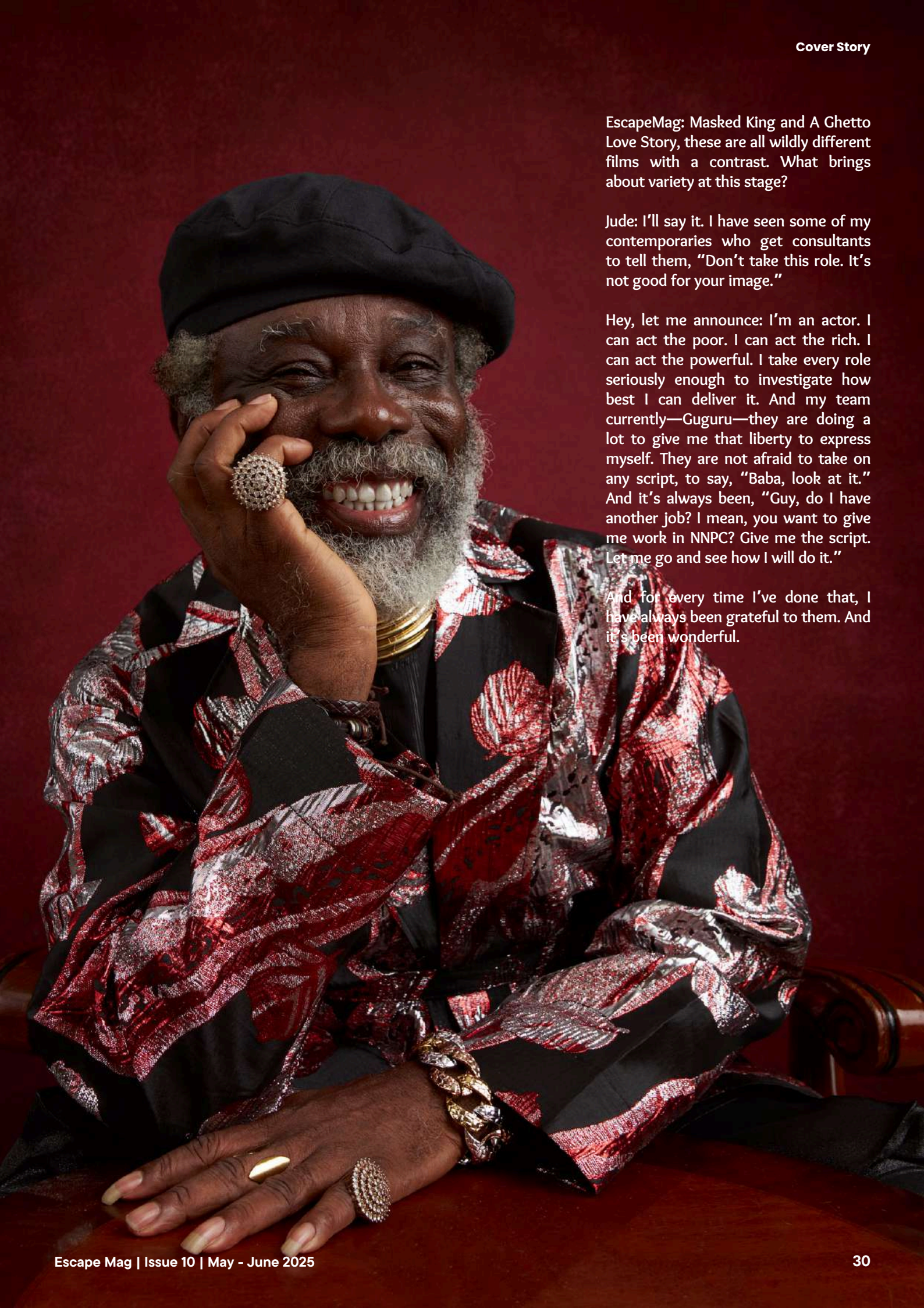
But that is not to say that there are no actors today, because I have worked with a lot of them. In our time, we were patient to understand the script. The directors and producers would help you understand the script and create time for rehearsals and all that. It's becoming old-fashioned these days to create time for rehearsals.

The character is not the character until he has shot like five episodes. But because we had time for rehearsals and all of that, you hit it from boom—you understand?

And some may blame it on finances and all that, and the economic realities. But you know, if it's going to influence or affect the quality of the delivery of the actor, then you better find a way to make sure that the actor is prepared from the word go.







EscapeMag: Masked King and A Ghetto Love Story, these are all wildly different films with a contrast. What brings about variety at this stage?

Jude: I'll say it. I have seen some of my contemporaries who get consultants to tell them, "Don't take this role. It's not good for your image."

Hey, let me announce: I'm an actor. I can act the poor. I can act the rich. I can act the powerful. I take every role seriously enough to investigate how best I can deliver it. And my team currently—Guguru—they are doing a lot to give me that liberty to express myself. They are not afraid to take on any script, to say, "Baba, look at it." And it's always been, "Guy, do I have another job? I mean, you want to give me work in NNPC? Give me the script. Let me go and see how I will do it."

And for every time I've done that, I have always been grateful to them. And it's been wonderful.





**EscapeMag:** So what do you think maturity brings to acting that youth doesn't?

**Jude:** You know, there's an adage that says "looking at the king's mouth, one will never know he ever sucked breast." You understand?

There was a time the king never had. But now he's full of wisdom and all of that. They look at his history as starting with his kingship, so to speak. Even the scriptures say that when a prince, who is meant to be king, is still a child, he's still subject to the instructions of the servants.

So, you know, we failed sometimes—but the key was what we did with those failures. We learned from them—both in terms of our craft and in shaping our character. But things are different now. A lot of younger actors today are distracted. They're facing challenges we didn't have to deal with, like the constant pressure and noise of social media. That affects their focus, their growth, and sometimes, their maturity in the craft.

So when you have your script in hard copy, you can concentrate and then rehearse. That's why they don't print scripts on both sides—so that you can leave your comments and make your notes on your character, your lines, where to emphasize, where to talk fast. But these days, they give you your script on your device, and you get on set and you begin to struggle.

And these guys—they may join the minor. They want to look fine.

Then you do take 400 and party. You understand. The sexuality, girls. Yes. Honestly, I left two sets—don't let me mention those sets. I left two sets because call time is eight o'clock; we won't start shooting until two—because four people were making up.

Now we get on set, take five. I just told them, "Hey guys, I can't continue with this. Let me take a walk." And I did that straight away. But you know, that makeup is required for the character too—I understand that. But that makeup—what is more important than the makeup is the lines. Knowing your lines.

You are looking good and we are doing take 15—because you are looking good. In fact, the very first one—very popular, it's running even now—the first season, I just told them, "No, no, no, no, no. If you want models, I'm out of this place. There are actresses that can deliver this. I will get out of this place."

Why are you using her?—Because she's fresh? She has long nose? What if Whoopi Goldberg was a Nigerian? She won't sell. Because nobody will consider her acting. They will say she's ugly. Sister, tell me another story.





**EscapeMag:** So are there roles you say no to now that you'd have jumped at earlier in your career?

**Jude:** I have never said no to any role.

**EscapeMag:** Really?

**Jude:** I have never.

My limit or caveat is that I will not strip on set. I will not engage in sex on set. Because if you don't have limits, you do anything in the first place. So those are my basic limits. And they still persist till today.

There are no limits for actors these days. Money is the motivation. How much you go pay for that scene? Two million naira—you go do am.

For that scene alone—two million naira—you would do it. Okay.

**EscapeMag:** Is legacy something you think about, or do you let the work speak for itself?

**Jude:** It's difficult to say. You know, one thing is—nobody does anything and not think about how it will affect his future, okay, naturally. And that's thinking about legacy. But, you know, there are some things you do and you say, "Yeah, I've done my best. Let this thing speak for itself."

So there are no hard and fast rules concerning what you do as a person. The final deciders on legacy are those watching you. They will say, "Okay, this is evergreen" or "I wish he didn't do this," and all that. So it's not for the actor to say, "I want to build a legacy."

It is what he has done—how it affects people—that they will either retain in their long-term memory or wish they'd not seen.

**EscapeMag:** So finally, if a film were made about your second act, who would you want to play you and what would the opening scene be?

**b:** There's this guy—Simi or Sinmileoluwa. He acted as my son in Ajoche.

He played Eje in Ajoche. On the set, every time I look at him, I see my past in him. Every time we've done things together—like two or three times—and I have always enjoyed acting with him. And I wish that if I ever have to write a script that they need a younger me, Sinmileoluwa is an awesome stage actor.

Thank you very much for this. I am very honored.

[Watch Movie](#)



A full-page portrait of Omowunmi Dada. She is a Black woman with a radiant smile, looking directly at the camera. Her hair is styled in thick, dark, braided loops that fan out around her head. She is wearing a strapless, light-colored, ruffled top over a patterned skirt. Her accessories include a gold chain necklace, multiple gold rings on her fingers, and a gold bracelet on her right wrist. The background is a warm, textured, light brown color.

# OMOWUNMI DADA

## Built on Boldness and Mastery

From stage lights to animated voices, Omowunmi Dada's journey is marked by discipline, vision, and a fierce sense of excellence. Every role she plays is laced with purpose — every opportunity met with preparation. In this sit-down, she walks us through her evolution, the power of speaking up, and the unseen work behind a standout career.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
OYINKANSOLA (BUMII)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALAMI  
OMOGBOLAHAN, JOSH OYEBANJI  
STYLING & CREATIVE DIRECTION BY  
BLACK ALBINO

HAIR BY OPE SMADE  
STYLING ASSISTANTS: BERRY  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI



**"A good film is a good film, regardless of the language. Language is just a medium of communication."**



**EscapeMag:** From *Geometry* to *Country Hard*, to *Aina*, to *Shade*—voice-over, stage—you seem to have done it all.

**Omowunmi:** No, I haven't done it all.

**EscapeMag:** Okay, but what would you say is the true power of storytelling?

**Omowunmi:** I'd say the true power of storytelling is just being true to life. At the end of the day, we say art is life and life is art—we imitate life itself. If you see a character you need to play and you bring it to life as though it were real, I think you give the best performance. You take out time to understand who the character is, what their life is like, and why they do the things they do. Bottom line: storytelling is about trying to be true to life.

**EscapeMag:** Yeah, that's very beautiful. Your role in *Somewhere in the Dark* earned you critical recognition early on. What did that role teach you about visibility for Yoruba-language and indigenous films?





PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALAMI OMOGBOLAHAN  
STYLED BY BLACK ALBINO, HAIR BY OPE SMADE





PHOTO BY JOSH OYEBANJI | STYLED BY BLVCK SUN | DESIGN BY ANNA'S TREND NG

**Omowunmi:** Life exists in different parts of the world, so language is never a barrier to a good story—never. I've always believed that. A good film is a good film, regardless of the language. Language is just a medium of communication.

When we were growing up, we watched a lot of Indian movies. We had no idea what they were saying, but we followed the stories and they impacted us. We still remember some of those songs. Same with Spanish series. So, the fact that we tell stories in Yoruba doesn't make them any less great.

That was actually the very first Yoruba film I did. The producer reached out, and although the story was something I'd never experienced personally, I knew it was real and existed. I did a lot of research and gave it my all. Every time I'm on screen speaking Yoruba, it gives me so much joy. I'm happy the film got the recognition it did. And here we are.

**EscapeMag:** Alright, now let's talk about *Sadé*—Nigeria's first animated film. What was it like being the voice of a project as historic as that? Did you feel pressure or was it just freedom for visibility?




PHOTO BY JOSH OYEBANJI | STYLED BY BLVCK SUN | DESIGN BY ANNA'S TREND NG

**Omowunmi:** Life is so weird—I wasn't even cast to play *Sadé*! I was cast for something else entirely. But I always say, no matter what or where you are as an actor, you must always be ready. Always. Ready to take the bull by the horn.

he was nowhere to be found. I said, "I can do it." You need to know what you're made of and trust your craft. Of course, you must've put in the work beforehand to even say that. But I knew I could do it.



A woman with dark skin and braided hair is smiling and posing against a dark, riveted metal wall. She is wearing a strapless, floor-length red gown with multiple ruffles and a colorful, patterned waistband. She has her right arm raised and is holding a cigarette. She is wearing a gold necklace, gold hoop earrings, and a gold bracelet on her left wrist.

They let me read, and after I did, they were like, "Okay... this is even a better Sadé than we thought." If I hadn't spoken up or been prepared, it wouldn't have happened.

You know when they say a closed mouth is a closed destiny? It's true. What's the worst that can happen? They say no? I've been told "no" many times, and it never stops me from putting myself out there. You have to be audacious. If you feel something is for you, say so. Speak to the universe. Speak to people. Even if it doesn't happen now, if you believe in it and keep improving, it will come.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSH OYEBANJI  
STYLED BY STEPHAN | FIT BY SAMMIELLE LUXE





**EscapeMag:** What is your definition of range, and how are you expanding your own range?

**Kayin:** My definition of range? I think range is basically the ability to morph into any character you're given to play. Your ability to empathize with any character, or to just be truthful about any character you have to play.

It's about being able to play different genres, whether drama or comedy or horror, whatever the case may be—and tell it truthfully. And I feel like as an empathetic person, you will naturally have that ability to delve into any character as long as you can find the truth within that character, whether it's a villain or a hero or whatever it is.





**EscapeMag:** If Nollywood were to make a film about you—from stage to screen—who would you want to play you?

**Omowunmi:** Wow. I've never thought about it.

**EscapeMag:** Is there someone you've seen who feels like a younger version of you or who could play you well?

**Omowunmi:** I don't think I've seen Omowunmi Dada in anyone other than Omowunmi Dada. But you know, when casting, there's so much to consider—height, skin tone, everything.

But I'd say Kayin (Eros). I hope she can speak Yoruba as fluently as I can, but she's a brilliant actor and I know she'd play me well. I'm always rooting for her. I doubt she even knows this, but yeah—I think she'd portray me beautifully. When I think about my journey—starting as an undergraduate at UniLag, working professionally from year two, juggling first-class goals with auditions—I think she's strong enough to tell that story.

I remember missing a test once for a shoot. I told my classmates it wouldn't hold, but it did. I went to the lecturer and explained. He sat me down, gave me different questions on the spot. I answered them and still graduated as the best in my class.

But that wasn't the end. That was the beginning of a tough, hard journey. And I think Kayin has what it takes to bring that journey to life.

**EscapeMag:** Thank you. That was very commendable.

**Omowunmi:** Thank you very much. I'm really big on the spirit of excellence. Every time you show up, give your absolute best. You don't know who's watching. You don't know the scene someone might stumble on and ask, "Who is this?"

In 2009, I went for an audition. I wasn't cast and didn't know someone had taken note of me. Fast forward to 2016—I got a call. They had auditioned people for a series already. I wasn't even in the country. Someone just called to ask if I was back in town. I said yes, and they said, "Come do a screen test."

I did it, and got the role of Folake in Jemeji. Much later, about six months into filming, we were on set in Badagry. Sanchez mentioned that back in 2009, he'd seen a young girl at an audition who had fire. She didn't fit that role, but he knew he'd work with her. And when Folake came up, he said, "Find Omowunmi Dada."

If I had disappointed them, that would've been it—but I didn't.



# Uzor Arukwe

## Lowkey, High Caliber

Uzor Arukwe is one of Nollywood's most talented and consistent actors. From his funny role in Sergeant Tutu to the powerful performance in A Tribe Called Judah, Uzor has shown he can play just about any character. But behind the roles is a calm and focused man who cares deeply about his work. In this honest chat with EscapeMag, Uzor talks about his journey, the love he has for acting, and why he chooses to keep his private life out of the spotlight.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
OYINKANSOLA (BUMII)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHALOREY  
STYLING BY BLVCKSUN  
STYLING ASSISTANTS: SOMA, BERRY,  
OBILERI, KOOKAVELLI

FIT TAILORING BY BAYO BAZZA  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI





PHOTO BY [PHALOREY](#) | STYLED BY [BLVCK SUN](#) | SHOE BY [KOOKAVELLI](#)

**“...If it works, it works. I’m not going to do stupid things just to be funny. If the situation allows for it, fine. If not, that’s okay.”**

**EscapeMag:** From Sergeant Tutu to A Tribe Called Judah, you’re a master at slipping into different skins that are really wild. What do you think is the thread tying all these characters together?

**Uzor:** I would say it’s some form of training. Training, skill—which is also dexterity—and then I would say me. Because this is the only vessel, the only instrument I have to communicate or embody these characters.

It’s just training, you know. And art is an ongoing school. You never really finish—you just keep trying to get better, trying to best your past performance.



PHOTO BY SALAMI OMOGBOLAHAN

*So yeah, it's training, skill, dexterity, passion. I'm not going to talk about grace and all of those things, because that's the supernatural. But for me, to answer your question, the shortest answer is: all of these factors—and then me. Because I'm the only vessel, and I'm just grateful to work. I love the job so much. So yeah, this is it.*



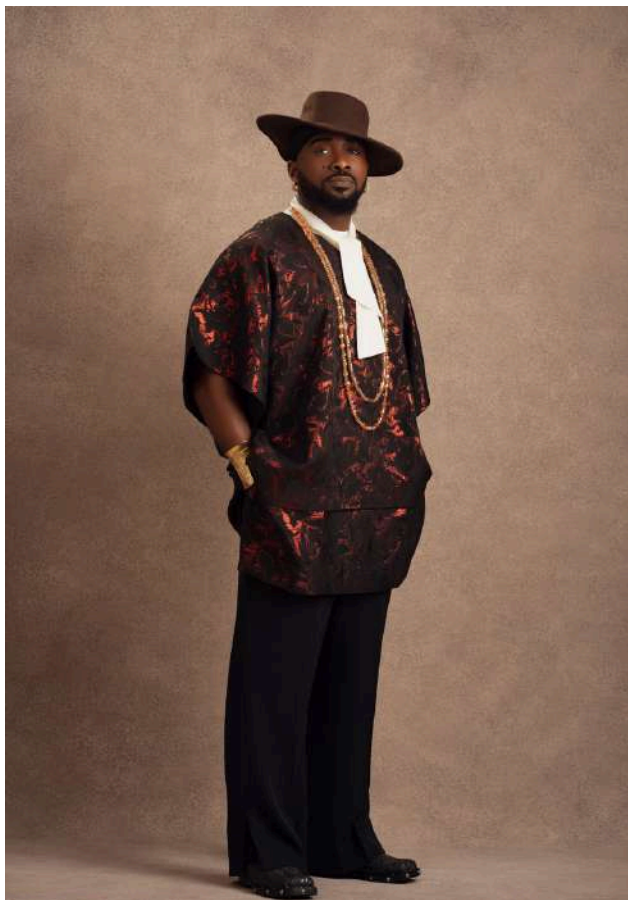


PHOTO BY PHALOREY | STYLED BY BLVCK SUN | SHOE BY KOOKAVELLI

**EscapeMag:** I have to commend you for that. You do it very effortlessly.

Many actors chase fame for a long time before hitting their stride. You seem to have done it all at once—and quietly. What changed? How did you do it?

**Uzor:** I don't know if I've done it. I mean... you know how it is. I don't know if I have. For me, it's a continuous thing. There's something Idris Elba said in one of his interviews I listened to: he said he just walks. Keeps walking. It's like jumping into a swimming pool—you're in a race, and your head is under water. You just keep going—those strokes—until you hit the end and push yourself back.

So for me, it's just continuous. I just keep pushing, trying. I don't know if I've "got it." People say I've blown—I don't know. I'm grateful for what God has done. But I still have a lot I want to accomplish as an artist.

**EscapeMag:** Do you think you've blown?

**Uzor:** (laughs) She caught me.

I would say to a large extent—because I get a lot more accolades now. A lot of people know me. When I walk into places now, people recognize me. Even if they don't know my name is Uzor, they call me "Odogwu." And for me, yeah—that's a bit of the definition of blowing.

**EscapeMag:** And it's all good. I'm glad you're happy, because I think you've blown.

**Uzor:** Thank you.

**EscapeMag:** You're fast becoming the go-to actor for both comedic and dramatic roles. How do you keep yourself from being pigeonholed as the "funny guy"?

**Uzor:** First off, I never go into a performance deciding what way to go.

I read the script thoroughly and do my homework as an actor. I'm not trying to be funny. I try to find elements in the story where I can bring in some humor—and I go with it. If it works, it works. I'm not going to do stupid things just to be funny. If the situation allows for it, fine. If not, that's okay.

I'm serving the story. Everything I do—whether it's for theater or film—is always about the story. I don't go in trying to be funny. I just interpret the character. And if there's a bit of humor to be found, I flow with it. If not, it's all good.

**EscapeMag:** What's one misconception fans or even industry insiders have about you that you'd love to correct?






[Watch Movie](#)

PHOTO BY PHALOREY

**Uzor:** That's a tough one, because there are a lot of misconceptions about me. Artistically, I feel like some of my colleagues think I'm very stoic, or uptight—because they don't really know me.

Yes, I work hard. I work very hard. But I also play a lot. People who know me know I like to have a good drink, listen to great music, and be around great people. There are other misconceptions I won't delve into now. But what you see is what you get when it comes to Uzor.

**EscapeMag:** You keep your family life fiercely private. How do you balance public visibility with personal boundaries in this era of oversharing?

**Uzor:** Like I've always said, I learned from the people before me—the veterans: Pete Edochie, RMD, Ramsey, Jim Iyke, Desmond, all of them. I noticed that it was always about the art. Not to say that's the only way, but it's safer for me. I don't want to bring my family or personal life into public view. If you love me, love me for my work—not because you see a lady beside me or some kids. I want people to know Uzor for the art.

I'm a human being. If you encounter me one-on-one, maybe you'll see how humane I can be. But if you don't, then what I put out is what I want you to see. So yeah—it's about the art. Social media, for me, is a tool. I'm not a podcaster. I use it to share my work, some joys, some wins. Not my entire life.

And I'm not saying people who do that are wrong—I actually enjoy watching that content. But personally, I don't see the point. I'm introverted. I'm private. Even my family members know. My people know that I'm a quiet, chill guy. Why am I telling everybody everything?

**EscapeMag:** I love that. I think you've figured it out in a way that's authentic to you.

**Uzor:** Thank you. Oh! Bunmi should be interviewing everybody.

The questions are sweet, they're great. You're not trespassing. You're not infringing on my personal rights or anything.

**EscapeMag:** Absolutely—we have to respect you.

**Uzor:** I appreciate that, man. It was lovely doing this with you.



# NAJITE DEDE

## Identity and the Unseen Realities of an Actor's Life

A master of reinvention and a stalwart of the stage, Najite Dede has carved out a career that spans decades and defies limits. Her performances are laced with purpose, her voice a commanding force across genres. In this intimate exchange, she reflects on legacy, lessons, and what keeps her coming back to the work.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
OYINKANSOLA (BUMII)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHALOREY  
STYLING BY FRAM'D  
STYLING ASSISTANTS: MARIE PETER,  
AYOBAMI

FIT TAILORING BY AXM  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI



**EscapeMag:** Okay, so tell me, *House of Secrets* had the feel of a psychological labyrinth. How were you able to—or let me say—how do you exit and enter that character without carrying them with you?

**Najite:** Oh, okay. So, the thing is that your brain doesn't know that you're acting, literally. So, when you're building a character, your brain actually thinks you are experiencing this person's past, you're carrying their habits—whatever it is. So, you literally have to perform an exorcism.

Yes, of some sort, for every character. By going back to the things you do. So, Sarah has her habits, her past, her things. Najite has her things. So, I literally have to be intentional about picking up the things that I left behind—those things of me—for Sarah. So, I now have to take them and say, "Bye, Sarah." So, back to Najite.

**EscapeMag:** It's like leaving the character and going back to you?

**Najite:** Yes. You literally have to do that, because there are things that Najite does—likes, eats, drinks—and Sarah doesn't or isn't. But your brain doesn't know that. So, you have to sort of reintroduce yourself to your brain and say, "Okay, hi. I'm back."

**EscapeMag:** Yes, I love that explanation. You have to do that. So, you've lived through several evolutions of Nollywood. What would you say this generation of actors need to learn?

**Najite:** Nothing. Well, I would say there are no new sins, just new sinners.

So, if you're an actor and you want to be a movie star, that's fine. Go ahead, get your bag. But not every actor becomes a movie star, and not every movie star is an actor. So, just bend down, select your route.

**EscapeMag:** Could you shed more light on that?

**Najite:** So, pick one that fits you. Being an actor is a whole profession in and of itself. It's a pretty tough road. It demands excellence like any other.

Yes, because of the nature of our work, you see all the glam and the shining of teeth on the carpet and all that kind of stuff. No, but it's very long, hard work in which you pull all of your emotions—all of your being—into it.

So, if it is just for wanting to change your status at, "Okay, this is the way to become famous"—sorry, not really the career for you, because that may or may not happen.

But if you are definitely into it because that is the work you want to do, as that aspect of storytelling, you're still going to have to either get training—whether you go to university, or you do workshops, or get trained on the job. Either way you can. Your talent will have to translate to skill. And from skill, then you may or may not get status.





PHOTO BY PHALOREY | STYLED BY FRAIM'D



EscapeMag: So, do you think being a director makes you a more disciplined actor or a more empathetic one?

Najite: Well, I actually became an actor by accident. I was a stage manager for a play, and one of the actors had to pull out. And the stage manager has to have everyone's line.

So, the director was like, "So, you are X, sir." And that's it. I became an actor. And then afterwards I thought that doing more acting may help me become a better director. So, it was actually one to feed the other. So, yeah, understanding directing does help a bit.

But because, as an actor, personally, I believe that you should never direct yourself. That's why there's a director. What you think of his or her skill is neither here nor there. They should have a vision, and you are there to give them what they want. So, when I'm acting, my director's hat is buckled up.



**EscapeMag:** If you had to write a letter to your younger self just passing out and acting, what would the first line say?

**Najite:** Dear Najite, so you have decided to become an actor. Very good. Understand that you are going to be technically unemployed a lot of the time.

It has no bearing on your talent. It's just the vagaries of life. Even the superstars don't act month in, month out.

Make sure you have some other work, which may be creative, but some other work that brings you an income as well. Your parents love you. Even though they are supportive as well, they really just want you to be safe and to have a life.

Acting will end up being very rewarding, but also get a therapist as well. You will need one.  
Sincerely, your older self.

**EscapeMag:** That was very personal. I think some parts of it is advice any actor or any person starting out in acting should take. Because with what you said, it is not a career that is income-earning from the start.

**Najite:** It is a phase where you have to go through the learning process, and then the process where you have to say, "Okay, yeah." Even when you do become established, it has a high period of feast or famine. You are working back to back to back to back.

Then next thing, you have no work for months on end. It happens. That's just the occupational hazard of being an actor. There are very few people—and then of course in our industry, that is relatively new. It's not new; let's say it's a teenager.

We don't have series and things like that in which a person is employed for years on end. Now we have it for maybe months on end, which is growth. You will do a film today, a film next month, a film the month after that, and then next, nothing.

It's not because you're not popular, you're not established—it's just the way it is. You have the thing of where you have income enough that sees you through, and then there are other people that you don't have the income that's seeing you through. Then you do have the income, but you need the work.

You're an actor. You need that stimulus. So you have people who are unemployed. It's not as if they don't have money, but they're literally, technically unemployed—and that can take a toll. Because the way our work is, it's a really strange thing. You're put under the most strenuous, hazardous, crazy-making situation, and you swear to yourself, "I'm never going to do this again," and two weeks after you've been on set, you're like...

I think it's good advice for the people getting into it for money, so they know that it is not... If you're in this to be rich and famous, there are easier things to do. There are much easier things to do. Becoming an actor is not the easy way to become rich and famous. If you thought it was easy, it's not. There are easier ways to do it.





# Sharon Rotimi

## More Than Words

Sharon Rotimi brings a quiet power to her work onscreen, shaped by instinct, range, and a striking presence. She carries roles with an inner life that lingers, embodying characters with grace and restraint. As she steps more firmly into the cinematic spotlight, she speaks to us about patience, preparation, and the sacred space of performance.

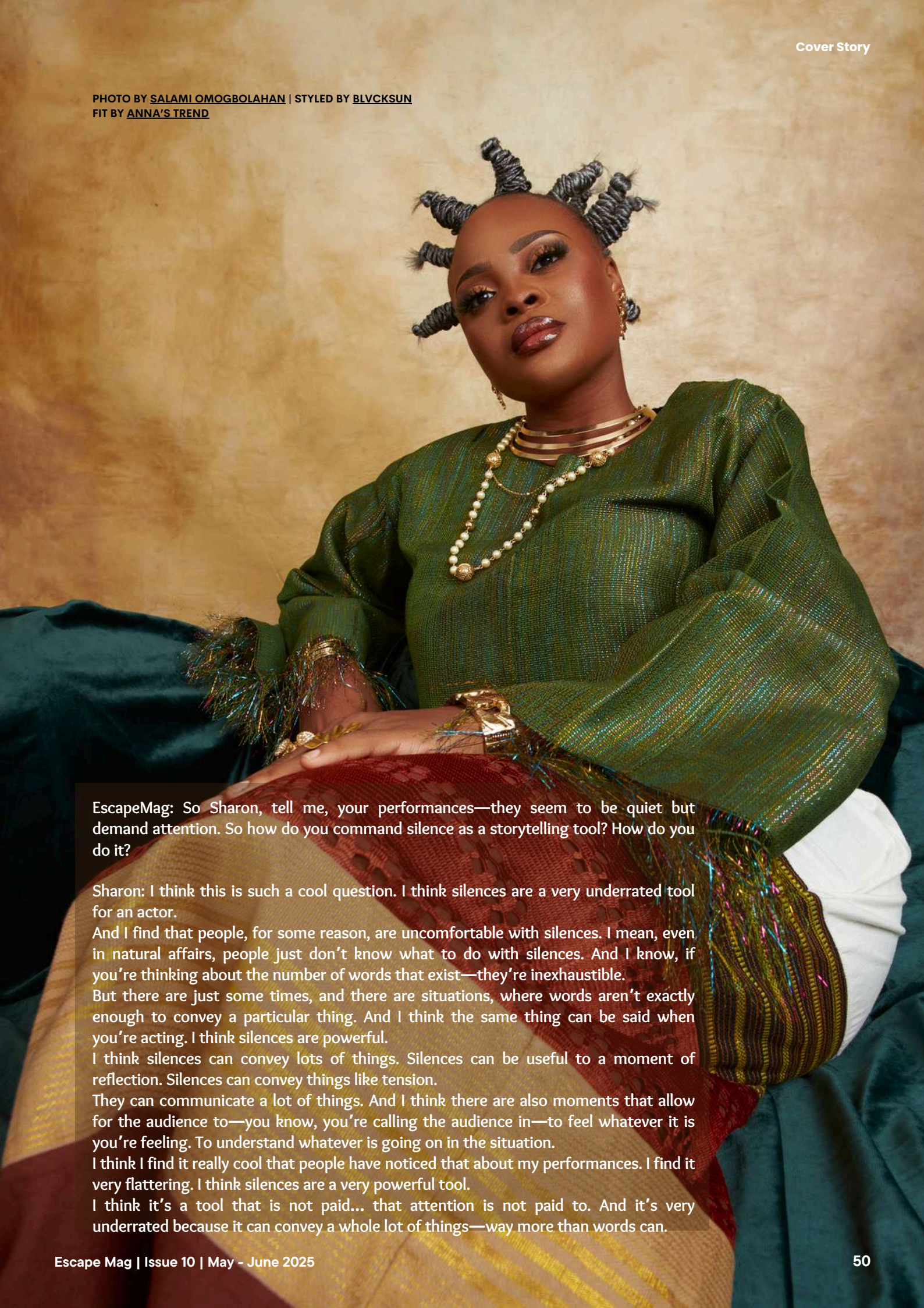
BY OKIKI LAOYE  
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STYLING BY BLVCKSUN  
STYLING ASSISTANTS: SOMA, BERRY,  
OBILERI, KOOKAVELLI

FIT TAILORING BY ANNA'S TRENDING  
HAIR BY OPE SMADE  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI



PHOTO BY SALAMI OMOGBOLAHAN | STYLED BY BLVCKSUN  
FIT BY ANNA'S TREND



EscapeMag: So Sharon, tell me, your performances—they seem to be quiet but demand attention. So how do you command silence as a storytelling tool? How do you do it?

Sharon: I think this is such a cool question. I think silences are a very underrated tool for an actor.

And I find that people, for some reason, are uncomfortable with silences. I mean, even in natural affairs, people just don't know what to do with silences. And I know, if you're thinking about the number of words that exist—they're inexhaustible.

But there are just some times, and there are situations, where words aren't exactly enough to convey a particular thing. And I think the same thing can be said when you're acting. I think silences are powerful.

I think silences can convey lots of things. Silences can be useful to a moment of reflection. Silences can convey things like tension.

They can communicate a lot of things. And I think there are also moments that allow for the audience to—you know, you're calling the audience in—to feel whatever it is you're feeling. To understand whatever is going on in the situation.

I think I find it really cool that people have noticed that about my performances. I find it very flattering. I think silences are a very powerful tool.

I think it's a tool that is not paid... that attention is not paid to. And it's very underrated because it can convey a whole lot of things—way more than words can.



**EscapeMag:** So, *All the Women in Me*. Let's talk about it. It's all like a declaration and a performance at the same time. So what part of your truth did that series allow you to express?

**Sharon:** That women are human. I feel like the world likes to convey this superhuman-ness to women. And I think it does more harm than good. I think it doesn't allow us to understand the complexities that come with being a human first—and then being a woman.

I like to advocate for the equal humanity of the sexes. Because I think both sexes are equally human. That's really what I wanted to convey with the monologues: that women aren't these beings who come on earth and perform their God-given duty of giving birth and serving the man—you know, them being this all-powerful, all-wise... Women can be stupid. And I think that's a good thing— No, I'm trying to say the other way around. I think people weaponise bad behaviour in women to just subjugate them. And they do not see it as necessarily part of the complexity or the humanness of a woman.

So I just thought, you know what? These people that have been mentioned in the Bible, and their stories are always in relation to the men in their lives—they're not necessarily as them, themselves, as whole beings. I just thought it made sense to try and pass that across in the form of art.

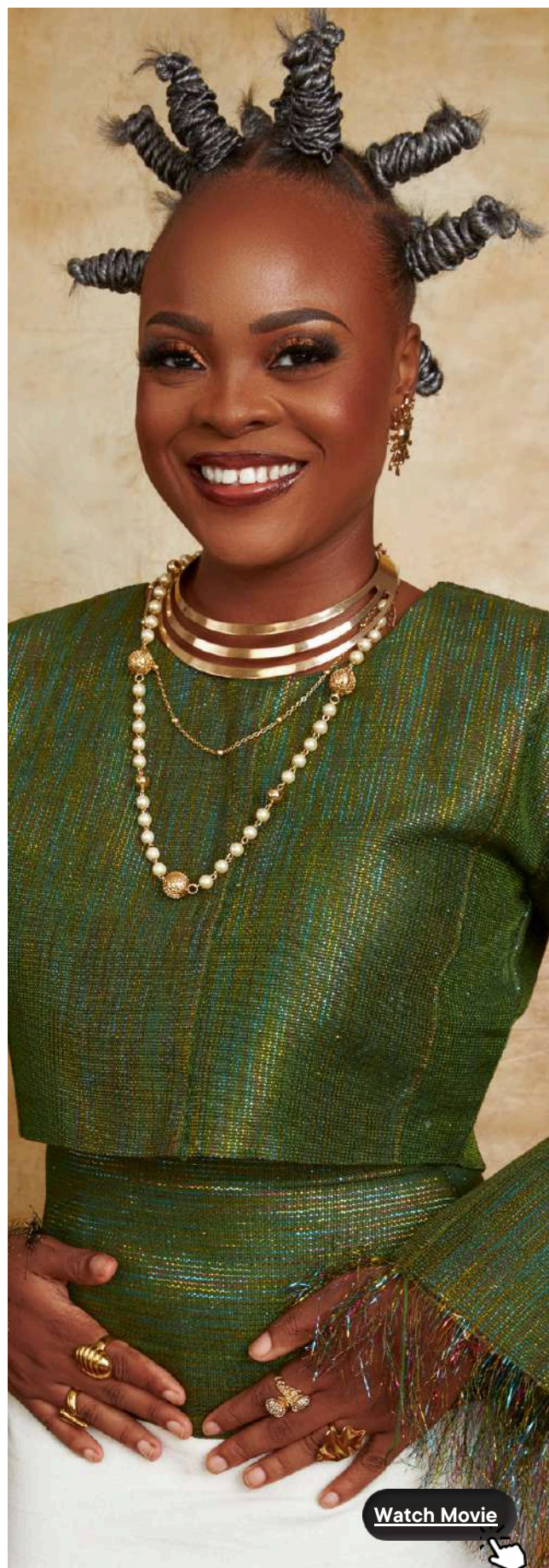
I think that the amount of discourses that have come out of expectations—things like “a woman should do this, a woman should be this”— I think that women are not given enough grace to be themselves. To be human, and to be a woman. I think that's a good thing. It allows you to express that part of yourself and that part of your truth.

**EscapeMag:** Finally, what does it mean to you to be a rising African actor in a world where—at a time when—the world is paying attention? What does that mean to you?

**Sharon:** I think it's such a beautiful thing. I'm grateful to be working in a time such as this. We have beautiful, amazing projects going into the world. I think people are beginning to realise that there was never a dearth of talent when it comes to Nollywood. There have always been talented, incredibly skilled people.

I think that at this time, where our stories are becoming more and more popular in popular media, I think it's such a blessing to be an actor, in this time. What it just means for us is that, as compared to 20, 10 years ago, people are finding it easier to tell our stories in the most authentic way possible. I think less and less we're trying to look like other people, and just finding the freedom in being ourselves. I find that really amazing.

I think that other parts of the world—other than Africa—are finally beginning to pay attention to the fact that there's so much goodness, so much excellence and creativity coming out of Africa. I think it's beautiful to see. And I'm grateful and happy for it, and proud of it. Thank you very much for having me. I'm glad that I did this. Thank you.





# Iremide Adeoye

## The Audacity of Authenticity

As an actor and domineering voice in the creative space, Iremide Adeoye brings a rare vulnerability to his work. While in front of the camera, he offers portrayals that pulse with honesty and intention. We catch up with him to discuss mentorship, mental health, and what it means to be a storyteller of this moment.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
OYINKANSOLA (BUMII)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHALOREY, SALAMI  
OMOGBOLAHAN  
STYLING BY BLVCKSUN, FRAIM'D, STEFAN  
STYLING ASSISTANTS: SOMA, BERRY, OBILERI,  
KOOKAVELLI, AYOBAMI, MARIE PETER

FIT TAILORING BY SOFT AIV, AXM,  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI



**EscapeMag:** So, Lolu Adeleke was a bold and nuanced role. What do you think normally gets wrong about Queer narratives?

**Iremide:** First things first, I'd say big ups to the filmmakers breaking the norms, you know, doing the courageous thing of telling stories that matter, even if it comes with a lot of struggles. From somebody that has played an iconic character like Lolu Adeleke, which is a very strong person, and the queer representation in Nollywood, I'd say there's still a lot of work to be done in telling queer stories, because there seems to be the tendency of telling these stories from, you know, muddy eyes, and there's just a probability of demonising or trying to sensitise, when in the real sense, we need to understand that queer stories are actual stories.

Just the same way you tell other stories, these are actual stories, and you need to tell them and tell them right, without your personal prejudice or what you think about the concept of this, you need to understand that you're telling the stories of real people, and you shouldn't do a disservice to that.


So take away prejudice, take away your own personal opinion. If you want to tell queer stories, then we need to tell them right, without trying to paint it in this stereotypical way. Okay, so more people need to come into the knowledge of that.

**EscapeMag:** Under the Influence placed you in a complex role. Did it feel like a test or a breakthrough?



PHOTO BY [PHAROLEY](#) | STYLED BY [BLVCKSUN](#) | FIT BY [SOFT AIV](#)





Iremide: Just the same way you tell other stories, these are actual stories, and you need to tell them and tell them right, without your personal prejudice or what you think about the concept of this, you need to understand that you're telling the stories of real people, and you shouldn't do a disservice to that.

So take away prejudice, take away your own personal opinion. If you want to tell queer stories, then we need to tell them right, without trying to paint it in this stereotypical way. Okay, so more people need to come into the knowledge of that.



**EscapeMag:** This one is funny. So when people call you “favourite TV boyfriend,” what’s your instinctive reaction?

**Iremide:** Hmm. I mean, that is what I heard. I think it’s beautiful. It’s cute because it’s a self-acknowledging title that has somehow grown to becoming a household name. And it is one of the strongest ways for me to connect with my community of people that love and cherish the work that I do. So it’s as simple as seeing this as a partnership, as a relationship with the people that love me, the people that support the work that I do. So it is good to hear it. And I love you guys, all my boos and baes. Forever your favourite TV boyfriend..

**EscapeMag:** Alright, so how do you prefer to embody characters that are socially controversial or emotionally intense? You know, those roles that, once you see the scripts, you just know that, yeah, this is something.

**Iremide:** Great. Like I would typically say, the character is king and research makes him. So the core of everything that I do as an actor is, when I’m telling stories, it’s about the character. It’s the character’s perspective, it’s the character’s motivations, it’s the character’s objective, it’s the character’s goal. And when I have to play characters that are controversial or emotionally tasking, I like to first listen. I like to research a lot. I like to learn, I like to unlearn. I like to gain knowledge about these characters just so that I can properly tell the story from the perspective of this character without doing a disservice to the character.

So the first thing for me in my quote-unquote process when I’m prepping for these characters is research. So I want to know everything that has to do with this character and I’m willing to go on a journey with the character as the character progresses and the different arcs of the character’s story. So it’s a process and I’m willing to learn straight up till I hear my final cut and it’s a wrap.

**EscapeMag:** Alright, thank you.

**Let’s talk about Dammy2Fresh.** Dammy2Fresh pursued an unconventional character. And so from the character’s point of view and in pop culture conversation, what do you have to say about young adults pursuing unconventional careers?

**Iremide:** Now for the character Dammy2Fresh, one of my favourite characters to play or that I have played as an actor, and I am super grateful for the gift of that character. A character that decided to pursue a career in an unconventional path.





PHOTO BY SALAMI OMOGBOLAHAN |  
STYLED BY FRAIM'D | FIT BY AXM



And that is the reality of so many young adults right now in, you know, speaking about pop culture. And I think for people that decide to take this step to do something that is not conventional, I think that's a very bold and courageous move. And it's highly commendable. And it isn't easy because you're trying to trailblaze in a path that isn't seen as the right way to go or the conventional thing to do. Exactly. So you're going in with a lot of grit and perseverance and you're trying so hard to prove your point and get something done in this unconventional means.

And I think anybody that is doing that, that's highly commendable. So if you're creative, if you're pursuing a career somewhere that doesn't fall under the typical doctor, lawyer, engineer, accountant and stuff like that, I think you're doing something highly commendable. And it doesn't come easy. It doesn't come easy. But the essence of this entire thing is the goals that you are trying to achieve as a person. So if you're fixed on that, you would consistently try to push towards that goal.



PHOTO BY PHALOREY | STYLED BY  
STEFAN

**EscapeMag:** So as a fast-rising actor, how has fame in such a short span, I would say, affected your relationship with authenticity?

**Iremide:** Okay, in all sincerity, I'd say that with fame comes the pressure to want to be what you're not. Trying to live up to the status quo, trying to live up to expectations of people.

And it is very easy to get swayed by stuff like that. And for someone like myself that works in an industry like this, and you know, by the day you are attaining some level of reach and prominence, there is this tendency to want to forget who you are or what made you start in the first place. But for me, I wouldn't say fame or whatever limelight I've gotten so far in my career as an actor hasn't made me change authenticity at all, because I like to remind myself why I started. Something brought me here. Something got me to this point. Something gave me this fame.

[Watch Movie](#)



So why change it? Why move away from what has gotten me here so far? Now, this does not take away the place of re-strategizing or growth. It's not the same thing. I just try to find a balance between staying true to myself and trying to fall under the expectations of society.

But for me, my personal growth and goals and ambitions are of top priority to me than the expectations of the society. So I know who Iremide is supposed to be. I have an idea of what I'm trying to achieve.

I know what I'd like to be. And that's the key, that's the goal. That's what I keep looking at every time.

So whenever I think I'm losing my sauce or I'm trying to deviate from purpose, I try to remind myself of why I started out in the first place. It's like giving what is demanded of you, but not losing yourself in the process.

**EscapeMag:** Okay, so if your journey so far was a film title, what would it be and why?

**Iremide:** Hmm, so I would take this as not an existing title, just me making up a title, right, for the film. I would say Grace and Becoming.

**EscapeMag:** That's interesting. Yeah. Why?

**Iremide:** I like to see my journey as Iremide as one that has been filled with so much grace. I love to do the work. I love to put in the effort. I take my craft, my career seriously, but I cannot take away the place of being graced so far in my journey as an actor.

And Becoming in the sense that every time that I step out as who I am, it is a journey—a journey of constantly trying to become something. Even in my performance as an actor, I am here to become things. I'm here to become characters, and it's a learning curve for me every time.

Every time I take on a new character, every time I tell a new story, or every time I'm attaining some level in my career's journey, it is constantly a process of becoming for me, obviously coupled with grace. So yeah, Grace and Becoming.



PHOTO BY PHAROLEY | STYLED BY STEFAN

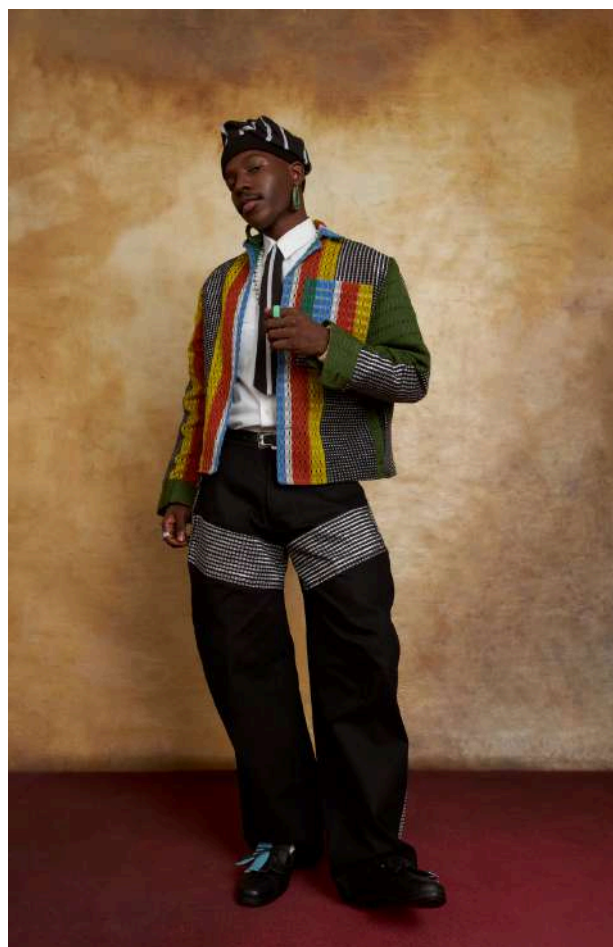


PHOTO BY SALAMI OMOGBOLAHAN | STYLED BY FRAIM'D | FIT BY AXM



# Kayin Eros

## Rising With Range

Kayin is one of Nollywood's rising talents you can't ignore—not just because of her performances, but because of her purpose. From bringing a nuanced performance to playing a cancer survivor in *Ireti* to championing women's rights and the untold stories of iconic women in *The Secret Lives of Nigerian Women*, her video series, she has mastered the act and art of empathy, intention, and courage to every frame. In this conversation with *EscapeMag*, she opens up about why she's drawn to brave women, the myths surrounding emerging actors, and how she's constantly pushing the boundaries of her craft.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
OYINKANSOLA (BUMII)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLAME BS, SALAMI  
OMOGBOLAHAN  
STYLING & CREATIVE DIRECTION BY  
STEFAN

FIT TAILORING BY SAMMILLE LUXE  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI





**Escapemag:** Let's talk about your monologues. Some of your monologues feel like revolutions. How do you choose the women whose stories you tell?

**Kayin:** Oh, how do I choose the women? Google? [laughs] I really am invested in telling stories by females. I feel like women are such fascinating and complex human beings, and I feel like their stories deserve to be told.

And I was also very fascinated by people that do things afraid—because that's something I'm trying to do now: just try to do things afraid. And there are so many women that did such endearing things in a time when we weren't allowed to do it—quote-unquote.

So I was looking for women that did courageous things, and I just went on Google. I was searching for historical women that did things in Nigeria, and so many names popped up. I was like, Okay, yeah—this is what I want to do.

**Escapemag:** That's very different. It speaks to how you're interested in these stories and you're willing to put them out. That's very nice.

**Kayin:** Thank you.

**EscapeMag:** What do you think is the biggest misperception people have about emerging actors?



PHOTO BY BLAME BS | STYLED BY  
STEFAN | FIT BY SAMMILLE LUXE

**Kayin:** Oh, how much time do we have? [laughs] The biggest misconception?

*I think it's that we don't know what we're doing and we're just kind of here for the fame and play, basically. And that couldn't be further from the truth. I mean, I feel like everybody has their reason and their "why" for doing things, but I know so many emerging actors like myself who are truly, truly about the craft. They want to tell stories, help people, impact lives, and be the best actors they can possibly be. I think they're often mocked for their willingness to even try. Like—You'd fail—is usually the first thing people say.*



**EscapeMag:** What is your definition of range, and how are you expanding your own range?

**Kayin:** My definition of range? I think range is basically the ability to morph into any character you're given to play. Your ability to empathize with any character, or to just be truthful about any character you have to play.

It's about being able to play different genres, whether drama or comedy or horror, whatever the case may be—and tell it truthfully. And I feel like as an empathetic person, you will naturally have that ability to delve into any character as long as you can find the truth within that character, whether it's a villain or a hero or whatever it is.





PHOTO BY SALAMI OMOGBOLAHAN |  
STYLED BY BLACK ALBINO



As long as you can find the truth of it, I feel like you can find range.

And how am I stretching myself? Honestly—by training. I'm obsessed with classes. I'm always taking one acting class or the other. I'm always looking for a new technique, a new way to do things, a new way to open up myself.

Because I feel like I have so much in me. And yeah—just training, and working on monologues myself, and tapping into that well of talent I know God has bestowed on me.



# Obi Maduegbuna

## Cool Nerves, Sharp Instincts

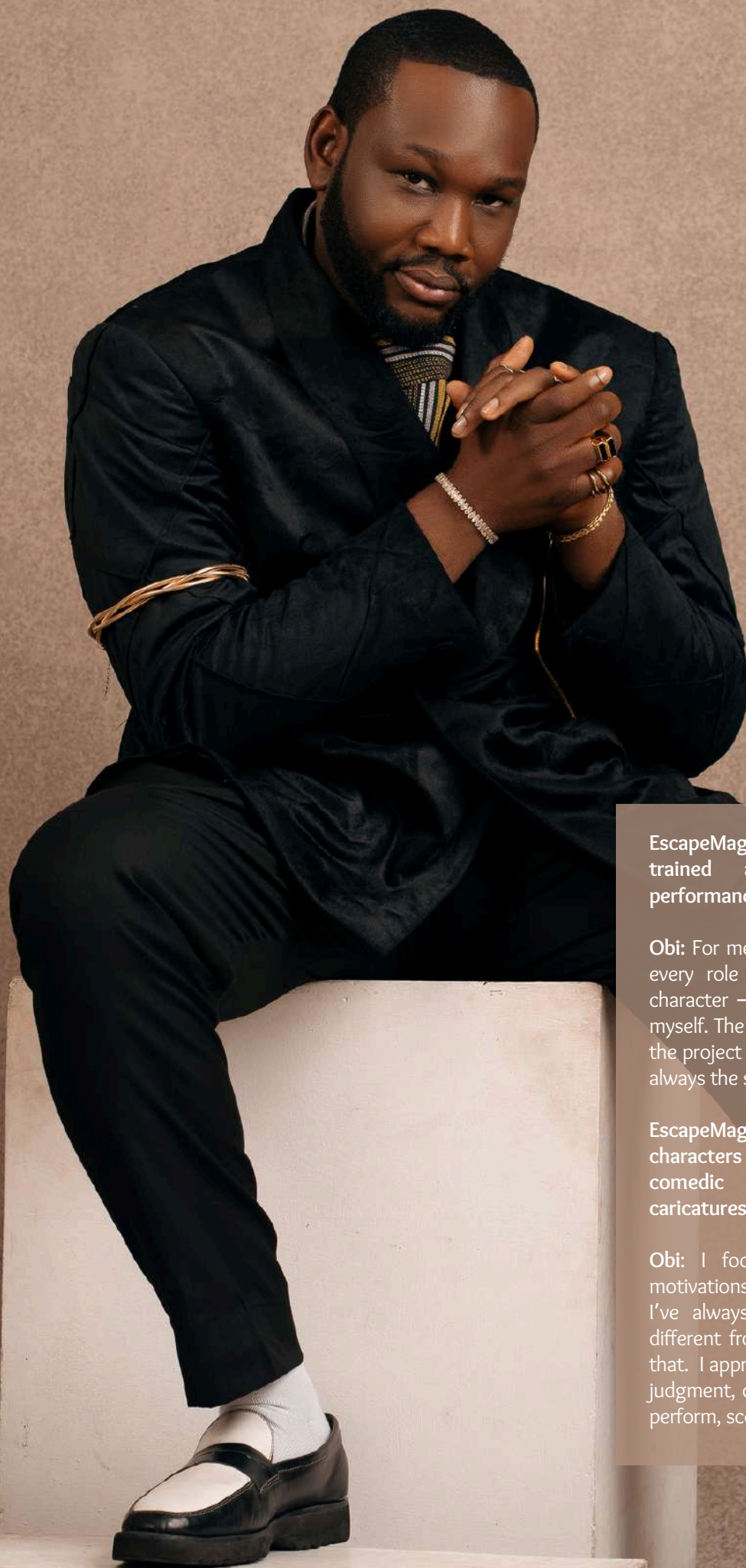
When a role calls, Obi Maduegbuna doesn't just show up — he locks in. Whether it's last-minute theatre in South Africa or bringing subtle magic to offbeat characters on screen, he blends stage muscle with on-screen finesse. British-trained, Nollywood-rooted, and always chasing the real, Obi talks to EscapeMag about navigating dual worlds, leaning into discomfort, and why true performance is never about perfection — it's about presence.

BY OKIKI LAOYE  
INTERVIEW BY OGUNMEFUN  
OYINKANSOLA (BUMII)  
PRODUCTION MANAGER: SAM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHALOREY  
STYLING & CREATIVE DIRECTION BY  
STEPHAN

FIT TAILORING BY CUTEES NG  
VIDEO BY JOSH OYEBANJI





**EscapeMag:** How do you navigate being British-trained and Nollywood-blooded in your performances?

**Obi:** For me, there isn't much difference. I approach every role the same way. It's always about the character — what I see in them and what I see in myself. The process might shift slightly depending on the project or people I work with, but at the core, it's always the same intention.

**EscapeMag:** You've played socially awkward characters with real depth. How do you humanise comedic roles without turning them into caricatures?

**Obi:** I focus on understanding the character's motivations — why they make the choices they do. I've always been curious about people who are different from me, and acting allows me to explore that. I approach each role with empathy and without judgment, discovering more about the character as I perform, scene by scene.





**EscapeMag:** When a script lands in your hands, what's the first thing you look for?

**Obi:** Honestly, I look for all of it — challenge, story, even the paycheck. But mainly, I love acting. Being on set brings me joy. I'm interested in what the story is trying to say, what it means to me, and how I can help bring it to life.

**EscapeMag:** So it's like dopamine for you?

**Obi:** Very much.

**EscapeMag:** Let's talk *Dear Kaffi*. What was your biggest artistic takeaway from performing it in South Africa?

**Obi:** That experience was wild. I wasn't supposed to be in the play — someone's visa got denied, and I was called in last-minute. One day I was in Lagos, the next I was flying to South Africa, learning lines on the plane.

Coming from a theatre background, it was a return to form for me. Since graduating from drama school, no one had cast me in theatre. So being thrown into a live performance environment again, and in another country, was powerful. I was flexing muscles I hadn't used in a while — and somehow, I pulled it off.

**EscapeMag:** What was it like doing something you hadn't prepared for, on such short notice?

**Obi:** Terrifying. You get excited about being cast, then the nerves set in. You're under pressure with limited rehearsal time, but you still have to show up. On stage, something shifts. The audience changes everything — their reactions help you find new moments in the performance you hadn't even discovered during rehearsals. It became a living thing.

**EscapeMag:** Do you think the African film industry is ready for genre-bending, wild, or unconventional stories?

**Obi:** I do — with the right directors and writers. We still have work to do, but progress is happening. Some filmmakers are turning to the festival circuit, where audiences are more open. It's a slow shift, but we'll get there.

**EscapeMag:** How do you define success? Is it in the awards, the impact, or something else?

**Obi:** For me, it's about loving what I do. Everything else — accolades, attention — is a bonus. Success starts internally. It's about how fulfilled you feel with your work.



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# EL OLAM by SOFT AIV

Fashion That Lives Forever

BY OLUWATONI OTTUN





In the world of SOFT AIV, fashion is more than fabric — it's art, it's story, it's legacy. The Lagos-based brand steps boldly into the spotlight with its latest editorial, *El OLAM*, a name that means "everlasting" — and that's exactly how it feels.









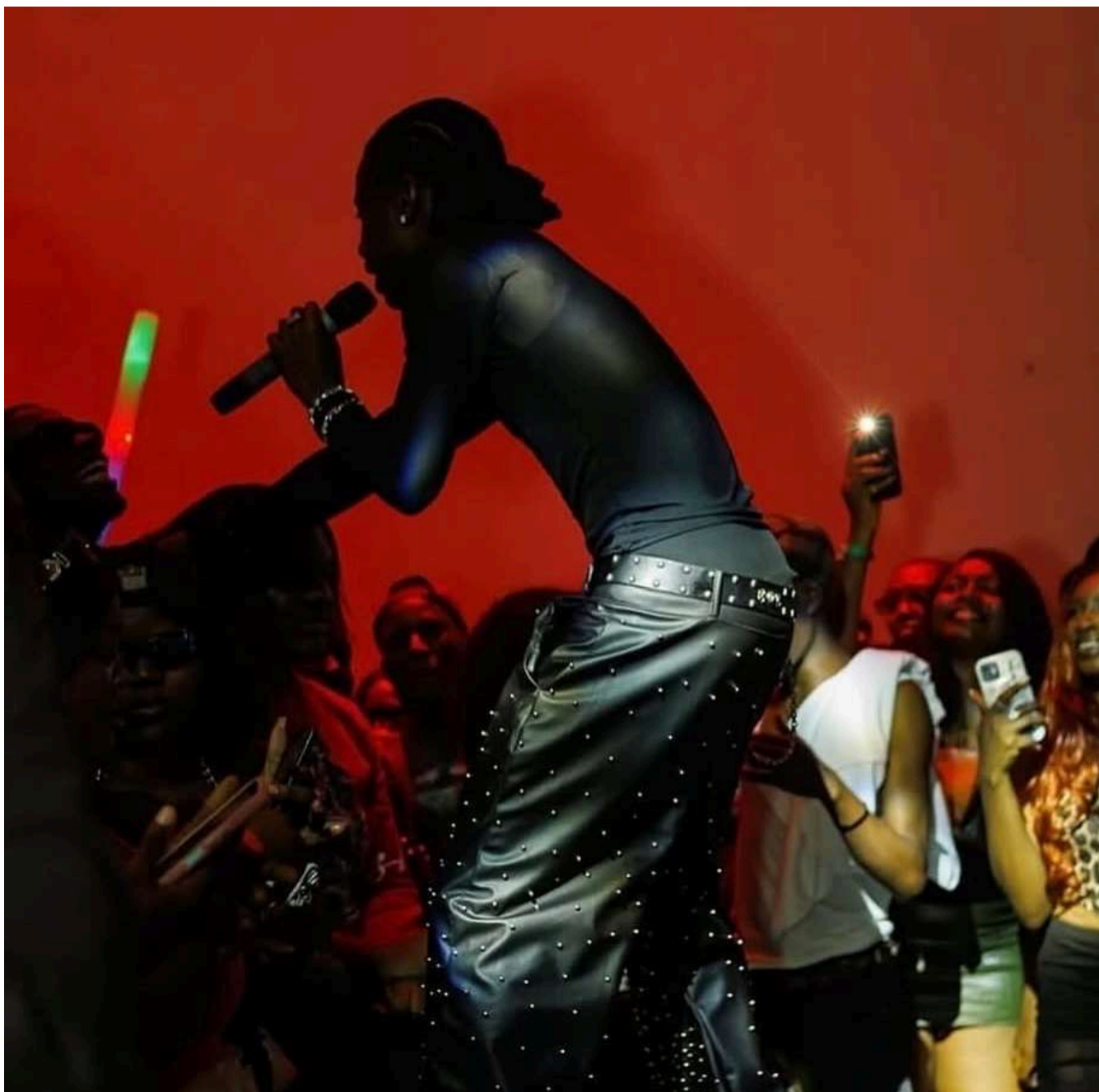


El OLAM is a celebration of timeless style. Each piece in the collection exudes luxury, strength, and grace. With rich textures, bold silhouettes, and striking detail, the editorial blends cultural heritage with high fashion, making every look feel like a masterpiece.

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# Anna's Trend

## Style Language

BY OLUWATONI OTTUN

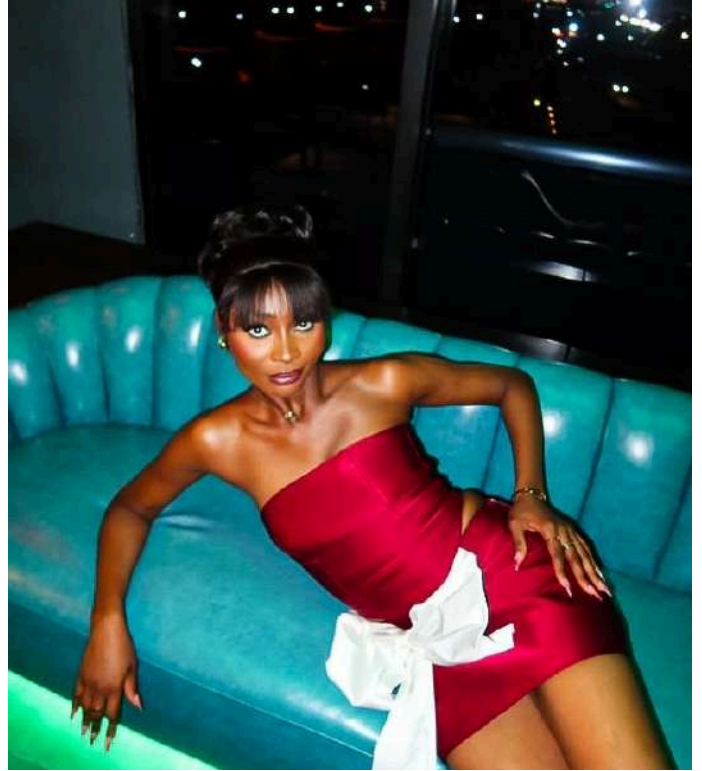
Clean cuts. Rich fabrics. Quiet confidence. That's what you notice first when you see someone wearing Anna's Trend. There's a kind of ease in the pieces — whether it's a sharply tailored suit or a dress with just the right amount of drama. The clothes don't just fit; they speak.



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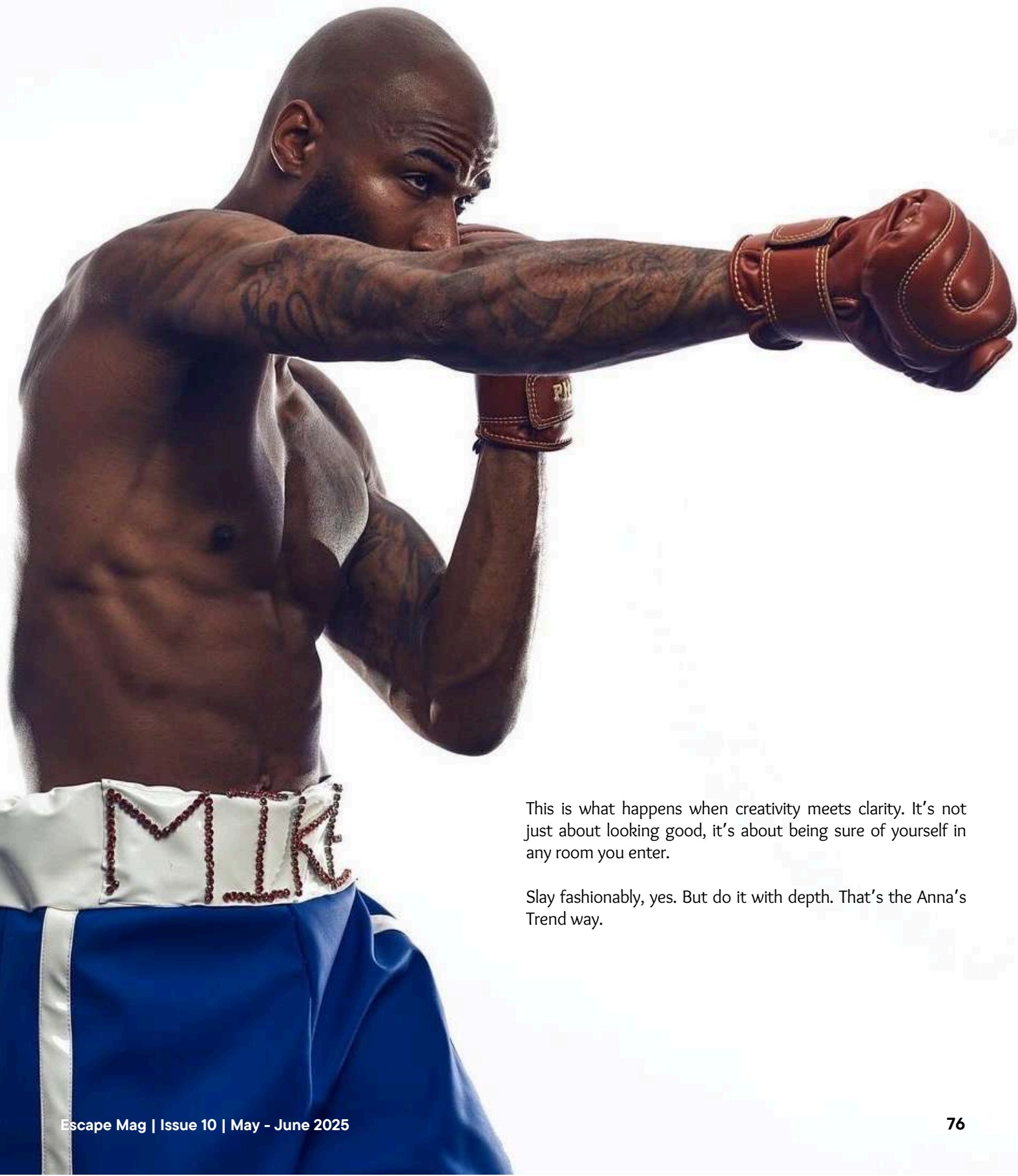






What makes it work isn't just good design. It's intention. From the choice of fabric to the final stitch, everything is crafted with care. And with custom options for special occasions, Anna's Trend knows how to make fashion personal.





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## **DR NKEM ANDREA OBI**

MEDICAL DOCTOR, NUTRITIONIST CONSULTANT  
FOUNDER OF M&D HEALTH

# Is Father's Day Really Fathering?

In the past few days, we marked Father's Day a day meant to honor the role of fathers, yet the celebration seemed to pass with only a gentle ripple compared to the waves of emotion, fanfare, and social media tributes that come with Mother's Day. It makes one wonder: Is Father's Day truly fathering?

In a country like ours, where societal norms still largely define men as providers and women as caregivers, boys grow up under pressure to "hustle" and provide, with little room for emotional vulnerability. From an early age, boys are taught strength, not softness; silence, not sensitivity. They are groomed to pamper their queens, but not necessarily taught how to care for themselves.

And really who wouldn't want to be taken care of?

But in our quest to uphold the image of the strong, unshakable man, we often fail to acknowledge the emotional and mental weight many men carry in silence. The pressure to meet expectations, to always "man up," to carry the financial and emotional burdens of a family can be mentally exhausting.

Behind the façade of composure are sleepless nights, hidden anxiety, bottles of alcohol meant to drown out the stress, and a growing number of silent breakdowns. It's no coincidence that more men are being diagnosed with

hypertension, diabetes, and other stress-related illnesses many of which stem from lifestyle habits shaped by unresolved mental health issues. The real tragedy? Men are not raised to be vulnerable. Speaking up is seen as weakness. Admitting that they're not okay is almost taboo. And although the tide is slowly turning with more women now contributing to household finances the emotional load still heavily leans on men.

Globally, mental health issues are one of the leading causes of death, and men are especially vulnerable because they often suffer in silence. It's time to change that.

In the spirit of Men's Health Month, we must amplify this message: Men's mental health matters.

Let's break the culture of silence. Let's remind the men in our lives—fathers, brothers, sons, husbands, friends that asking for help is not weakness, but strength. Let's encourage them to seek therapy, open up to trusted friends, and take their emotional well-being seriously. You don't have to be a therapist to help. Sometimes, a caring ear, a simple check-in, or a kind word can be life-changing. Be that safe space for someone. Be that reason someone chooses to keep going.

Let's not wait for another Father's Day to show appreciation. Let's make every day an opportunity to father the fathers to care for the carers.





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# Streaming Is the New Music Industry — And Kai Cenat Is at the Center of It

BY OLUWATONI OTTUN



L-R: KAI CENAT, POIKMANE, ISHOWSPEED

Streaming isn't just content anymore, it's currency. It's community. It's cultural power. The way radio once dictated what songs made it big, streamers now influence what's hot, who gets attention, and how audiences engage with creators in real time. At the center of this shift is Kai Cenat, one of the most influential digital figures of the decade. From reaction videos to full-blown IRL experiences, Kai has evolved into a global bridge-builder. Through his now-famous Streamer University, he's laying the groundwork for what the next generation of content creators can become, structured, mentored, and business-minded. Talents like Rakia and Tylil are learning the ropes not just of entertainment, but of digital entrepreneurship.





L-R: SHANK, PELLER, ENZO

But Kai isn't doing it alone. He's intentionally building global connections, linking with Shank in Nigeria, Ray from Taiwan, and Tota from Brazil, reinforcing the idea that streaming is borderless. And while Kai builds those bridges, other streamers like iShowSpeed are taking IRL content to new heights, popping up in London, China, Germany and stadiums across the world.

What's changed? Celebrities now look up to streamers. The dynamic has flipped. From Drake joining Ninja's stream to artists begging for a Kai feature, streamers aren't riding the wave; they are the wave. Brands know this too. Product launches, ad integrations, and full-blown campaigns are now being designed around streamers' platforms. Want to sell something to Gen Z or Gen Alpha? You launch it live.

And the business is real. Platforms like Twitch, TikTok and YouTube aren't just creative outlets; they're full-fledged revenue streams. Subscriptions, donations, ad deals, merch drops, sponsorships, affiliate links, a streamer can make thousands of dollars in a single night. What used to be seen as "just vibes" is now monetized influence, backed by analytics and cult-like fan loyalty.

Even politics is paying attention. When Donald Trump appeared on Adin Ross's stream, it signaled how seriously even presidential campaigns are taking this space. Podcasts, another longform offshoot of this shift, are growing for the same reasons: rawness, relatability, and real-time storytelling.

Now, the big question: Can Nigeria catch up?

The answer is yes, and it's already happening. Peller, one of Nigeria's most consistent streamers, is growing a loyal base. Shank, who linked with Kai, has helped spotlight Nigerian humour and personality for a global audience. Enzo, another Nigerian streamer recently graduated from Streamer University, signaling how African creators are being invited to sit at the table early.

But growth won't happen in isolation. Collaboration is the key, locally and globally. The same way Afrobeats went global by building communities across Lagos, London, and Atlanta, streaming will scale by linking creators across continents. Streamers need to build with each other, not compete blindly. Brands need to invest in talent, not just influencers. And Nigeria needs to recognize streaming not as a trend, but as a legitimate creative industry.

Streaming is no longer the future. It's the now. And just like music, whoever figures out how to own, monetize, and scale it, wins.



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