

TAMELA MANN

Starring as Cora Simmons, the loving and churchgoing “but woe to those who cross me” daughter of beloved Deacon Leroy Brown on the hit TBS comedy Tyler Perry’s **Meet The Browns**, **TAMELA MANN** makes millions laugh every week while she enjoys a unique personal double blessing. Continuing the role she originated in Perry’s 2004 play and 2008 film of the same name, the sassy, high spirited multi-talented singer and actress plays a woman that, like her, is absolutely in love with Jesus—and is able to work on set every day with David Mann, her husband of 24 years who plays Leroy. Looking back on Tamela’s extraordinary career, which began in the early 90’s when she and David joined future gospel superstar Kirk Franklin & The Family, her success is truly part of **The Master Plan**, the name of her highly anticipated new gospel album.

Even as she’s enthralled audiences with her comedic acting over the years as Cora in many of Perry’s hit plays (**I Can Do Bad All By Myself**, **Madea’s Family Reunion**, **Madea’s Class Reunion**) and films (**Diary of a Mad Black Woman**, **Madea Goes To Jail**), Tamela has never strayed far from her first love of singing. Touring and recording with The Family, she was a featured soloist on tracks like “Now Behold The Lamb” and the Grammy-nominated (for Song of the Year) “Lean On Me,” which featured Mary J. Blige, Crystal Lewis, R. Kelly and Bono. Her explosive versions of “Father Can You Hear Me” and “Take It To Jesus” are included on the soundtrack album of **Diary of a Mad Black Woman**. After making her solo recording debut in 2004 with **Gotta Keep Movin’**, she recorded the concert CD/DVD **The Live Experience** at Calvary Church in Dallas, which featured exciting new arrangements of the songs. A Top 20 Billboard Gospel Chart hit, this album earned Tamela 2008 Stellar Award nominations for Female Vocalist of the Year and Contemporary Female Artist of the Year.

While from her earliest days singing at the Holy Tabernacle in her hometown of Ft. Worth, Tamela has always considered herself a traditional gospel singer, on **The Master Plan** she incorporates more contemporary urban/R&B sounds under the guidance of Grammy Award winning producer Myron Butler (Kirk Franklin, Yolanda Adams) and another Perry regular, Terrell Carter. For the first time as a recording artist, Tamela is a co-writer on a handful of songs, including the title track, “I Trust In You,” “Here I Am,” “Anything For You” and “In Him.” She also includes a stirring new arrangement of “The Lord’s Prayer.”

As Tamela recalls, a fascinating moment of divine inspiration gave rise to this extraordinary project: “I was on a plane flying to Baltimore when both the lyrics and the tune for the song ‘**The Master Plan**’ came to me. Because I’m still new at songwriting, it was kind of a shock to me the way it happened. In the past, either the music or words came first, but not both at the same time. I hadn’t planned on recording a new album yet, but when I told David and my manager that the inspiration was poppin’, they hooked me up with Myron and Terrell and things started taking shape. Songs would hit me at the strangest times. ‘Here I Am’ came on another flight, while ‘I Trust In You’ hit me as I was about to walk onstage to perform in ‘What’s Done In The Dark.’ I knew that song was a keeper when my son David called me from college telling me about all the bad stuff his dorm mates were into—and after someone pulled a gun on him! I started singing ‘I Trust In You’ and he started weeping. To me, that’s the power of music.”

That trust and faithfulness, combined with an unimaginable amount of talent and drive, has brought Tamela to a place of gratitude and humility as she thinks back on her impoverished childhood in Texas where money was scarce, and struggles were ever-present. God and the sweet gospel sounds of Walter Hawkins, Edwin Hawkins, Andrae Crouch and the Clark Sisters were pretty much all she had to hold her together. She was the baby of 14 children born to a mother who had a third grade education and was largely unemployed. Tamela ultimately left home at 16 due to her verbally abusive stepfather. As an illustration of the family’s struggles to survive, Tamela remembers him having the kids “dumpster dive” to find food.

Music was her solace from the beginning, as the gospel she heard in the house calmed her troubled mind and she began attending choir rehearsals with her siblings when she was eight. By 12, she was performing in the "singing choir" at the Holy Tabernacle. In her late teens, her best friend took her to an after school chorus class, where she first heard high school friends David Mann, Kirk Franklin and Darrell Blair sing; in those days, they were known as the "Humble Hearts." Tamela went to a different high school, but impressed them with her voice, and David enjoyed her gig as a special guest soloist at another church. She and David, who later studied at beauty college together became best friends and eventually began singing with Franklin and the larger ensemble he created that became known to the world a few years later as The Family.

The happy, feel-good side of David and Tamela's story has them falling in love, starting a family—their kids are Porcia (23), Tiffany (22), David (20) and Tia (19), also raising David's 35-year-old niece Sonya as their own—and being part of Franklin's recording and touring experience from 1992-1998 as he became a multi-platinum, Grammy Award winning superstar with The Family and then God's Property. During this time, Tamela made her first stage appearance as part of the gospel musical cast of David E. Talbert's **He Say...She Say...But What Does God Say?** The Manns' dual acting careers took off when Tyler Perry cast them in his play **I Can Do Bad All By Myself** in 1999.

Any great romance and Hollywood success story worth its salt and faith begins with trials and tribulations, and David and Tamela can entertain folks for hours with some of the anecdotes from their "poor days" when they were first married. When Tamela was first pregnant, they recall only being able to afford five potatoes for a week's food. Their favorite is the "windshield wiper" story. The motor that makes the wipers go back and forth conked out, so they made sure they checked the forecast before leaving home for too long so that they didn't encounter any rain. One night, they miscalculated and found themselves 20 minutes from home. Pushing and pulling long clothes hangers that they attached to the wipers and operated from inside the car, the Manns drove home with the windows down, fending off the rain from the windshield manually as they got soaked. What kept the marriage strong then—as it does now—is laughter, and more importantly, the ability to laugh at life and persevere through the good and bad. "David is always there for me and makes me laugh," she says. "It's hard to be upset with him because he cracks me up. He makes me the maddest and happiest of any person I have ever met!"

"These are stories we tell because they humble David and myself and remind us of who we are and where we come from," Tamela adds. "They make me grateful for the blessings that have followed and the life we have now because we know the hard work and faithfulness it took to get here. I sometimes drive by the old neighborhood I grew up in just to remind myself of the journey. And this is why I sing and make albums like **The Master Plan**, because singing helps me stay joyful, grounded and sane.

Tamela continues: "My recordings are my way of thanking God for the gift of music. I like to say that I don't mind singing in the rain because the rain is not a distraction. I love all of the wonderful things I have been able to do in the movies and TV. I also love singing for audiences and inspiring people, but there are times when I look out at the audience, close my eyes and forget they are there—and all I see is Jesus in the front row and I'm singing my heart out for him as if it's the last time I will ever do it. That's the love the God inspires in me which makes everything else in my life possible."

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CONTACT / ROGERS & COWAN:

LORI LOUSARARIAN – 310/854-8104
llousararian@rogersandcowan.com

LESLEY BURBRIDGE – 310/854-8170
lburbridge@rogersandcowan.com