

Melba Moore, songbird and actress, candidly admits how life had dealt her some cruel blows. In a classic example of the sheer will, determination, and resilience of the human spirit, she picked herself up from the ashes of defeat. Catch her as she rockets to the top of the entertainment scene — where she belongs.

SH!OUT was lucky to hitch a ride on this comet and witness first hand the star dust she leaves behind as a beacon and an inspiration to us all.

Her new CD, **Unconditional Love**, bristles with power. Anyone who has ever loved someone or been loved by someone will be able to identify with the lyrics. Thus, once again, she gives a gift to us all.

Q: So Melba, you have an album called **Unconditional Love**. Is that just named for the title song or is there more meaning behind those words?

A: Absolutely! There is a lot more meaning behind the words. I believe that it is the story of my life.

Q: What defines Unconditional love?

A: The love of a parent for a child. I think is the most pure.

Q: You do a lot of charity work with children. Is that part of your inspiration?

A: Yes. Children teach us how to love - unconditionally. Though we always have conditions with kids. You especially see that in child abuse cases. Even though they are abused, they still love their parents.

Q: You used to teach children didn't you? Weren't you a teacher when you got the role in "Purlie"?

A: Yes. In the public schools, I was teaching kindergarten through grade school.

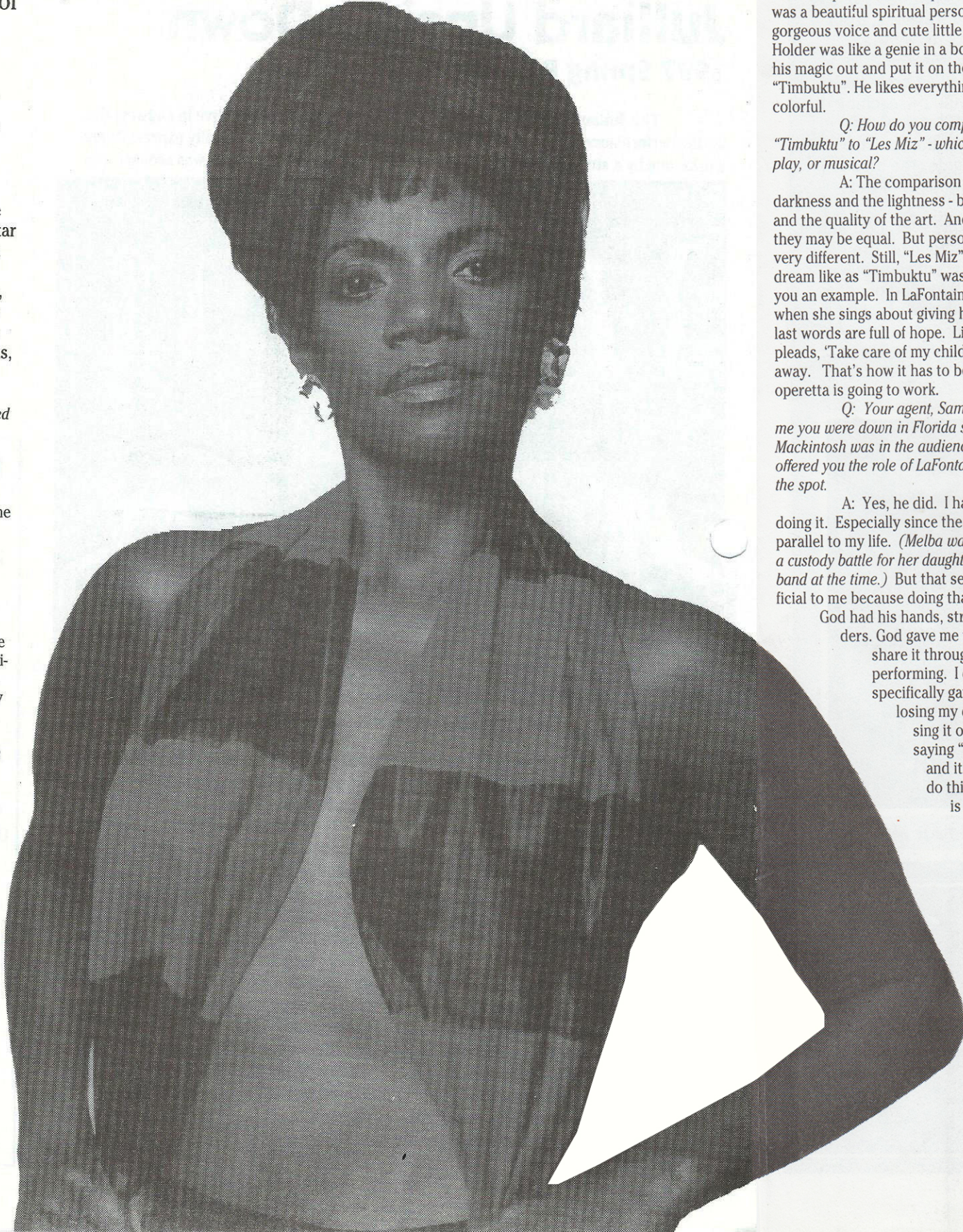
Q: Purlie was a wonderful young, innocent and child-like character. Were the children you taught a source inspiration?

A: I was very young and innocent myself, at that time! I think joyful and innocent is the key. I think Ella Fitzgerald is the perfect example. I think anyone who ever saw Ella, at any age, would consider her innocent. Even at the very end, she still had that sweetness and joy about her. A spirit. Hers is a spirit that accompanies joy.

Q: You mentioned the word, 'spirit'. How much of your work comes from - religious inspiration? Or personal spirituality?

UNCONDITIONAL Melba

by Robert W. Cabell



A: It's personal spiritual revelations.

Q: Revelations! Well, you've had a career of revelations haven't you. Tell us about "Timbuktu," Geoffrey Holder's re-working of "Kismet." That was pretty revelational.

A: It really was an absolute dream. It was opulent. The costumes were very showy and dream like. Gilbert Price was a beauty. He was a beautiful person with a spiritual personality. He was a beautiful spiritual person. He had the most gorgeous voice and cute little buns! Geoffrey Holder was like a genie in a bottle. He let all of his magic out and put it on the stage in "Timbuktu". He likes everything sweeping and colorful.

Q: How do you compare doing "Timbuktu" to "Les Miz" - which is such a dark play, or musical?

A: The comparison to me is not the darkness and the lightness - but the challenge and the quality of the art. And, to me, in that they may be equal. But personality wise they are very different. Still, "Les Miz" was as exciting and dream like as "Timbuktu" was in a way. I'll give you an example. In LaFontaine's death scene, when she sings about giving her child away, her last words are full of hope. Like a prayer she pleads, 'Take care of my child,' and then slips away. That's how it has to be if the medium of operetta is going to work.

Q: Your agent, Samantha LaViel, told me you were down in Florida singing and Cameron Mackintosh was in the audience, saw you sing and offered you the role of LaFontaine in Les Miz on the spot.

A: Yes, he did. I had such a great time doing it. Especially since the sadness was exactly parallel to my life. (Melba was then going through a custody battle for her daughter with her ex-husband at the time.) But that seemed almost superficial to me because doing that role was kismet.

God had his hands, strongly on my shoulders. God gave me this pain so I could share it through my art, through performing. I don't mean that God specifically gave me the pain of losing my daughter so I could sing it on stage, but he was saying "You are an artist and it's meant for you to do this." That's what art is about, if you take it seriously and get the greatest joy out of it. You rise to the occasion.

Q:

You've really done it all, Broadway, hit records, TV and film. What is it that you would like to do more of?

A: Well, I'd love to do more theatre. I'd like to do that consistently. Especially comedy. I would love to create characters, as Lily Tomlin did, that become their own personality. You do need to be consistent with what you do and in theatre you have the music, the comedy, drama, everything. You still need to do television, films and albums to do all the various cycles of your career but I would like to do more theatre.

Q: Getting back to your album - did you have a lot of fun doing this or was this something you felt you needed to send a message through - or you just wanted to go back and do some recording again?

A: No, no I wasn't interested in doing any recording again. The reason I say I wasn't interested in it was, at the point I met Andrea Wallace - (who arranged and produced the album for me) I was only interested in surviving. Recording is not first in my life. I've already done that. Theatre is something I want to develop more. Now - people are first, theatre is second, and I guess recording is third. Only because that's been done and I won't lose it.

Q: Musical Theatre Works gives seminars in creating musicals. They sometimes talk about what makes a great musical number work. And they give examples in whether it was the singer or the song that created a great moment in musical theater. For example - "Impossible Dream" in "La Mancha" being a perfect song that created the magic - and Melba Moore singing "I Got Love" in "Purlie" that made the song magic. How do you feel about that?

A: Well, I wouldn't disagree with that, but it's very interesting. I did "Hair" first on Broadway before I got "Purlie" but I never sang for the role before I was cast. They didn't really know I could sing. And originally I only had the one title song "Purlie," which kept getting such good response night after night - that they later wrote "I've Got Love" and put it in for me. So it's sort of funny asking whether I made the song or the song made me because it was tailor made for me. Sort of 'Which com first da chicken or da egg!'

Q: What's your favorite song to sing, when you just want to sit back and wrap a song around you?

A: Well certainly "I've Got Love" is one. There are some lines in there that are prophetic. Like, "Da Sun betta shine cause I got mine!" or "Da Spring don't sprung just to charm the bees. The flowers flower just for Purlie." I love the way that, that's expressed because when you are in the joyous part of life, everything does seem so personal. It is important what you sing about because you do become a part of it. When you sing "I Feel Like I Can't Lose" it's true. And if I pay attention to that — I can't. One of the reason's I got the role of LaFontaine was — I had just lost everything, husband, home, my daughter - no career - I had nothing left to lose and I said to myself "Now what yah gonna do!" That was my attitude. There's nothing left that you can take from me now. It wasn't like an angry or vengeful attitude. It was more like - 'I'm cool, now, I don't

have any more attitude or anxiety and I can explore new avenues and career ideas and ways to protect my daughter that I could never think of when I had all these legal things held over my head.' Like, "If you do that we'll find you're in contempt of court." I'm a survivor, and I was tired of being paranoid and letting them hold things over my head. I had the courage of someone with nothing to lose so I said — Well let's call his bluff — "What happens if I'm found in contempt of court?" They said, "We'll throw you in jail." I said, "Is that all? Well, let's call the press." I'm just giving you an example. I'm not talking about trying to take someone's money or receive monetary things. I'm talking about, "Hey, I have a right to live! To the pursuit of happiness which is guaranteed under the laws of this country." So you start thinking about the things you never worried about or could control when it seemed like someone had you by the neck, by threatening you with this - that - or the other. But once that is gone — and you have the rest of your life in front of you - that's no longer a threat.

Q: Do you think part of your personal problems were because your original success came so very quickly and so very young? "Purlie" was a big success and you went right in to television and films.

A: Yes, it's true that the times I have been successful have come very fast. I came right from doing a year and a half in "Hair" - being relatively unknown - except for being in a hip revolutionary show — into "Purlie". I went from one success right into the other. And the bad breaks have been down right dynamic too.

Q: So what is your favorite Broadway show that you've done.

A: It had to be "Purlie" I loved working with Cleavon Little - he was so wonderful. And I loved working with Sherman Helmsley. I absolutely adore Sherman. He's brilliant, funny, he works so hard at what he does - and I have never seen anyone literally unfold comedy out of their body like Sherman does. He knows exactly what he looks like and he choreographs it to where it is hilarious. I love that. It's like the highest art.

Q: Now, at this point in your life and career and personal journey - is there a change in your art - is that reflected in your album?

A: As we talked about earlier in the message that's part of "Unconditional Love" - is to sing songs that have substance. The kinds of songs that have lasted with me. Like, "Lean On Me" or "Long Winding Road" not just strong ballads but songs that make strong comments and messages. I feel that I was relegated to a degree to do what the record industry panders to. It has to be about love and sex, to appeal to the younger crowd. I don't want to be relegated to that only. I'm not saying I don't care about being commercial but there is a way to make music and do both.

Keep doing it, Melba!!