

# ENTERTAINMENT



## Ben Vereen Recalls Years of Drug Abuse



**BEN VEREEN**

Stage and film star Ben Vereen, who had previously acknowledged that he turned to drugs for solace when his daughter, Naja, was killed in an auto accident in 1987, has revealed that he was no stranger to drugs at the time.

Vereen, who now lectures youngsters around the country against drug abuse, said in an interview to be published this Sunday in PARADE that he had been involved with drugs since the '60s. "It seemed like everybody was doing them, at least in my crowd," he recalled. "We live in a society that says 5 o'clock is happy hour. You really look like you need a drink or a joint," he mimicked.

"But sometimes what people really need is a good hug, so they know they are loved. We didn't understand love. Instead, we bought into drugs."

For years, Vereen said, "I told myself, 'I can handle it. It's not handling me.' Then Naja died. You don't want to face the loss. The addictive me said, 'I'm going to need some MAJOR drugs to hide the pain.' But the pain

just seeped away anyway."

Describing his lowest point, Vereen said, "You see yourself crawling on the floor. You smell yourself, and you don't smell good, and you don't care. I had hit skid row in my life, meaning I had given up. You could have walked in and wiped me out, and I wouldn't have cared. Thoughts of death danced through my mind."

Vereen, who has four other children, said his older daughter, Malaika, 20, finally made him realize what he was doing to himself. "She came bursting into my room one day, when I was in the heap of destruction, and started screaming at me. 'You've been like this for four months now, and Naja wouldn't have wanted this!'"

Admitting that he needed help, Vereen went to a psychiatrist and then placed himself in a drug-treatment center. "I reconnected with my spirituality," he said. "I realized that it had never turned from me. I had turned from it. It motivated me and became my rock."

"I felt I wasn't enough," he continued. "And I am enough. If I had loved me, I wouldn't have gone through all those years of substance abuse. If you don't love yourself, you have nothing to hold onto."

Vereen said he still grieves and finds it hard to smile. "Now, when I have a problem and find myself feeling anxious, a voice inside me says, 'This too will pass.' When I'm going through trauma, the voice says, 'You've suffered greater loss. This is nothing. Get up. Get on.'"

## ACTOR BLAIR UNDERWOOD LAYS DOWN THE LAW IN HOLLYWOOD

Debonair actor Blair Underwood continues to make his case for Hollywood success; Plus EM asks, "Should You Keep Your Sexual Past A Secret?"

discusses careers in the cosmos with Black astronaut Charles Bolden, Jr., explains "How To Say Goodbye To Your Best Girl" and heads off to college with smart looks in campus fashions, in the August issue.

Finding consistent, quality acting roles since his first big break on TV's "The Cosby Show," talented star Blair Underwood, now entering his third season as co-star of the weekly series, "L.A. Law," continues to prove that for him, Hollywood success is an open-and-shut case. Underwood, 26, whose growing roster of impressive work includes "Murder In Mississippi," and the up-

coming movie, "Heat Wave," explains why he enjoys the challenge of network

productions, though his relationship leaves him little time to watch TV. "The lady I'm with, she's an incredible young lady, and she's very supportive," Underwood says. "I'd rather just sit at home, or go somewhere with her. That sounds boring, but that's me," he adds.

Also in the August EM: A look at why the roots of some sexual involvements should remain buried, and America's fourth Black astronaut Charles Bolden, Jr. tells why space is the place for future pioneers. Plus EM explains "How To Say Goodbye To Your Best Girl" with respect, and reviews fall fashions for the man about campus.



**BLAIR UNDERWOOD**

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**HOWARD HEWETT**  
BIO

Howard Hewett is a man at peace with himself and the world. The power of that feeling come through on his eponymous new album on Elektra Records. "It's a little bit clearer than the rest of my albums," says Howard, "in those days, I was searching for things and there was a lot of craziness in my life. This album differs in the sense of direction, clarity, and uniformity."

Born and raised in Akron, Ohio, Howard Hewett began performing as a pre-teen with his family gospel group, the Hewett Singers, and went on the gospel road circuit with the Five Blind Boys From Alabama, the Soul Stirrers, Mighty Clouds of Joy, and the Staple Singers. At the age of 14, Howard began his shift toward the secular, learning the bass and performing with a number of Akron R&B

bands while still in high school.

In 1976, two years after graduating from high school, Howard Hewett moved to Los Angeles. "There I was at the L.A. airport with \$34.00 in my pocket," Howard remembers, "my only plan was to see what I could get into." He joined a show group--put together by John Daniels--as lead vocalist playing California hot-spots like Maverick's Flat and touring Europe.

In 1979, Howard got an offer to join the top R&B group Shalamar. He auditioned on a Saturday morning, singing "Feel The Fire" in a rocking chair, and was on a plane that evening to perform with the group on television.

For the next six years, Howard Hewett led Shalamar through an unbroken chain of hit records, including the certified-Gold albums Big Fun, Three For Love, and Friends. Howard's silky vocal also propelled singles like "Second Time Around", "Make That Move", "For The Lover In You," and "A Night To Remember" and other top hits. Jeffrey Daniels and Jody Watley had left the group. "instead of just going out on my own," Howard recalls, "I felt there was still something I needed to do with Shalamar." With Howard Hewett at the helm, a reformed Shalamar recorded the group's final album Heartbreak and the single "Dancin' In The Sheets"--which wound up in the multi-Platinum Footloose soundtrack. In 1985, Howard picked up a Grammy for "Don't Get Stopped In Beverly Hills," from the Beverly Hills Cop soundtrack.

Howard is also an accomplished song writer, co-author of such hits as "Show Me", "Let Me Show The Love", "Let's Get Deeper," and others.

**The Portland Observer:  
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## Sally Kirkland Discusses Her Role in Black Film "Watts"

Actress Sally Kirkland, who plays the only major white character in a cable television movie about the violent riots in the Black Los Angeles ghetto of Watts twenty-five years ago, hopes the film will make a difference.

"I think with this movie we bring some real humanity to some real problems," Kirkland told PARADE contributing editor James Brady, who interviewed her for this Sunday's issue of the magazine.

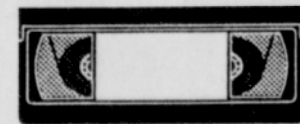
Kirkland play a Beverly Hills woman for whom Cicely Tyson works as a maid. "I side with Cicely against my husband, who's white," Kirkland said. Also starring in the movie, titled "Heat Wave", are James Earl Jones and Blair Underwood. It was produced by the Turner Television Network and will air August 11.

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