

## Nia Long Talks About Her Role in 'Mooz-Lum'

**Kam Williams,  
Special to The Skanner News**

Nitara Carlynn Long was born in Brooklyn on October 30, 1970, but was raised mostly in South Central Los Angeles in the wake of her parents' divorce.

The accomplished thespian of Trinidadian extraction first found fame on TV on *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, and she's since enjoyed recurring roles on such series as *Judging Amy* (2001-2002), *Third Watch* (2003-2005), *Boston Legal* (2007), *Big Shots* (2007-2008) and, most recently, *The Cleveland Show* (2009-present).

Her breakout performance on the silver screen was in 1997 when she starred opposite Larenz Tate in *Love Jones*. And her resume' includes outings in such films as *Are We There Yet*, *Are We Done Yet*, *The Best Man*, *Boiler Room*, *Boyz 'n the Hood*, *Friday*, *Alfie*, *Soul Food*, *In Too Deep* and *Big Momma's House 1 & 2*.

In 2000, *People Magazine* named the gorgeous ingenue one of the World's 50 Most Beautiful People, and she also landed the #3 spot on *Black Men Magazine's* 10 Sexiest Women List. Later that same year, Nia had a son, Massai, Doresy, Jr. who she is currently raising in L.A.

Here, she talks about her new movie, *Mooz-Lum*, a dysfunctional family drama where she plays Safiyah, the long-suffering wife of an overbearing, religious zealot.

**Kam Williams:** Hi Nia, thanks so much for the time.

**Nia Long:** No worries. How are you?

**KW:** I'm fine. I have a lot of questions for

you from my readers, so why don't I launch right into them.

**NL:** Absolutely! Why not?

**KW:** Children's book author Irene Smalls says: You've done an impressive body of work covering comedic and dramatic roles. What attracted you to the script about this mother conflicted between her son and her husband?

**NL:** Hmmm... That's a good question. I just thought the film had so many wonderful layers of the journey that women take with motherhood. There's no book out there that tells you how to be a good parent. So much of parenting is following your instincts, and taking the time to actually know your child. I'm raising a 10 year-old boy, and my son in the film, Tariq [Evan Ross] goes through the traditional growing pains associated with transitioning from a boy to a young man. When I read the script, I immediately thought to myself, "Wow! This is a really special movie. It's entertaining, it deals with a lot of social issues, and it addresses practical parenting concerns that everyone can relate to."

**KW:** Irene adds: Did having a son yourself help in portraying the mother in the movie?

**NL:** Absolutely! The minute your child is born, your life is changed forever. I think I've become so aware of how important balance is in life. I have to constantly make sure that it stays that way for myself and for my son, because if I'm not emotionally available for him it will impede his development. Yet, if I don't work, we'll be living in a cardboard box. So, that calls for a tremendous amount of balancing constantly.

Therefore, working on this film, I understood Safiyah's search to balance being a devout Muslim woman with allowing her child his natural curiosity and desire to explore in life.

**KW:** Felicia Haney asks: What were your feelings about Islam before taking the role and after the film wrapped?

**NL:** When I was a young girl, my mother traveled to Abu Dhabi, which is a Muslim country. When she returned home, she taught me a lot about Islam. So, I was already familiar with the religion's basic teachings. But in preparation for this role, I definitely got to experience Islam on a much more intimate level. The one thing that stands out in my mind is the commitment Muslim women make to each other. They are so supportive and so loving, and they do everything together. It's really all about family, and I like that, because I'm a family-oriented person. I believe that whatever your religious preference, there has to be a commitment to family because everything really does start there. Hopefully, this film will help to eliminate stereotypes, because Muslim women are misunderstood. They're strong, beautiful, classic, contemporary and so much more.

**KW:** Attorney Bernadette Beekman says: Here in France, especially in Marseilles where I was for dinner this evening, the issue of women wearing chadors in public institutions has been hotly debated and legislated over. As a child, you attended Catholic school where I suppose you had to wear a uniform. How did that experience influence your performance as a Muslim

woman wearing a head-wrap? Were you more sensitized to a group of people who wish to acknowledge their religion in an overtly public way?

**NL:** Hmm... My son goes to a Catholic school where he has to wear a uniform. I attended a Catholic school where I had to, too. I think it's a beautiful thing when you wear a uniform or a garb which represents a group of people, because what it immediately symbolizes is oneness, togetherness. I believe everyone should have the freedom to represent what they believe-in in their own way.

**KW:** Editor/Legist Patricia Turnier asks: What is your favorite scene in *Mooz-Lum*?

**NL:** I'd say the pivotal scene where I notice the scars on Tariq's back.

**KW:** Patricia also wants to know whether there's a novel that you would like to see turned into a movie and also star in? And which African-American icon would you love to portray in a film?

**NL:** There's a novel I just read called *Queen Pin* that I've been talking to the author about optioning. I encourage everyone to read it. It's a great story. As for an African-American icon, I was very interested in portraying Nina Simone until I heard that Mary J. Blige is doing it. I'm sure she'll do the role more justice, because I am not a singer. I just think Nina was a very mysterious woman, and a trailblazer who came along at such an important time in our history. She did it her way, and she has one of the most unique voices in jazz history.

**KW:** Larry Greenberg asks: Does being

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