

Tyler Perry: The 'Madea's Witness Protection' Interview

By Kam Williams
Special To *The Skanner News*

Tyler Perry's inspirational journey from the hard streets of New Orleans to the heights of Hollywood's A-list is the stuff of American legend. Born into poverty and raised in a household scarred by abuse, Tyler fought from a young age to find the strength, faith and perseverance that would later form the foundations of his much-acclaimed plays, films, books and shows.

It was a simple piece of advice from Oprah Winfrey that set Tyler's career in motion. Encouraged to keep a diary of his daily thoughts and experiences, he began writing a series of soul-searching letters to himself. The letters, full of pain and in time, forgiveness, became a healing catharsis. His writing inspired a musical, "I Know I've Been Changed," and in 1992 Tyler gathered his life's savings and set off for Atlanta in hopes of staging it for sold out crowds.

And so began an incredible run of thirteen plays in as many years, including "Woman Thou Art Loosed!," a celebrated collaboration with the prominent Dallas pastor T.D. Jakes. In early 2005, Tyler's first feature film, "Diary of a Mad Black Woman," debuted at #1 nationwide. His ensuing films "Madea's Family Reunion," "Daddy's Little Girls," "Why Did I Get Married?," "Meet The Browns," "The Family That Preys," "I Can Do Bad All by Myself" and "Why Did I Get Married Too?" have all met with massive critical and commercial success, delighting audiences across America and around the world.

2006 saw the publication of Tyler's first book, "Don't



Tyler Perry

Make a Black Woman Take Off Her Earrings: Madea's Uninhibited Commentaries On Life and Love," which shot to the top of the New York Times nonfiction bestseller list and remained there for eight weeks. It went on to claim Quill Book Awards for both "Humor" and "Book of the Year" (an unheard-of feat for a first-time author), and spread Tyler Perry's unique brand of inspirational entertainment to a devoted new audience.

It is a brand that is quickly becoming an empire. In 2007, Tyler expanded his reach to television with the TBS series "House of Payne," the highest-rated first-run syndicated cable show of all time, which went into syndication after

only a year. His follow up effort, "Meet the Browns," was the second highest debut ever on cable - after "House of Payne."

Not one to rest on success, Tyler Perry and his 300+ Atlanta-based employees are always hard at work. In the fall of 2008, he opened his 200,000 square foot Studio in Atlanta, situated on the former Delta Airlines campus of more than 30 acres. The Studio consists of 5 sound stages, a post production facility, a pond, a back lot, a 400-seat theater, a private screening room, and designated areas for entertaining and hosting events.

But listen to Tyler Perry and you'll hear a man who hasn't forgotten about the people that have helped him reach the top of a mountain he could once only dream of climbing. He has donated generously to charities that focus on helping the homeless, such as Feeding America, Covenant House, Hosea Feed the Hungry, Project Adventure, and Perry Place - a 20-home community that Tyler built for survivors of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans.

In July 2009, Tyler sponsored a trip to Walt Disney World for 65 children after learning that a suburban swim club had turned them



Perry, at left, and Eugene Levy in 'Madea's Witness Protection Program.'

away because of the color of their skin. Tyler Perry has also built 2 churches and has donated generously to the NAACP. In January 2010, Perry pledged \$1,000,000 via The Tyler Perry Foundation to help rebuild the lives of those affected by the recent earthquakes in Haiti.

Tyler Perry practices what he preaches, and what he preaches has endeared him to millions of fans drawn by that unique blend of spiritual hope and down-home humor that

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