



Celebrity Chic

HOLLYWOOD

with Allison Kugel

TLC's Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas

The Future of TLC, Motherhood & Life as a Music Legend

ONE third of the largest selling American girl group of all time. Exotic chiseled beauty compounded by abs that won't quit. A little girl lost vulnerability when it comes to true love. Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas is surprisingly low key about her own legend. You have to nudge her to remind her of what she and fellow TLC members, Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins and the late Lisa "Left-Eye" Lopes mean to the music industry and millions of fans who purchased more than 65 million TLC albums, worldwide. Chilli is in awe of the people who are in awe of her, yet, it's evident there are still songs unsung in her heart. She speaks of a future TLC album with a combination of excitement and angst. It's a longtime coming, and she knows it. In the meantime, Chilli has joined the ranks of other music industry heavyweights, gracing the judge's panel on the new talent competition show, TruTV's *Fake Off* — which aims to break the mold where talent competition TV is concerned. Ten versatile and talented teams compete in the art of "Faking," by re-creating iconic pop culture moments through a combination of dance, mime, illusion, synchronicity, lighting and scenery. Think Las Vegas spectacular meets the TV show, *Fame*. As we drifted from topic to topic, Chilli's demeanor lit up when conversation turned to topics of motherhood and the idea of soul mates, and her fanbase of A-list musicians. Lady Gaga, Bette Midler and Prince all count themselves as proud TLC super fans!

AK: I watched Fake Off. It's like a big production in Vegas. Performance troupes are outside-the-box in terms of what is commercially viable entertainment. How was the show pitched to you and how did they come up with that name?
Chilli: They sent over stuff you'd see in Vegas, and performances from overseas. Once they explained to me what "Faking" was, I said, "Wow, this is great!" I wanted to be a part of it. It's called *Fake Off* because groups are given themes from iconic concepts, movies, cartoons, television shows — things we are familiar with. Then, contestants have to put their best "Fake" on it. It's like when you watch something and feel like, "Wow! That was almost like the original!" That's the art of Faking — how to entertain an audience the way they do.

AK: What's it like judging other artists on the show?
Chilli: It's entertainment and I enjoy entertainment. My thing is: Can the person captivate me and the audience the entire time they're on stage? I love judging, but it's not easy to do. It's not easy to make everyone happy with what you give them.

AK: Watching performers on stage does it make you want to try something theatrical, like a Broadway musical?
Chilli: I don't want to do a Broadway musical, but I look at elements like lighting and am interested as far as [TLC's]

show on stage... things that could take us to the next level.

AK: Is motherhood all you imagined?
Chilli: It's awesome. Kids are the most amazing gift. My son, nieces and goddaughter are amazing kids. You can't say boys are better than girls or vice versa, it depends on personality and how a parent shapes them, and who is around to influence them. I think the only difference between boys and girls is attention span (laughs). Parents have to equip ourselves for whatever comes up. We should be the best we can be for whatever God gives us. I began instilling good morals and values in my son since he was small. It's important to pay attention to your child's personality; you want to help shape it, but not break your child's spirit. Teenage years are my least favorite, though my son is phenomenal and doesn't get in trouble, teenagers think they know so much (she sighs, expressing the exasperation of parents everywhere). I tell him, "Tron, I'm telling you, I said the same thing to my mom!" They have to go through things to mature, gain wisdom. We want to shield them from the bad — but we can't.

AK: Do you see your son following in your footsteps?
Chilli: He has the music bug. It's in his DNA, he can't help it. (laughs). I didn't guide him to this, but he's been around it his whole life. He's a drummer, writes music and he's really good.

AK: Speaking of family, you continue to work with your ex and your son's father, producer Dallas Austin, to this day. What makes him an ideal collaborator for TLC?
Chilli: The last time we worked with Dallas was when we did a song... originally done for Lady Gaga. She went to him and said she wanted a TLC record — she wanted a song that felt like a TLC song; how we sing together and the messages behind what we sing. Dallas was the right person to go to. The song wasn't released, but overall he gets it. He gets Tionne's voice more than anyone. Dallas writes songs perfect for her voice and, produces her vocals better than anyone. It's a win/win like Janet Jackson with Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

AK: It must be incredible to hear Lady Gaga wants a sound similar to yours, or when a young Beyonce was screaming and jumping at the idea of getting to meet TLC.
Chilli: Beyonce and Destiny's Child toured with us. I didn't meet them when they were small, but I understand meeting someone who inspires you. Michael Jackson had the "What About Your Friends" dance in "Remember The Time". I was totally in love with Michael Jackson... to see that, I couldn't breathe! Or Prince saying, "TLC is my favorite group," and you're like... "WHAT"?! Bette Midler, as iconic as she is, covered Waterfalls, and said really sweet words in a recent interview. That's crazy to me!



AK: Did you receive constructive criticism early in your career that made you better in some way?
Chilli: Criticism I got early on wasn't constructive it hurt me, but I got over it, and improved myself. One person who gave me insight to performing was MC Hammer. I watched him perform every night and it helped me with my performances. Here was this man with so many people on stage with him, but he is the one who stood out. And that was amazing to me.