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# GRACE UNDER FIRE:

## SPICE ON BREAKING GENERATIONAL CURSES AND THE AMERICAN MARKET

Performer and personality, Spice sits down and talks about spirituality, wigs, and her 10-year feud with her label. She's the epitome of Grace under fire.

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WRITTEN *By* JAMES R. SANDERS • PHOTOGRAPHY *By* BLAIR DEVEREAUX  
MAKEUP *By* MARQUIS GUTHRIE • HAIR *By* CHERIE AMOR • STYLE *By* CHRISTOPHER JAMAL PAYNE  
PR: DIVINE INFLUENCE PR • BEAUTY *from* Faces & Laces The Piano Palette ([facesandlaces.com](http://facesandlaces.com))

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Artists can always tell when being interviewed, if you're interested in what they have to say, or if they're just another "job." Spice was more than a job and that was apparent between the both of us within the first 10 minutes of speaking.

I was somewhat familiar with the performer, but I knew her most from my guiltiest pleasure – *Love and Hip Hop Atlanta* where she's one of my favorites.

She's not Leela James, or Michelle – you know, where the singer's speaking voice sounds different from her performance voice. Spice sounded exactly as expected. She sounds like dancehall. She sounds like at any moment, she could break out into one of her hits, and I was here for it.

That said, the whole Dancehall Queen thing was lost on me, so I immersed myself in her music. We get into her hit single, "Go Down Deh" later in our conversation.

Full disclosure – seven minutes into my medley of Spice's dancehall hits, my dutywhine went wrong and me and my diabetic socks were knocked to the ground. I went down deh, and not in the way that Spice and her iconic collaborators Shaggy and Sean Paul were talking about.

That's the thing about queens, they can make even the stiffest and delusional of dancers (like me) feel like they can do anything. That's just one of her powers. I finally understood the people call her the Dancehall Queen and her title is well-earned.

I felt like I got to know Spice through her music and on TV, but I hadn't yet gotten to know Grace Hamilton.

It was obvious that Spice had gone through rigorous PR training – and that was cute, but I wanted the real. There had to be more to the Queen, other than the cuts and edits that production makes every Monday at 8 p.m.

## COVER STORY

Last year when the cameras were forced to stop rolling, everyone got to see.

With the pandemic planting artists firmly on the ground and off tour buses, she was more Grace than she was Spice. But what did that mean? As a mother, a reality star who couldn't film, and a businesswoman who sells products people wear out during a time when no one was leaving their homes.

She answered all my questions, including the one about my favorite of her songs.

Her debut album *TEN* is important because it took years to make. The artist, who has released several hit singles (most of which she produced) over the last 10 years has gone through a public grievance with her label, VP Music Group. This album in its final and most polished version is 10 years in the making with executive production from the iconic Shaggy.

"Creatively – that was the disconnect,"

Spice says.

Spice's voice elevates when she talks about her label. But the performer doesn't hold back. Confident in her truth, she's candid with me in a way that reveals the long road and full circle moment that finally came 10 years later.

A study conducted in 2019 by Northwestern University found that songs by male artists were more danceable than women. That statistic doesn't seem to apply to the Dancehall Queen, but it could have something to do with a 10-year feud that Shaggy had to come and mediate.

"The fact that I trust him so much," Spice says, is why her collaboration with the artist works. "He is someone who is on the level where I want to go."

Shaggy and Spice have history. She's known his wife for years, and their children have all gone to the same school (often the same class).

"He's family."

Spice credits Shaggy with mending fences between her and the label. Acting as intermediary, he was able to create a space for the two to finally create the project in a way that both would be happy with.

"Shaggy has been there, done that. He has done the unexpected internationally. Working with him is like a family bond for me."

Despite losses in the music industry over the last few years, the international and world music genres have been growing.

Spice's debut is slated for Friday, July 30th which primed to be part of that revenue for 2021.

Her lead single, "Go Down Deh" is a high-energy dance anthem powered by her own vocals and assisted from two icons of the genre.

"Shaggy and Sean Paul are two giants and to have both of them collaborate on a track is an awesome feeling to know Spice did that."

Spice did do that, the song debuted at #1. The video puts to shame any Las Vegas laser light show.

"I'm excited for my fans to have a song like this," Spice says after a deep breath. She agrees that the pandemic put people on the ground but "Go Down Deh" is going to make them move in the best way.

Mama used to tell me,  
friends no good for you girl,  
but I know I would learn the  
hard way." – Spice, "Frenz" 2021

Each of Spice's lessons were hard-learned starting at nine when she lost her father. This is the part where we got personal. I was talking directly to Grace, not Spice – and the transition was obvious because while the confidence was still there, her speaking voice was tinged with tenets of wisdom.

I was getting a brief master class on how to have grace under fire.

"I've never mentioned a lot about my past or growing up," she said cautiously.

I felt honored that she trusted me enough to be vulnerable – something rarely associated with Jamaican women.

"I was homeless after coming home and finding my house on fire."

When her father died, her mother was pregnant with their youngest of five children. When they lost their house to the fire, they went from couch to couch ultimately winding up in a one-bedroom apartment where she and her siblings shared a single mattress.

"There were nights when we really didn't have it as a family," she says somberly.

Here, Grace paused for a minute and we broke the ceiling of public relations bravado. Her words got quicker, and you could tell that the performer was trying to rush through what she had to say; though I tried my best to create a safe space.

If she didn't realize, her grace extends beyond the stellar performances and reaches to these moments when stripped. Still beautiful, more vulnerable,

but just as strong – Spice is the star, but Grace is the overcomer – and she got it honest.

Originally from Portmore, Jamaica – Grace walked miles everyday for school. The coastal town is neighboring surrounding cities Kingston and Spanish Town.

But that was just the prologue. "I broke generational curses," Grace says. "I went from homeless to owning houses in Atlanta and Jamaica."

The lessons her mother taught her helped propel her career and provided the lyrics for my favorite of her songs, "Frenz."

"Smile inna yuh face, them a chat behind yuh back, gwan like them a sheep but them a wolf inna pack... say them love you, don't fall for that, man to man so unjust member that." – Spice, "Frenz" 2021.

"That song resonates and impacted my life." Grace says. "My mom told me to be careful of the people I keep company with." That's the lesson she held onto the tightest when she became a fan-favorite on the popular *Love and Hip Hop: Atlanta*.



The hardest thing about breaking into the American market, Spice said, has to do with connections, or the lack thereof. That's why when her friend, Karlie Redd came to Jamaica with the cast of *Love and Hip Hop*, she became an unofficial ambassador.

"I met the cast, I did a performance, showed them around, and I just kind of fell in love with the idea of being on reality TV."

Spice's friend Stacy Chong had a relationship with showrunner Mona Scott-Young and was instrumental in getting the artist on the series when she pitched Spice to Young.

The performer saw it as an opportunity to expand her brand which now includes a beauty label, Faces & Lashes and a new fashion line Graci Noir, that she started during the pandemic. She refers to herself as a walking beauty and with good reason. Her skin illuminates on-screen and is sun-kissed in a way that makes you admire and envy the performer.

"I am known for my blue hair, but let's get into it, I was wearing synthetic hair before I could afford human," Spice says, laughing. "I was one of the first girls to do that."

## SHE ALSO WANTS TO BE THE GIRL, SHE SAYS, TO MAKE THE INDUSTRY

# "SHUT UP!"

In 2018 when controversy struck, Spice went viral after posting an image of her skin bleaching, which was just done with makeup. It was in promotion and protest for her hit single, "Black Hypocrisy."

"I did the skin lightening with makeup to provoke the community and show them – listen it doesn't matter what shade I am; you're going to respect me and take me as I am." That moment, along with countless others, gave Spice the thick skin she's known for. But the pandemic showed her fans another side.

"It's been rough," Spice says of the pandemic. Spending years on the road touring and then having that all come to an abrupt stop, has proven to be a challenge for the Dancehall Queen.

Her children are her silver lining.

"The greatest thing I talk about is how I appreciate the time I get to spend with them during the pandemic." That time means everything to the single mother. "I was fully booked. Now that I'm more settled, the pandemic gave me that bonding time to spend with them."

It also gave her time to spend with her Jesus.

Spice is an open book – somewhat. So, still not feeling like I got in her business enough, it was important to talk about something her fans didn't know.

Much to my ankle's dismay, the Dancehall Queen can make anyone move with her beats and rhymes. While her lyrics aren't always the most saved and sanctified, her spirituality is one of the most important things to her. And gospel music is her favorite genre.

Surprise!

This summer, she was giving Jamaican-T.D. Jakes with her viral worship and praise sessions on Instagram live that had nothing to do with Dancehall and everything to do with being grateful and honoring God.

"No one expected that I was so close to God when I would do devotions and praise and worship."



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON SPICE:  
Instagram: @spiceofficial  
Twitter: @spiceofficial