



King of the MOBOS

BY SYLVIA ARTHUR

KANYA KING, the dynamic founder of the Music Of Black Origin (MOBO) Awards is a busy woman. In the weeks running up to the MOBOS, the prestigious annual showbiz affair, the half-Irish, half-Ghanaian media mogul is juggling calls from the press, the public, artist liaison and event management. Yet after eleven years of organising the hottest

event on the British music calendar King still has a palpable passion for her job.

King is a warm and personable character who is graceful under obvious pressure. As a businesswoman and role model she takes her responsibilities seriously and speaks freely about her steady rise up the corporate ladder. "We're always looking for new ways to innovate and new

categories to incorporate," she says, in response to a question about the African Music category that's running for the second year. "The African music category came at the right time. It was a big year for Africa in 2005 and African music is getting bigger every year so we have to respond to the mood of the market. Also, the MOBOS being the music of black origin

started in Africa so it's only right to have an African category." 2005 was a landmark year for African music. MTV launched its regional satellite *MTV Base Africa* at the beginning of the year and later introduced the Best African Music Act award at the *MTV Europe VMAs*. This year's nominees for the Best African Act MOBO award, which was also introduced in to

in to the MOBO portfolio in 2005 included Ghana's Batman and Nigerian artist Tony Tetuila. Asked whether she had any favourites in the relatively new category Kanya laughs and says diplomatically, "I couldn't possibly say."

Although Kanya, whose name means *last born* in her father's local dialect has been to Africa she's yet to visit Ghana. Her father, who was from Keta in the Volta region came to the UK at an early age where he met his future wife, Kanya's mother. But his life was cut short by illness when Kanya was just 13.

Asked why she's yet to visit to her father's homeland she explains, "I feel emotional when I think of Ghana. My dad died when I was 13 and the last thing he said to me was always do your best. So I've always wanted to make him proud. When I finally go to Ghana I want to go there when I've really achieved something and

make my father proud." Kanya says she has a brother and other family in Ghana and is close to the Ghanaian side of her family in the UK. But what exactly it is she wants to achieve before making her pilgrimage to Ghana she finds hard to elucidate.

The youngest of nine children, Kanya says her parents suffered discrimination because of their mixed-race marriage. But the experience only solidified Kanya's own drive to succeed, which has been key to her maintaining the MOBOs as a serious force to be reckoned with in the fickle music industry. With 2007 being the bicentenary of the abolition of slavery (and the 50th anniversary of Ghana independence), she's keen to capitalise on the unique opportunity to take the MOBOs to Africa. "We're looking to bring MOBOs to Africa next year because of the anniversary of the end of slavery. We're not sure

where to yet but we hope it will happen. I'd like to set up a MOBO Awards in Africa."

As well as bringing hip-hop glamour to Africa Kanya also plans to continue developing the MOBO brand to include a clothing range and other products. She has her mind firmly set on MOBO world domination. "We want to build the brand on a global basis. We're working with partners who share our values. It's about com-

munity, diversity, building role models and maximising opportunities."

And her words of advice for aspiring entrepreneurs? "Never give up at the first hurdle. A lot of people give up at the first sign of trouble. It's always helped me to be resilient and I'm always striving to achieve." King's hard work and perseverance have deservedly paid off.

For more info on the MOBO Foundation visit www.mobo.com

MOBO 2006 AWARD WINNERS

Best African act: Batman Samini

Best international male: Jay-Z

Best international female: Beyoncé

Best British male: Lemar

Best British female: Corinne Bailey Rae

Best UK Newcomer: Corinne Bailey Rae

Best video: Beyoncé, *Déjà Vu*

Best song: Beyoncé, *Déjà Vu*

Best R&B: Rihanna

Best Group: Black Eyed Peas