



CATCHING UP WITH

# Rutina Wesley

THE BADDDEST BABE IN THE BAYOU

Apparently, our favorite vampire-slaying Black chick will be burned at the stake if she reveals what's left to come on the remainder of this season's *True Blood*.

The show, a cornucopia of vampires, shape shifters, werewolves, fairies, ultraconservative-yet-sexually enlightened spiritualists and, new to this season, witches, follows the life of a human/fairy woman, Sookie (Academy Award-winner Anna Paquin), and her 100-percent-human best friend, Tara (Wesley).

It's already a cult hit and pay dirt for HBO, which excels at original scripted programming. But more than that, the show is the *pièce de la résistance* for Wesley, a Juilliard-trained actress and the

**Fav flicks:**  
*The Color Purple*,  
*Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*,  
*Notting Hill*,  
*Doubt*,  
*Fame*  
 and *Dodgeball*

“**[My character] was kidnapped by the vampire Franklin and raped, and all that stuff for me was huge.**”

daughter of a Vegas showgirl and a well-known tap dancer.

“It’s been really challenging to play someone who is so wrapped up in her anger and her defensiveness,” says Wesley, who adopts a deep Louisiana bayou accent and loads of I-have-to-survive-or-I’ll-crumble, head-swinging attitude for her character. “People can see [Tara] is more than just an angry woman. She is also a lost little girl who didn’t necessarily have the best childhood. Ultimately, she became a victim. She was kidnapped by the vampire Franklin [last season] and raped, and all that stuff for me was huge.”

If it’s any consolation, Tara gallantly fought back against Franklin. And she won. But for Wesley, living in such a dark space was tough on her personal life.

“My husband was like, ‘Can you just bring my wife back? Bring my wife home.’”

She is back. This time around, Wesley gets to play a happier Tara who has a temporary reprieve from her seemingly unimaginable stretch of bad luck.

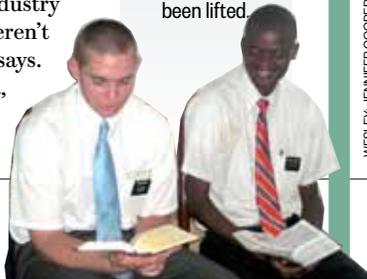
*True Blood* is hardly her last stop. Wesley is auditioning for other roles,

but she won’t reveal what’s next. She does say she has grown exponentially as an actress from having stretched into her Tara role and from current study of her icons, Viola Davis and Angela Bassett.

Often compared to Bassett because of her physique, Wesley says being the daughter of dancers gives her—a former Alvin Ailey aspirant—the ability and expertise to stay in shape. And, finally, she’s free of feeling as though she can’t land roles because of her skin color.

“When I was younger, I struggled with being dark, and I’ve struggled with being an African-American actress in this industry trying to break out in roles that weren’t necessarily crossover roles,” she says.

“I also look up to Viola and Angela, and I see them doing their thing. You just kinda let it go.” —ASG



press play



**Watch:**  
*The BET Awards*, which claims the largest Black viewing audience of all programs on TV, airs June 26. See Alicia Keys give her first post-baby musical performance.



**Learn:**  
*Nobody Knows: The Untold Story of the Black Mormons* comes to the Documentary Channel in July. It includes never-before-seen footage of boycotts at Brigham Young University and interviews with Black Mormons and former Mormons. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) has a history of controversy, starting with its initial belief in bigamy. But with Blacks, the controversy used to be that African-Americans could not be a part of their faith. The LDS “curse” apparently has been lifted.

WESLEY: JENNIFER COOPER/CORBIS OUTLINE



# Single Ladies

OUR OWN HOTLANTA TAKE ON LIVING, LOVING AND LIFE

**ONE WOMAN** patiently waited for marriage, but it didn’t work out. Another is a video vixen who can’t quite escape her own lies. The last is a White woman, married but unable to keep herself from taking one more bite out of the chocolate chip cookie jar. Welcome to the world of *Single Ladies*, VH1’s newest foray into a sexy world of best women friends packaged in a neat little soap

opera box. Produced by Queen Latifah and created by Stacy Littlejohn, LisaRaye McCoy stars as Keisha, Stacey Dash is Val and Charity Shea plays April. “It’s very high-end, and it’s something for us,” says McCoy. “It’s not male bashing. It shows how women should be friends to each other and support each other and how to secure the issues that we’re insecure about.”

—ASG



Scene stealers: (Top) McCoy (middle) is joined by co-stars Shea and Dash as the vixens in *Single Ladies*, a new (and Black) spin on *Sex and the City*.

coming soon



> Catch Garcelle Beauvais right now on TNT’s *Franklin & Bash*. Mekhi Phifer returns to TV in two TiVo-able watches: *Close Quarters*, a Lifetime action movie, and *Torchwood: Miracle Day*, a sci-fi series that appears July 8 on Starz. Kerry Washington and Columbus Short are preparing to wow us this fall on ABC in Shonda Rhimes’ new medical procedural drama, *In Crisis*.