Cayman Airways
SKIES
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CAYMANIAN ACTRESS
CAITLIN TYSON
UP CLOSE

UP CLOSE

AND PERSONAL WITH

CAITLIN TYSON,

CAYMAN'S EMERGING ACTRESS.

ACTING THE part

By Shurna DeCou

Photos: Pascal Pernix of PCreative

Makeup: Eboneé Walton

Styled: Carey Burns of Carey's Karma Closet

With her contagious sense of humour and effortless grace, it's easy to forget that Caitlin Tyson can instantly transform herself into the role of a female villain and bring her audience close to the heart and soul of the story.

At just 22, Caitlin recently graduated from an intensive drama conservatory program and has been keeping up a hectic pace of acting, singing and dancing to establish herself as an actress. Although working in New York City can be incredibly stimulating, Caitlin is also stretching herself in a project closer to home in a strong female role for a new indie film being written and filmed in Grand Cayman.

Tyson spoke with *Cayman Airways Skies* about what it was like growing up in both Cayman and Miami, her emerging career as an actress and what keeps her going in a very competitive business.

YOU JUST RECENTLY PERFORMED IN LYNN NOTTAGE'S PULITZER-WINNING PLAY *RUINED* AT THE EPIDAURUS FESTIVAL IN ATHENS. WHAT WERE YOUR EXPERIENCES PERFORMING IN THAT PLAY?

I got the call from my director a month after my graduation from The American Academy of Dramatic Arts. He was my acting instructor in the first year of my training, and he called me while I was taking my head shots. He offered me the job, and of course I said yes. It was surreal to be offered such an amazing role and opportunity right out of school.

[My experience performing in Greece] was not what I expected and it was a very turbulent process. For me, this was a very swift transition from drama school to the real world, but I was so lucky to have met and gotten to work with such inspiring and talented actors. I was able to represent and translate every bit of the frustration and loneliness that I felt into my character, and at the end I left it all right there on that stage in Athens.

WHAT WERE SOME OF YOUR EXPERIENCES IN GREECE OUTSIDE OF THE PLAY?

The people are so friendly. I felt so Caymanian my first week, saying 'Good morning' to everyone, but it was great because they do that too. And I know it doesn't sound like much, but I live in New York City, so you learn to sort of live with blinders on and walk with your poker face. In Greece, I could allow all of that to melt away and it was freeing.

I quickly noticed that I was the first black person that a lot of people saw and interacted with. I don't think they were used to tourists in the residential area where we were staying in and there was a curiosity that was new for me. I realised that growing up in such a diverse community had answered a lot of questions for me about life and people early on.

But what stuck with me the most was the people's respect for their land and their history. Even in the main city, you feel that nature is a part of the structure. It was so beautiful walking those streets every night, dodging low-hanging trees with fruit you are not supposed to eat. It reminded me of home — the Cayman I remember growing up.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO GET INTO ACTING, SINGING AND DANCING?

Well my parents met in a band in Miami. My dad played the bass and guitar and my mom sang, so my house was always filled with music and singing. I was first inspired to become an actress after watching *My Fair Lady* — it was one of my mom's favourite musicals and there was a quality that Audrey Hepburn had that just stuck with me. My mom and I started watching movies and musicals together all the time and we would memorise entire soundtracks and sing along in the car, at home and anywhere else.

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WHAT ARE YOU CURRENTLY WORKING ON IN NEW YORK AND CAYMAN?

I have had a few featured, non-speaking roles in shows like VH1's "The Breaks" and Netflix's "Orange is the New Black," and also a few short films shot and directed by Columbia University students. A few of my friends and fellow actors have taken it upon ourselves to start creating the roles we want to see and not waiting for someone else to give us that representation.

[In Cayman], I am collaborating with Pascal Pernix at PCreative on the upcoming indie film *Canvas*, to be released at the end of 2017. The film is a psychological thriller; it centres around a gang of highly skilled women trained to steal valuable and well-protected art pieces for profit.

I think it is important as an artist to never stop working. We should always leave enough room for inspiration and creation, especially in the time we live in where this industry is so obsessed with archetypes, stereotypes and fitting people into a box. We need new stories and new perspectives.

WHAT HAS IT BEEN LIKE LIVING IN BROOKLYN AND WORKING IN NEW YORK CITY?

I love Brooklyn because of the community and the families that live here. They remind me of home more than anywhere else in New York City. There is also a lot of Caribbean influence in my area, so I love being able to find a good plate of oxtail when I need one.

WHAT ARE SOME PROFESSIONAL GOALS YOU ARE WORKING ON RIGHT NOW AND HAVE THEY EVOLVED AS YOU HAVE PURSUED A CAREER AS AN ACTRESS IN THE LAST FEW YEARS?

I am very focused, so my goals haven't changed much as I am still pursuing my career as an actress. Representing myself and freelancing can be challenging, so I am definitely going to look into some agencies for the upcoming year. And I have found a very powerful outlet in my writing that I would love to explore further.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE ATTENDING THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF DRAMATIC ARTS IN NEW YORK?

I did the accelerated [two year] program, so we had no breaks at all — we went straight through the summer. Towards the end we were all losing it, waiting for our first two weeks off in nearly eight months. I was in the stairwell having a breakdown, and these girls saw me, stopped for a moment, looked at each other, nodded and walked away. I could not stop laughing, because it's so common to see someone crying or screaming or talking to themselves, and you never know if they are getting ready for a scene or having an actual moment.

HOW IMPORTANT HAS THIS TRAINING BEEN IN YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

When I went to Greece and was able to stand on my own beside those other actors, I realised just how much I had gained having sought training. Technique is the thing that saves you. When your heart and mind are busy with other things, you can always rely on your technique and your training.

YOUR MOTHER IS A PUBLISHED AUTHOR AND TV SHOW HOST. HOW HAVE YOUR MOTHER AND FAMILY INFLUENCED YOUR CAREER ASPIRATIONS?

My mother has been everything to me; she is my best friend and my role model. I always said there is no way I can fail when I have a mother like her. When you grow up seeing so much strength, you can't help but absorb it.

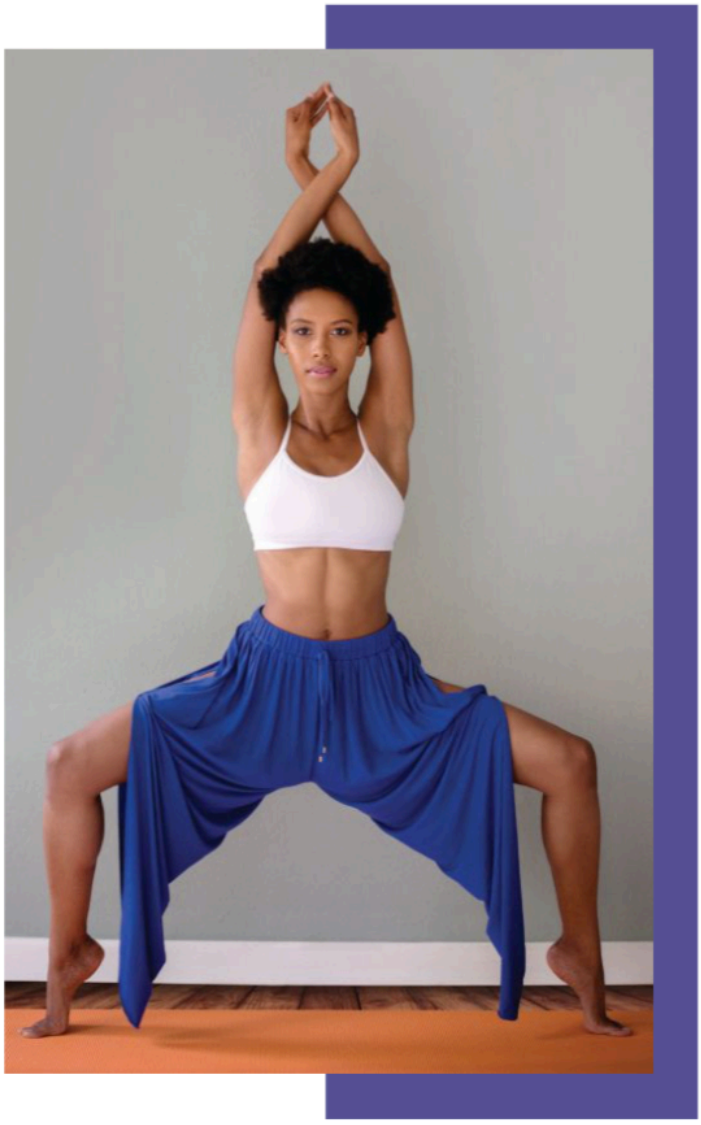
YOU ALSO GREW UP PARTLY IN MIAMI WHILE YOUR MOTHER WAS ATTENDING UNIVERSITY. WHAT WAS GROWING UP AND GOING TO SCHOOL LIKE IN MIAMI, AND HOW DID THAT COMPARE TO CAYMAN?

When I started school in Miami, I was a bit of a loner. The other kids thought I was different. I had a dialect they didn't understand and I had never been in the American school system. I had never even been in an American cafeteria. But I remember my teacher calling on me for show-and-tell, and when I didn't have anything to show, I explained that we don't really do show-and-tell where I came from. She told me that I could do whatever I wanted, so I sang a song. And every week after that, I would sing to the class and teach them nursery rhymes I had learned from back home. That is when I started making friends and that was so different to me, because in Cayman I never had to make friends, I just grew up knowing these people my whole life.

WHAT'S SOMETHING THAT MOST PEOPLE MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT YOU?

I am a really good cook. I actually wanted to be a chef for most of my childhood. I got some food management training at Kendall Culinary College, but it was those long hours and my aching feet that made me realise it just wasn't for me.

I have also been putting things in place to receive my certification as a licensed yoga instructor. Yoga has become a passion of mine, having been introduced to it in drama school as a tool to help centre the mind and release physical and emotional tension to prepare for our work as actors. I always have my mat with me and I will stop, drop and yoga anywhere — it's that serious.



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