

# Jacqueline Rhinehart

## Promoting Urban Music's Groove

by Perdita Savage Belk



She rubs elbows with the Who's Who of urban music's "A" list. You know them well, the artists recognized simply by their first names—Aretha, Dionne, Rakim, Babyface, the list goes on. As a matter-of-fact, Jackie Rhinehart is a close friend to many music icons whose records we groove to everyday.

"Mary J. Blige and I worked together on her *My Life* album, and I think I helped her come into the light," remembers Rhinehart, vice president of marketing, black music, for Universal Records in New York. "Erykah Badu was a good project, too, and she is as she seems. I had her baby shower at my home."

Not bad for the Columbia native who paced her career in music just out of college. Knowing early that she wanted to be in the "business," Rhinehart and childhood friends worked alongside concert promoters and started Tryad Promotions, making T-shirts, buttons, posters and other paraphernalia that artists sold on tour. "Our first client was Rick James. We met him in Columbia and took a chance on designing his tour shirts—without his request!" laughs Rhinehart of her first high profile gig. "He loved them, wore them on Soul Train, and hired us to continue doing the shirts for his national concert tours." The Rick James success led to work with Prince, Pieces of a Dream, the Fatback Band, and Zapp featuring Roger Troutman—all before she graduated high school!

"I grew up with an exceptionally bright group of friends," reflects Rhinehart of her school-days circle of friends, including Marva Smalls, executive vice president, public affairs and chief of staff for Nickelodeon and fellow *IMARA Woman* Advisory Board member. "We were competitive academically and social-

ly and were the leaders in everything we did."

This classy, braided marketing wunderkind is a diva in her own right, managing a marketing department which oversees all urban albums released under Universal Records. Her savvy and in-depth knowledge of music trends allows her to guide wannabes and established artists through the maze of album promotion. "We shepherd them through manufacturing, sales positioning, advertisements, videos, album covers, public appearances, tours and merchandising," said the 20-year diversified entertainment veteran who has strategized album success for jazz great Najee, rapper Rakim, and gospel songstress Oleata Adams.

Once in the Big Apple, Rhinehart found that hard work and perseverance would be the ticket to her ascent up the promotions chart. "I had been in New York City for 10 years before I got my first big break at Arista Records" which led eventually to her being named national director of publicity with a roster that included Aretha Franklin, Whitney Houston and LaFace Records. "I was the publicist that started the word on LaFace Records and Atlanta as the hot spot, so L.A. Reid and Babyface and I met back in 1987 before they were household names." She also worked a couple of years at Mercury Records as the national director of artist development, creating the Artist Development Manager which has been emulated by several other record companies.

Despite her envious social calendar—"It's just like TV and the movies. We are invited to an event virtually every night—from album release parties and new restaurants to concerts and dinners"—Rhinehart still finds time to come home to Columbia

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at least four times a year. "I have a home in Saluda and would eventually like to spend more time there." She'd be well remembered in her hometown, having made a mark for herself back in the day as campaign coordinator for Richard "Dick" Riley for Governor, who later became U.S. Secretary of Education under former President Clinton. "I have learned the need to be creative in all endeavors and to have a passion for the job that I am doing...I'm constantly thinking of ways to make a work environment or product more desirable."

But success has had its sacrifices. "This lifestyle makes it difficult to really have a personal life—you must be flexible to move and work late," says the early 40-ish journalism graduate from the University of South Carolina who is now engaged to East Harlem native and union electrician Verne Watley. "You really have to establish yourself in this business, and consequently I waited until now to get married. But, I have no regrets."

Rhinehart inherited her strong work ethic from her father, Willie James Rhinehart, and motivation from her mother who inspired and encouraged her to pursue her dreams. "My mother indulged all of our dreams and supported them," she recalls fondly of Maggie Lee Richards Rhinehart, who expected Rhinehart and her brothers William and Felton to do well in everything they attempted. "She always told us to do the job that made us the most happy, and let the money be secondary. I did that, and I love what I do!"

And that's the advice she gives to others. "Have a passion about what you do," emphasizes Rhinehart who is very comfortable in her quiet, alone moments. "I seek to infuse my work with all the creativity and passion I see the artists instilling in their work. This makes the total project a successful one." Ultimately, she offers, "Just be the best at your gig—figure out something new to do...and you will eventually be a success ...how could you not be?" ■