

A full-page photograph of Terrence Howard. He is wearing a dark pinstriped suit jacket, a white dress shirt, a dark tie, and a dark fedora hat. He is looking upwards and to the right, with his right hand raised to the brim of his hat. The background is a light, textured grey. In the top left corner, there is a blue rectangular box with the text 'COVER STORY' in white. In the middle of the page, the name 'Terrence Howard' is written in large, bold, yellow letters. In the bottom left, there is a blue circular graphic containing white text. At the very bottom, the author's name 'BY JANE BIANCHI' is written in a smaller, white font.

COVER STORY

# Terrence Howard

THE CRITICALLY  
ACCLAIMED FILM STAR  
TAKES A BREAK FROM  
HIS DAY JOB TO FOCUS  
ON ANOTHER PASSION—  
MAKING MUSIC.

BY JANE BIANCHI

**T**errence Howard has already been nominated for an Oscar. Now that his debut album has been released, could a Grammy be next?

Read on to find out how this sensitive, soft-spoken man developed and mastered so many different talents.

## Getting His Act Together

Terrence Dashon Howard was born on March 11, 1969, in Chicago, Illinois, and raised in Cleveland, Ohio, by biracial parents. His unusual features made his childhood difficult: "I grew up at a time when having light skin and green eyes in the middle of a black community was not popular," said Howard. He found solace by teaching himself to play guitar and listening to singer-songwriters like James Taylor and Paul Simon. When he turned 18, he caught the drama bug from his mother, grandmother, and uncles, who were all actors, and moved to New York City to pursue his dreams.

After making an appearance on *The Cosby Show*, Howard got his big-screen break in *Mr. Holland's Opus*, the 1995 film about a student wind ensemble and its inspiring conductor. More roles in music-oriented movies followed, like *Ray*, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, *Idewild*, and *August Rush*. But none brought him as much fame or respect as 2005's *Hustle & Flow*: Howard received an Academy Award nomination for playing an aspiring hip-hop artist, and performed three songs on the film's soundtrack.

So you can imagine what Sony record label executives guessed when Howard first approached them with some of his original songs. "They thought I wanted to make a rap album," said Howard. But he surprised them with his John Legend-meets-Ben Harper style, and his soul-folk

sound landed him a two-album deal with Sony's Columbia Records.

## A Music Man

While on a break from filming last summer's blockbuster *Iron Man*, Howard recorded his 11-track debut—in less than a week. "I hired all the musicians and we kind of jammed out," said Howard. He had a hand in writing and arranging every song, and co-produced the album with Miles Mosley, a classically trained bassist who has worked with artists such as Lauryn Hill and Herbie Hancock. *Shine Through It*, named after Howard's personal MANTRA, hit stores in September 2008.

Howard's husky tenor adds texture to the smooth arrangements—especially on the first single, "Sanctuary," which is filled with lightly plucked acoustic guitars, strings, flutes, a stand-up bass, and horns. And he's not afraid to let his voice crack from pure emotion. "I could work with a singing coach to make my vocals do back flips and somersaults," said Howard. "But they won't have any direction to go in unless I'm singing from my heart."

While a few upbeat tracks break from the gentle mold, indulging in harmonicas, jazz grooves, and Latin rhythms, there's one thing every song has in common: a strong NARRATIVE. "You can listen to the album and know what I used to dream about as a little boy. I'm completely naked now—in front of the entire world," said Howard, who finds inspiration in everything from his children (he has a son and two daughters) to his old middle-school crush. Howard is such a natural storyteller that Mosley doesn't refer to his tracks as "songs"—he prefers the more CINEMATIC word, "scripts."

The "scripts" may not be the kinds of songs you'd typically hear on the

radio, but having eclectic taste and a unique sound is A-OK with Howard. "It doesn't fit," admitted Howard. "It's not supposed to. The moment it starts fitting in, I need to quit."

## Keeping it Real

Like other actors who have dabbled in music (Jamie Foxx, Jared Leto, and Lindsay Lohan, to name just a few), Howard isn't sure if he'll eventually have to PRIORITIZE one path over another. For now he enjoys doing both. Howard signed on to do an *Iron Man* sequel, and is already writing songs for his next album. "Film is my vocation, my 9 to 5," he explained. "In the movies, I don't have control over the message I deliver. I lend myself to someone else's vision. But music is my own form of personal expression."

He's also experimenting with yet another art form: theater. In 2008 Howard made his Broadway debut in the Tennessee Williams drama *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. But the main reason he accepted the role wasn't to improve his acting chops—it was to learn how to perform live, so he could go on a concert tour to promote his record!

Singing on stage isn't something that comes naturally to Howard. "During my first couple of concerts, I tried to 'perform,'" he explained. "I can't 'perform.' A performance is always a lie. I used to think, as an actor, the better liar is the better actor. But singing is all about looking for the truth and then sticking to it, no matter how loud or how quiet it may be."

In case Howard ever runs out of artistic talents, he could always teach physics, a subject he's loved since grade school. "Science is about trying to understand the simple things we can't see," he said. "It's about asking the how, and the why. Music is really a part of that." **MIA!**