

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams
Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33



Shaffer Chimere Smith, aka [Ne-Yo](#) , was born in Camden, Arkansas, but raised in Las Vegas, Nevada by his mother, a musician of Chinese and African-American descent. He began making a name for himself as a singer/songwriter in 1999, going on to compose hits for Mary J. Blige, Faith Evans, Christina Milian, B2K, Mario and others, and also to record four solo albums.

In 2006, he added acting to his repertoire, making his screen debut in *Save the Last Dance*, later appearing in *Stomp the Yard* and, more recently, in *Battle: Los Angeles*. Here, he talks about his co-starring opposite Cuba Gooding, Jr. and Terrence Howard as Andrew “Smoky” Salem in *Red Tails* , a World War II saga recounting the daring exploits of the Tuskegee Airmen in the skies over Europe.

[*The interview below was conducted in 2012*]

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams
Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

Kam Williams: Hi Ne-Yo, thanks so much for the time.

Ne-Yo: No problem, brother. Thank you.

KW: What interested you in *Red Tails*?

NY: For starters, I wanted to do an acting role in a movie that had nothing to do with the music business or in which I would play a singer or a songwriter. When I act, I don't even want to be thought of as Ne-Yo. I want to be Shaffer Smith, which is my government name. So, my initial attraction to *Red Tails* was the opportunity to play a character that was not me. *Stomp the Yard* was a great film, but I played myself there. When *Red Tails* came along, all I knew was that they were the first African-American fighter pilots in the U.S. Air Force. I had no idea how deep the story went or about all their amazing achievements. There were a few Tuskegee Airmen on the set to make sure everything was as authentic as possible. And just to sit back and listen to these cats talk about the discrimination they faced while fighting for their country really got to me. So, I was really happy to be a part of this film, and excited that their story is being told in the way it's being told. It's more than just entertainment. It's educational at the same time. [Producer] George Lucas and [director] Anthony Hemingway knew what they were doing.

KW: Harriet Pakula Teweles asks: How do you expect *Red Tails* to contribute to the public's rethinking about the historic role of the Tuskegee Airmen?

NY: By focusing on their triumphs as much on the tragedy. I like how Anthony decided not to hit the audience over the head about the racism. We all know that racism was rampant in the U.S. in 1942. So, instead of simply highlighting the segregation and discrimination these aviators had to endure, he accentuated their positive experiences, like the fact that they wound up doing their job better than anyone had before them.

KW: What message do you think people will take away from the film?

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams

Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

NY: For me, that any and everything is possible, if your heart is in it and your mind is in the right place. If you believe in yourself, it doesn't matter what others might be telling you is impossible. It's all up to you!

KW: Editor/legist Patricia Turnier [of www.megadiversities.com] asks: Did meeting the real-life Tuskegee Airmen affect how you approached your character, Smoky?

NY: Absolutely! They were there for authenticity, to help us get closer to our characters. Even though Smoky is fictional, I based him on one of the guys I spent time with. Having an opportunity to sit and listen to his stories and to hear how things really went down definitely helped.



KW: When will your next album, “The Cracks in Mr. Perfect,” be released?

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams

Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

NY: I'm thinking April or May. I'm still putting the finishing bells and whistles on it. I don't want to call myself a perfectionist because perfection is imperfection. But, at the same time, I can't give it away to the world until it's all the way right.

KW: What should fans expect from the album?

NY: Everything that you've come to expect from me, plus a little bit more. This is slightly Ne-Yo unpolished. This is me with the tie loosened up a little bit and with the hat cocked to the side.

KW: Have you gone grunge?

NY: Not necessarily grunge, just a little imperfection.

KW: Why did you go over to Japan right after the earthquake and tsunami?

NY: We were scheduled to go over there anyway. So, we didn't back out, like a lot of other artists, because we figured they needed us more than ever.

KW: Is there any question no one ever asks you, that you wish someone would?

NY: Not really, I've pretty much been an open book my whole career, so people don't really pull punches with me. I'm 100% real, even when what's real is ugly. I don't take any pride in covering up, hiding and lying.

KW: The Columbus Short question: Are you happy?

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams

Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

NY: I'm actually a lot happier now than I've ever been. I have to credit that to my two beautiful children. My daughter's one and my son's three months-old. They have definitely put life in perspective for me, by showing me just how unimportant a lot of things are I'd thought were important. Now my priorities are in order.

KW: The Tasha Smith question: Are you ever afraid?

NY: Oh, yeah. Fear is a healthy part of success.

KW: The Teri Emerson question: When was the last time you had a good laugh?

NY: Three days ago, when my son smiled for the first time. I fell over laughing.

KW: What is your guiltiest pleasure?

NY: Cartoons. I watch cartoons the way most adults watch reality-TV shows.

KW: The bookworm Troy Johnson question: What was the last book you read?

NY: "The 48 Laws of Power."

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0140280197/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams
Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

KW: The music maven Heather Covington question: What was the last song you listened to?

NY: "Love Me in a Special Way" by El DeBarge.

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B0040Z1F4Q/ref=nosim/thslfofire-20>

KW: What is your favorite dish to cook?

NY: I do not cook. However, if I did, I'd cook all Italian food, all the time.

KW: The Sanaa Lathan question: What excites you?

NY: The creative process, a great necktie knot, and music.

KW: The Uduak Oduok question: Who is your favorite clothes designer?

NY: Tom Ford and Paul Smith are amazing. So are Gucci suits. I can wear them right off the rack.

KW: Dante Lee, author of "Black Business Secrets," asks: What was the best business decision you ever made, and what was the worst?

NY: My worst and best are kind of the same: spending way too much money on something

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams

Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

stupid. But it taught me the value of a dollar.

KW: When you look in the mirror, what do you see?

NY: Me! [Laughs] That question was easy.

KW: If you could have one wish instantly granted, what would that be for?

NY: That people appreciated music in the way they once did.

KW: The Ling-Ju Yen question: What is your earliest childhood memory?

NY: Busting up my chin on an electric car I got for Christmas by driving it off a bike ramp. I never got on it again.

KW: The Melissa Harris-Perry question: How did your first big heartbreak impact who you are as a person?

NY: It definitely taught me the true meaning of pain. There is no pain like the first time you get your heart broken.

KW: The Judyth Piazza question: What key quality do you believe all successful people share?

NY: Above everything and anything, a good work ethic. The ability to keep going. When everybody else is partying, you're in the office.

One on One with the Grammy-Winner artist Ne-Yo

Written by Kam Williams

Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

KW: What advice do you have for anyone who wants to follow in your footsteps?

NY: The same answer as the last question. If you want to be successful, you have to be the best person doing it. And in order to be the best person doing it, you have to get your work ethic right and keep going,

KW: The Tavis Smiley question: How do you want to be remembered?

NY: As a great singer/songwriter, but above all, as a great man.

KW: Are you still in touch with any folks back in your birthplace back in Arkansas?

NY: Yes, I am. You know what? It's especially beautiful to be able to go back, visit family, hang out and help them out with bills and other stuff.

KW: Thanks again for the time, Ne-Yo, and best of luck with *Red Tails* and the new album.

Written by Kam Williams

Wednesday, 29 July 2015 23:33

Ne-Yo



Picture: One on One (2008) by Kam Williams is a 3 minute 51 second video
kwilliams@megadiversities.com