

Fox giggy, energized, content with turning 40

LOS ANGELES (AP) - It's not every day you'll hear a Hollywood actress bragging about turning 40 the way Vivica A. Fox is doing.

Of course she can boast about aging because she doesn't show it, not even on this day, when she had taken a red-eye flight from Toronto and spent much of the morning promoting her new Lifetime series "Missing."

She's bright-eyed, smiling and talking a mile-a-minute about everything from the single life and the "little young fellas" who keep "checkin'" her out to going shopping for frilly, pretty things — like the strapless, pink A-line and matching feathery flip flops she's wearing.

"Guurl, I'm excited about 40. I ain't wet behind the ears no more!" she says, laughing. "I'm a woman and I'm cool with me, and if everybody don't like me, that's OK because I ain't goin' to like everybody anyway, and I'm cool with that, too."

Yet it appears television audiences like Fox just fine in the newly retooled "Missing," which premiered last season as "1-800-MISSING" with Caterina Scorsone and Gloria Rueben, who has left the show.

Since last month's season debut, "Missing" has climbed to No. 1 in its time period (10 p.m. EDT Saturdays) with women aged 18 to 49, according to Lifetime, which just ordered five additional episodes of the series.

After a string of ill-fated shows, Fox now has a chance for a more lucrative series run playing FBI special agent Nicole Scott, a frank, off-the-cuff investigator partnered with straight-arrow agent and psychic Jess Mastriani (Scorsone).



Actress Vivica A. Fox appears to be hitting stride as she embarks on her fourth decade.

Making "Missing" is like "doing a mini-movie every week," Fox says. "I'm doing drama, with a little bit of humor added, and I'm very happy. I like being here."

Series creator Debra Martin Chase seems just as pleased with the casting.

"Vivica's that great combination: She looks amazing, she's smart; women love her, men love her," Chase said. "We were able to

take advantage of that and create a character that is vulnerable, who is gentle but tough and is not afraid to kick some butt; who breaks the rules but who has her own code of honor."

Having finished "Kill Bill: Vol. 1 & 2," "Ella Enchanted," and a series of urban romantic comedies, the woman who catapulted her movie career with an out-of-this world kiss with Will Smith in "Independence Day" wasn't interested in returning to television.

But Lifetime had other ideas. "Vivica's was the first name we went to when Gloria talked about wanting to leave," says Lifetime programming vice president Kelly Goode, "and Debra was just dogged about going after her."

After three months of relentless pursuit, Fox finally got an offer she couldn't refuse: co-executive producing credits on "Missing" and a film production deal with Lions Gate Entertainment, which produces the series in Toronto.

"I feel like I've achieved another level in a business that's not kind to African-American actresses," says Fox.

But juggling her roles as producer and star hasn't been easy.

"There's days when I gotta get down on my knees and do positive prayers, especially when I first started the show," she says. "There were always so many questions and ways I'm being split that I have to stay positive to keep my strength, to keep my serenity."

She's needed that a lot lately, after her divorce to singer Sixx-Nine (Christopher Harvest) in 2002 and the abrupt end of her romance with rapper 50 Cent, who began

insinuating after the breakup that Fox was "crazy" and using him to get her face on magazine covers.

Fox waited until the BET Awards in May before publicly responding to 50 Cent's comments.

"I spoke out because I needed closure," she said. "I needed to remind everybody, I've been doing this for a long time. I'm not new to the game, I'm true to the game."

Mulling it over now, she says "the mistake that me and 50 made was that we went public too fast. We just got too excited about each other. It was just exciting!"

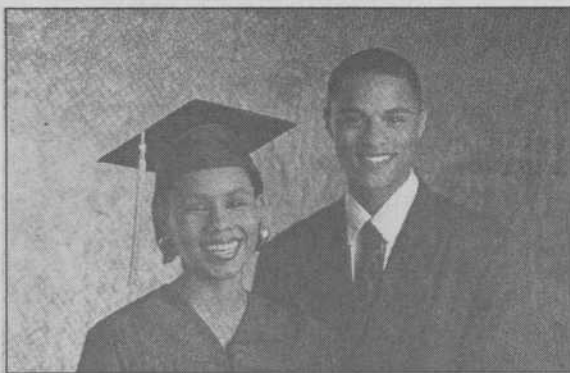
She added: "I didn't speak about the breakup when it happened, and he was going so public, which was completely disappointing ... I really don't know what I did that made us break up. It was sad, because I really cared for him, but I still wish him well. But I will never publicly put down a Black man. I just can't."

Moving ahead, Fox will soon be back on the big screen with Eddie Griffin in the action thriller "Blast," and is awaiting distribution on several projects, including one of four "Beauty Shop" features.

In the meantime, she's looking to finance her "passion project," "Vertical," an independent film that she will produce and star in.

"It's kind of like Vivica's 'Training Day,'" she explains. "I play a very dark character that's very charming, which is fun."

Taking a moment, she sighs and smiles. "You know, I just feel at peace with Vivica right now," she says. "A new chapter is getting ready to happen in my life. I'm just thankful and not taking anything for granted and enjoying my life."



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