



KEEPING UP WITH MS. JONES

From screenwriter to philanthropist to music enthusiast, Hollywood's golden girl Rashida Jones proves there are few roles she can't master.

| By Andrew Myers | Photography by John Russo |
| Styling by Brad Goreski |

Every kindergartner learns square pegs and round holes don't jibe. But sometimes too many "fits"—too many possibilities, too many options—can be just as problematic. It's a blessing most overachieving parents would gladly bestow on their kids. But for Rashida Jones, the actress-slash-Renaissance woman who is quickly becoming Hollywood's newest standard bearer in cross-categorical success, there is no such thing as too many fits.

Red organza gown, \$9,950, at Valentino, in the Galleria. Crystal dot circlet, \$425, by Jennifer Behr at BHLDN, Highland Village.

This month, Jones takes on her first cinematic lead role in *Celeste and Jesse Forever*. It's a film the 36-year-old co-wrote with best friend and writing partner Will McCormack, "as an experiment," that sold in a bidding war on a day Jones describes as "one of the best of my life, far better than getting a role."

Outstanding in isolation, the feat becomes fantastic in context. The script's conception and execution, followed by the film's production and distribution, occurred while Jones was, well, somewhat otherwise committed. She was in *The Office*, the Emmy Award-winning hit comedy in which she played ambitious saleswoman Karen Filippelli, and the Emmy Award-nominated comedy *Parks and Recreation*, playing nurse Ann Perkins. She was also starring in films that include *The Big Year*, opposite Houston's Jim Parsons, Steve Martin and Jack Black; *Our Idiot Brother*, with Paul Rudd and Zooey Deschanel; as well as *Monogamy*, *The Muppets* and the megahit *The Social Network*, among others.

Then there's *Frenemy of the State*, the comic book about a socialite recruited by the CIA, which she conceived, co-wrote and sold to Universal and Imagine Entertainment before the first issue was even released (Jones and McCormack are currently writing the script, natch). Jones modestly minimizes her comic-book-writing cred: "They [co-writers and husband-and-wife team Nunzio DeFilippis and Christina Weir] picked up a lot of my novice slack, big time."

Then there's her serious interest in songwriting and singing: Jones has contributed vocals to numerous albums, including the Tupac Shakur tribute *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*. She's also proficient on the piano and the tambura, a classical Indian instrument that she describes as "not nearly as difficult as the sitar." There are also years of philanthropic work, political activism and modeling. Let's just say that if she had a LinkedIn resume, you'd be scrolling in perpetuity.

Is it any wonder that the salient character trait of Celeste in the film *Celeste and Jesse Forever* is one that might easily be ascribed to Jones as well? As she explains, "Will and I wanted to do for a type-A woman what Judd Apatow does for schlubby loser-y guys," i.e., make them real and relatable through humor. Still, Jones adds, "We didn't want the story to be a slave to a specific genre or quadrant; we wanted to harken back to a different kind of movie, one in which you would laugh but might cry too."

If not inevitable and predestined, Jones' condition is certainly predictable. The daughter of media mogul, musician and record producer Quincy Jones (a Grammy Award winner 27 times over who also holds the record for most nominations, 79), and Golden Globe-winning actress Peggy Lipton (perhaps best known for *The Mod Squad* in the late 1960s and *Twin Peaks* in the early 1990s), Jones was raised in Bel-Air, in a cocoon of privilege, but also of intense creativity and serious work ethic. An exemplary student at the prestigious Buckley School from elementary through high school, Jones' stride was not noticeably interrupted by her parents'



Dress in vintage crêpe, \$3,750, at Hermès.
Beige cuff, \$318, by Etro at Neiman Marcus.



Coral silk georgette V-neck pleated gown, price upon request, at Gucci, in the Galleria. Pendant necklace \$1,198, and gold link bracelet, \$648, both by House of Lavande Vintage at houseoflavande.com. Gold bracelet (top), price upon request, at Neil Lane, Los Angeles.

Hair by Rob Talty at The Magnet Agency using Sachajuan
Makeup by Jamie Greenberg for Mark
Cosmetics at The Wall Group

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divorce when she was 10. She penned missives to elected officials to repudiate their policies (especially those regarding education reform), but she also indulged her comic side, stopping the DJ at a seventh-grade dance party so that she could do her “Church Lady” impersonation. “Most of the party was probably confused, with my three best friends laughing in sympathy,” she remembers.

Clearly, Jones had no problem expressing herself. An early aptitude for music—singing, songwriting, playing the piano—was met with great enthusiasm from Dad. “He was always really excited about me and music,” she says, adding that “at some point” she would still like to “get serious” and attend a music conservatory.

But theater enthralled her most of all. Active in drama at Buckley, it proved her buttress at Harvard, a university that she initially found “slightly disappointing, much more cliquy than high school.” Nevertheless, in short order she found her Cambridge legs in drama, a capella singing and writing music. She appeared in

daunting. “I didn’t know how hard getting a job would be,” she says, full stop.

What, then, of nepotism and connections? Isn’t Hollywood rife with them? “There’s often the assumption I was handed things, and oh, how I wish it were true: I would have taken a handout; lay that nepotism on me!” she says wryly. Truth is, even six years ago Jones considered chucking it, heading back to school to work toward a public sector job or a staff position at a nongovernmental organization. Then came her role in *The Office* in 2006, her professional game changer.

Ironically, with this show, personal connections almost killed the opportunity at its inception. “Greg Daniels [the showrunner for the series’ first four seasons] saw my name on the audition sheet and said, ‘We’ll never cast her because she’s friends with two of the writers on the show, but we have to see her.’ It wasn’t even [due to] my parents! You’re always going against some kind of bias,” she says.

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plays that included *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Enuf*, *Dancing at Lughnasa* and *The Odd Couple (Female Version)*. She also found a group of friends who shared her creative bent and with whom she remains close.

Jones considered law school as her next step, but the lure of stage and screen, both big and small, proved to be too strong. It was not, however, a decision she made lightly. “I was very cognizant [of the choice]; I believe in hard work, in preparation. I certainly didn’t think of acting as any kind of shortcut, which people sometimes do, crazy as that is,” she says. And her parents’ reaction? “My parents are unconditionally loving—hippies, a Jewish girl from Long Island and an African-American man from Chicago,” she says. “They let me fall and get back up.”

Then the roles started coming her way. Jones secured an all-important SAG card through her work in *The Last Don*, in 1997. The unreleased indie film, based on the book by Mario Puzo, served as her first credited performance. But she counts her big break, emotionally, as her part in *Boston Public*, the hit series by David E. Kelley. “That was huge affirmation,” she says. Still, between guest spots and commercials, trying to book “real” acting jobs was

Needless to say, Jones and her reading changed Daniels’ mind.

Just as a profusion of acting opportunities followed Jones’ début in *The Office*, offers of writing assignments followed *Celeste and Jesse Forever*. “We [McCormack and I] were very lucky and grateful that people responded so well to *Celeste*,” says Jones, adding that while she and McCormack accepted several writing jobs, she was starting to feel—perhaps ever so slightly and at long last—overwhelmed. “I started writing because it’s something I love; I don’t want to be a writer for hire. Unless it’s for, oh, Soderbergh.” Quips aside, for now Jones is comfortably in what she calls pondering mode. “We stepped back, remembering the source of creativity and that we’re writing to and for ourselves.”

Perhaps due to all the years of type-A activity and myriad modes of expression, or maybe despite them, the actress has learned two very valuable lessons: One is perspective, and the other is patience, the ability to wait and assess. She’s referring specifically to what comes next with her screenwriting, but the notion holds equally true for *What Comes Next*, a potentially far more involved and terrifying proposition. Right now, Jones says, with ease and equanimity, “Really, there’s no rush. No rush at all.” ■