



**Jean Baylor** née Norris, grew up in Rhode Island. She was part of [Zhané](#) (with Renee Neufville), a well-known suave duo from the 90s who created a sensation with their natural style and R&B/Soul sound. In other words, Zhané set themselves apart from the other groups of the era with their nice afros and soul style. This move was a key to their fame besides their musical talent. At the height of their success the group had huge hits like “

[Hey, Mr. D.J.](#)

”, one of the best hip-hop party anthems, and “Groove Thang.” They did the cover of several magazines such as

*Essence*

. The duo was part of Queen Latifah's Flavor Unit collective and earned a seven year contract with Motown in 1994. The duo worked with Naughty by Nature, De La Soul and were featured in movie soundtracks such as Higher Learning. Their debut CD,

*Pronounced Jah-Nay*

went gold and achieved Platinum status. Jean Norris and Renee Neufville (originally from Jamaica) met while studying music at Philadelphia's Temple University.

Mrs. Baylor currently records purpose driven R&B/Pop music. She is an all-round talented artist: a singer, songwriter, pianist and producer. Baylor, who got a deal with EMI Music Publishing has demonstrated her songwriting skills by penning songs for Mary J. Blige and

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Allure. She also wrote two songs which were featured on the great HBO special, "Disappearing Acts," starring Sanaa Lathan and Wesley Snipes. In addition, she wrote, produced (with Marcus Baylor), played the piano and sang *For A Reason* for the 2007 movie "Of Boys and Men" starring Robert Townsend, Angela Bassett and Victoria Rowell. Baylor's career also includes landing a coveted spot on the Sports Illustrated Campus/Music Match compilation targeted to over 15 million subscribers. Other highlights of Jean Baylor's career are writing and performing with the world-renowned, Grammy-award winning group, The Yellowjackets. She is featured on the song "Healing Waters" on the group's Grammy nominated Time Squared album, and co-wrote their single "The Hope" on their latest release, "Altered State".

Baylor released her debut solo album *Testimony: My Life Story*. It is a spiritual CD with soulful and lovely sounds that Baylor wrote and produced. The album is the soundtrack of Baylor's personal life. The lyricism of her latest album flows with a groovy sound. On a personal level, the songstress is married to musician Marcus Baylor who co-wrote the singer's debut album. He is the former drummer and percussionist of the acclaimed rhythm & jazz band The Yellowjackets. The couple wed in April 2002 and reside in the South Jersey area.

### *Mega Diversities*

had the pleasure to talk to Mrs. Baylor last July. She was very generous of her time. During the interview, we noticed that she has a great voice even when she speaks. She shared with us her experience in the music industry throughout the years and she spoke about her latest CD.

[Since this interview, it is important to note that Mrs. Baylor recently launched her first solo Christmas EP "Light Up The World" on itunes: <http://itunes.apple.com/us/album/light-up-the-world/id483262107> ]

**Patricia Turnier talks to Jean Baylor:**

**P.T. Growing up, which singers were you inspired by and why?**

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**J.B.** There are so many. Among them I can name Anita Baker. I love her voice, which is smooth, soothing, rich, velvety. Even her speaking is awesome. She has been the most influential artist for me for a long time. I love her music from the 80s, more specifically her albums such as *Rapture*, *Giving you the Best That I Got* which are amazing. I tried at the time to imitate her voice [Laughs].

Beyond her, I can name Chaka Khan, Whitney Houston, Luther Vandross, The Commodores, Lionel Richie, Stephanie Mills. The radio was hot in the 80s. I listened to black radio and pop radio: Duran Duran, Sting, The Police, Genesis, Chicago, U2 (for instance, their song *Pride (In the name of love)*, a tribute to MLK, was hot!). I was exposed to so many genres of music in my Junior high and high school years. I feel that I was very fortunate and I really appreciate this.

**P.T.** Do you know what I miss from this era? We used to see females playing instruments. We hardly see this now.

**J.B.** You are so right [Laugh out loud]. Thank God for [Alicia Keys](#) ! [Laughs].

**P.T.** And [Esperanza Spalding](#) !

**J.B.** [Laughs]. We have India Arie who plays guitar but what you are saying is so true. There's a scarcity of female musicians in commercial music. The 80s was a generation of musicians. Even if she was around before the 80s, I can name Aretha who plays the piano. I saw her doing it in Detroit at her house. She sat and played. She was amazing. I was blessed to take piano lessons when I was younger. I can incorporate that in my performance. More importantly, I use it also as a writing tool. It is one of my greatest joys to compose my music.

**P.T.** You took two years to work on your debut solo album *Testimony: My Life Story*. How was your experience recording your first solo CD?

**J.B.** It was very interesting and enjoyable. Seeing that it was my first solo project, it was a discovery process. I had the freedom to do what I wanted and that was awesome. I always functioned before with a record label and it is my first experience as an indie artist. There was no pressure of any other sort. I just had to go to the studio and create music. Overall, I am glad that I started out in a group situation, especially with a friend, and now I can successfully make the transition into a solo career.

**P.T.** You feel free.

**J.B.** Exactly! It is pleasant to be creative and not being put in a box, confined. It is up to me to find a balance between the creativity and the marketing aspect of my career. I enjoy the flexibility as a solo artist on every level: from the creative process in the studio, to the performances on stage and decision making. For my solo project, I wrote the lyrics and took care of all the vocal arrangements. My husband produced most of the tracks

**P.T.** About not being in a box, I was impressed with your latest album to discover that you could play piano. I believe that, unfortunately, many artists are restrained to follow a certain formula and the public doesn't have the chance to see the variety of their talents. We hear also the actors who often complain about being typecast.

**J.B.** At the end of the day, for the movie and music industries with any type of media, what really counts is the dollars. I understand that from a business perspective. For instance when an artist had success, the companies want to recreate it by using the same formula. However, with this mindset there is always a lack of creativity and the art form suffers. For an artist who is very creative, this situation can really be difficult. I have to say also that there is a disadvantage for performers who put too much emphasis on their artistry. They forget the marketing side which is important and cannot be neglected. There is a balance to find. You have to please the public by delivering quality work if you want longevity and your work has to be profitable for the record label. The same goes for me. I don't want to be a creative artist who does not sell CDs. I also have to find the balance for gaining benefits. I want to add that I am very positive because I believe that now more than ever people all over the world can see the work of artists on the Internet. There is a big market out there and we have to take advantage of it.

**P.T.** I think that now more than ever the public will discover worldwide talents from many realms.

**J.B.** Absolutely!

**P.T.** What message do you want the public to take away from your debut solo album?

**J.B.** I want them to take away a sense of hope, inspiration and spiritual growth. I have songs which are meant to uplift the souls, minds and hearts of people. I want the listeners to have a positive experience from my album which can hopefully inspire them to improve their everyday lives.

**P.T.** You said to the media that your latest album tells your personal story authentically, in a creative and conceptual way. Can you elaborate on that?

**J.B.** Creatively and conceptually, my album really tells my personal story with lyrics of encouragement for the listeners. My songs are an extension of my life, straight from the heart. I wanted to reflect through music where I was in my life. Some of my songs are about making a change in your life when things are not working out (relationships and so on). I have a song called *Bye Bye*. Sometimes it is difficult to turn the page on some aspects of your life, but that is imperative to evolve and grow. You have to be ready and open to make that step which might be challenging. I am all about progress. I hate to be stagnant. I realise that change can be slow. Nevertheless, as long as you have the ability to breathe, you are able to do something to change your situation. When I talk to young people, I tell them that at the end of the day, you have to decide the kind of life you want to live and make sure you go after it. Some people stay in a situation and suffer because they don't see a solution to move forward. Some are scared, have insecurities and are unsure of themselves to make a change. I have singles in my album which reflect my spirituality. There are songs where I talk about my life when I was ready to do things God's way (based on the Bible). There was a time when I did things my way. I made all the decisions and I saw the results of that, which were not good.

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