

# Ebony Enchantress

Singer, songwriter, and film producer Ebony Tay uses her talents to champion gay rights.

BY JOHN HOBBS



PHOTO BY MARC LECERULL

It's a testament to Ebony Tay's success that she can't seem to find a moment to relax lately. "You push and push and then, all of a sudden, everything just magically comes together," explains the Chinese-Jamaican songstress, sounding a bit stressed. Understandably so: The singer, songwriter, and film producer has had a busy year. In 2005, a remix of her single, "Jesus by 45," broke in to Billboard's Top 20 Dance Club Playchart; "Situation," a song from her forthcoming CD, *Stories of the Firehorse*, is already slated to be featured on an episode of *Scrubs*; and Tay has even gone multi-media, co-producing and writing the musical score for *Hate Crime*, an award-winning film she's been promoting for its 2006 release. Not bad considering Tay, whose music has been described as an earthy Hendrix meets Marvin Gaye with an early Mahalia Jackson and Tina Turner feel, is an independent artist.

While performing—and promoting her movie and CD—at Prides across North America, the passionate performer says she has found her life's mission: fighting for gay rights and hate crime legislation—issues that hit home with Tay, whose brother-in-law was a victim of a cruel hate crime. She sat down with *IN Los Angeles* to discuss her stint on the Gay Pride circuit, how

Olympic-medalist Florence Griffith Joyner pushed her in to becoming a musical artist, and why the gay crowd cannot get enough of her soulful rock music.

#### **How did you first get involved with the Pride circuit?**

What got me into the festival circuit was *Hate Crime*. As it went into select theaters, the music started to really get buzzing. I also have two gay brothers, so I thought, "I grew up around all these gay men. I've got to play the Prides." I have met the most wonderful people [at the Prides]. I started to listen to their stories about how they were ostracized by their families and about what they went through in the work place. That's when I went, "These are civil rights."

#### **How many Pride celebrations have you performed at?**

I played the Long Beach Pride—opening for India Arie—then I went on to do the L.A. Pride, promoting the movie and playing "Jesus by 45." Then on to Toronto Pride, which was amazing. I have never seen a Pride with so many straight people—with their children, walking through the streets, drinking, and dancing with gay people. It didn't even feel like it was a Gay Pride. It felt like it was a United Nations of people just accepting each other.

#### **What do you think it is about your music that holds such appeal for gay audiences?**

I think it appeals to them because they like good music. That's the bottom line. They know when something's real. The love I have felt at Pride is unlike anything I have ever felt before.

#### **How did you first get started performing?**

I was a national track and field athlete for many years. As I was doing that, people said to me, "We need a way to bring the athletes together. So can you whip out the guitar?" One of the top runners in the world, an Olympic-gold medalist by the name of Florence Griffith Joyner, said to me, "You can really sing. You should be doing that."

#### **What can we expect from you at San Diego Pride?**

I am playing after the commitment ceremony—after 200 people get married. And how wonderful to play after all this love! I'm going to do a set that has a lot of soul, rock, and then some intimate stuff.

*Ebony Tay will perform on the Jack FM Stage at 1:20 p.m. on Sunday, July 30. For more information, go to [www.ebonytaymusic.com](http://www.ebonytaymusic.com).*