



For immediate release Jan. 14, 2009

## **SOUL: She's got it**

- Canadian R&B sensation **Keshia Chanté** stars in new drama series
- Premieres Feb. 11 at 9 p.m. ET on VisionTV

*"The spotlight shines on whom it will. But that light can burn, make no mistake."*

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Mahalia Brown has a talent that could open doors for her. But if she dares to step through, she may find herself in a dangerous place, far from everything in her life that's safe and true and comforting. Is it a price worth paying to live her dream?

Welcome to Mahalia's world. Welcome to **SOUL**.

A six-part drama premiering in February on **VisionTV**, **SOUL** stars Canada's premier R&B artist, **Keshia Chanté**, as Mahalia, a gifted young gospel singer on the verge of leaving behind the safety of church and family for the fast track to pop stardom.

**SOUL** is VisionTV's first original hour-long drama series. It airs on **Wednesday nights, starting Feb. 11, at 9 p.m. ET / 6 p.m. PT.**

The series was produced for VisionTV by **Halifax Film**, an award-winning production company whose credits include *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* and *The Guard*. Principal photography took place in Halifax, NS last fall.

**SOUL** is the first small-screen starring role for Ottawa-born Keshia Chanté, who earned a Juno Award in 2005 for R&B/Soul Recording of the Year.

As Mahalia, Chanté plays a young woman at a crossroads. A member of the Keystone Church choir, she has been content to play second fiddle to her best friend Alicia (**Jessica Parker Kennedy**, *Smallville*), the choir soloist, while secretly dreaming of stardom.

When Keystone competes in a televised choir competition, Mahalia seizes a chance to step into the spotlight, putting her friendship with Alicia at risk. Courted by an influential record producer, she finds her principles put to the test. Can she stay spiritual in a material world?

Mahalia's story unfolds against a backdrop of sometimes violent conflict within her troubled urban neighbourhood – a dangerous world of drugs and guns into which her ambitious brother Malcolm (**Ish Morris**, *ReGenesis*) is increasingly drawn.

SOUL also co-stars **Eli Goree** (*North/South*) as her boyfriend and fellow choir member Samson, a young man struggling to protect a troubling secret, and **Karen LeBlanc** (*Playmakers*) as choir leader Dee Dee Washington, a former pop star and recovering addict trying to undo the damage of her past.

**Michael Anthony Rawlins** (*Intelligence*), **Kim Roberts** (*I'm Not There*), **Mpho Koaho** (*Flashpoint*) and series co-creator **Andy Marshall** (*The Life and Hard Times of Guy Terrifico*) also star. **Michael Beach** (*ER, Third Watch*) guest stars as gospel music mover and shaker Rev. Isaiah Hunter.

The Executive Producers of SOUL are **Floyd Kane** (*North/South*), **Peter Lauterman** (*North of 60*), **Michael Donovan** (*Bowling for Columbine*) and **Charles Bishop** (*The Guard*). **Joan Jenkinson** is the Executive Producer for VisionTV.

Andy Marshall is Creative Producer, and **Margaret Harrison** (*Shake Hands with the Devil*) is Line Producer. The series writers are Andy Marshall, Peter Lauterman and Floyd Kane. The directors include **Stefan Scaini** (*Degrassi: The Next Generation*) and **Steve DiMarco** (*The Chris Isaak Show*).

SOUL is a result of the **DiverseTV** initiative launched by VisionTV in partnership with the **National Screen Institute – Canada** (NSI), and is the first DiverseTV project to go before the cameras. DiverseTV was designed to offer visible minority and Aboriginal writers the chance to create a television drama for national broadcast.

For more information on VisionTV programming, please visit [www.visiontv.ca](http://www.visiontv.ca).

VisionTV, an S-VOX company, is Canada's multi-faith and multicultural broadcaster, dedicated to entertaining and insightful programming that celebrates diversity and promotes understanding and tolerance among people of different faiths and cultures.

Halifax Film ([www.halifaxfilm.com](http://www.halifaxfilm.com)), co-founded by Michael Donovan and Charles Bishop, develops and produces original film and television programming. Halifax Film manages and co-ordinates all aspects of a program's life, including developing original ideas; purchasing literary rights; arranging production financing; carrying out production and post-production; and exploiting worldwide distribution rights. Halifax Film is a subsidiary of DHX Media Ltd., a leading international producer and distributor of television programming and interactive content with an emphasis on children, family and youth markets.

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## **SOUL – Series Synopsis**

**SOUL** revolves around Mahalia Brown.

A young gospel singer with the Keystone Sanctuary Youth Choir, Mahalia has an unforgettable voice and an overwhelming passion for music. It's her elixir of life.

It's also her potion for commotion. When she puts it out there, nobody can resist. Not her choir director Dee Dee Washington. Not gospel powerhouse Isaiah Hunter from Cleveland Temple. And certainly not R&B producer Jamil Foster.

By the end of the first episode, Jamil has discovered Mahalia. He whispers seductively: "God has given you an amazing voice; let me make you a star."

But Mahalia also hears the voice of her father, Pastor Clinton Brown: "I named you Mahalia for a reason. Serve God and God alone. He'll take your voice where it needs to go."

Mahalia is at a crossroads. She loves the church, she loves God ... but she also has a musical gift that she wants to share with the whole world. Can she have it all? Can she be spiritual in a material world? *SOUL* follows her struggle to answer this question.

Mahalia's older brother Malcolm has no such concerns: he wants to be a music producer, and the type of music doesn't matter. To this end, he's hooked up with Jason, a white DJ with street cred, and with the United Nations, a street gang with big ambitions, led by the formidable Shaka.

Mahalia's father, the pastor of Keystone Sanctuary, has concerns of his own. He's the one who brought Dee Dee, a former R&B star, into the church. But Dee Dee's troubled past and her approach to leading the choir has ruffled some feathers. Meanwhile, Clinton's wife Roslyn is doing her best to make sure Dee Dee doesn't find her way into the good pastor's heart.

With best friends Samson and Alicia beside her, Mahalia is setting out on a quest that will take her through many worlds – churches, clubs, gangs, studios – as she tries to make peace between her ambitions and her beliefs. But those friends start to turn away when the journey inspires jealousy and reveals harsh truths – about them, and about Mahalia herself.

**SOUL** is a series about music and faith in an urban world. It's about honesty, connection and growth – and about trying to do the right thing, no matter what the cost.

## **SOUL – Episodes**

### **“Stepping Through Doors”**

**Wednesday, Feb. 11, 9 p.m. ET / 6 p.m. PT**

Mahalia takes her first steps toward gospel music stardom, but must choose between her loyalty to best friend Alicia and her thirst for fame. Mahalia’s father, Pastor Clinton Brown, and Keystone Choir director Dee Dee Washington get into hot water with church elders when the choir delivers a provocative performance. To help her brother Malcolm secure a DJ gig, Mahalia reluctantly agrees to perform at the Babylon Fire nightclub with Alicia and their friend Samson, only to end up caught in the middle of a gang war. Music producer Jamil Foster makes a move on Mahalia.

### **“Twice”**

**Wednesday, Feb. 18, 9 p.m. ET / 6 p.m. PT**

Mahalia and the Keystone choir receive an invitation from televangelist and gospel music super-producer Rev. Isaiah Hunter. An R&B/gospel track by Mahalia and Malcolm catches the interest of ruthless gang lord Shaka. Dee Dee fears the past is haunting her when Keystone Sanctuary is vandalized.

### **“Seducing Spirits”**

**Wednesday, Feb. 25, 9 p.m. ET / 6 p.m. PT**

Mahalia deceives her parents and goes to New York to work with record producer Russell Alexander. Elder Tullock sabotages an attempted truce between Shaka’s gang and Keystone, and learns the high cost of crossing Shaka. Samson questions himself after an intimate moment with a fellow choir member. Mahalia and Jamil have a confrontation over his plans for her career.

### **“Fathers and Daughters”**

**Wednesday, March 4, 9 p.m. ET / 6 p.m. PT**

Mahalia is surprised when Rev. Isaiah Hunter (guest star Michael Beach) arrives with a tempting offer, and travels to Cleveland to record a track with his daughter, teen gospel sensation Nikki Hunter. But Isaiah has an agenda of his own. Jamil goes on the offensive when Mahalia refuses to authorize the release of the Russell Alexander track, while Dee Dee reaches out to a volatile Alicia.

### **“My Way”**

**Wednesday, March 11, 9 p.m. ET / 6 p.m. PT**

Disenchanted with the worlds of both hip-hop and gospel, Mahalia takes a stab at creating her own music, with help from Malcolm. As Samson prepares to proclaim his love, Mahalia is confronted with evidence that his affections lie elsewhere. Malcolm is drawn deeper into Shaka’s criminal schemes. Clinton and Roslyn find themselves divided on the question of their daughter’s career path, while Mahalia comes to a decision about Jamil.

### **“Exile” – SEASON FINALE**

**Wednesday, March 18, 9 p.m. ET / 6 p.m. PT**

Russell Alexander comes to town to record a track with Mahalia, a development that leaves Malcolm on the outside looking in, and triggers conflict at Keystone Sanctuary. Roslyn finds herself taking a more active role in Mahalia’s career, while Dee Dee succumbs to old demons and Alicia risks her new relationship with Malcolm. Mahalia refuses to meet Russell’s demands, leading to a confrontation – and a choice.

## **SOUL – The Players**

### ***Mahalia Brown (Played by KESHIA CHANTÉ)***

Mahalia Brown is passionate, soulful and idealistic – a young woman bursting with energy and blessed with the gift of music. But her life has reached a crossroads. Mahalia loves and respects her parents, but as she develops her own way of seeing things, she finds herself more and more at odds with them. She has a deep faith and loves being part of the church, too, but she could do without the narrow-mindedness and fear of change. Above all, Mahalia wants to live a spiritual life – but she also wants to give expression to her musical talent. Can she do both? Well, she's going to give it her best shot. And you can bet that both her faith and her music are going to be tested.

Ottawa-born R&B singer and songwriter Keshia Chanté released her self-titled debut album in 2004. The third single from that album, "Bad Boy," broke the top five on Canadian radio and became the number one video on MuchMusic for four weeks. She collected five Urban Music Awards in 2003 and 2004, and a Juno Award the following year for best R&B/Soul Recording. Her follow-up album, *2U*, was released in 2006, and a third album is slated for release in 2009. Chanté is signed to Ford Models International. Her screen credits include *'da Kink in My Hair* and the independent film *Cat's Cradle*.

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### ***Alicia Sang (Played by JESSICA PARKER KENNEDY)***

Alicia is Mahalia's best friend. With her exotic good looks, she has always been the centre of attention, and she likes it that way. Alicia has long been the primary soloist of the Keystone youth choir – and to keep Alicia happy, Mahalia has suppressed her own talent. Now that the pecking order has changed, Alicia's life is beginning to fracture, leading her to take some desperate measures. Her friendship with Mahalia is about to be put to the test.

Calgary native Jessica Parker Kennedy has been acting since the age of six. After receiving a diploma in theatre arts from Calgary's Mount Royal College and working for two years in local theatre she moved to Vancouver to pursue a career in film and television. Her recent credits include guest appearances on *Smallville* (CW) and *Fear Itself* (NBC).

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### ***Samson Stennett (Played by ELI GOREE)***

Samson is Mahalia's other best friend. Or rather, he used to be. Now he's the guy she's crushing on, and he knows it. But Samson is struggling with new feelings of his own – feelings that have forced him to question himself, and to keep secrets from the people closest to him. Funny and full of life, Samson seems outwardly to have everything going for him. And he would – if not for this one little problem.

Halifax, NS native Eli Goree has been performing from the age of six, when he appeared on *Sesame Street*. His screen credits include *Street Cents*, *Canada Now* and *North/South*, along with a regular role on Global Television's *'da Kink in My Hair*.

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### ***Dee Dee Washington (Played by KAREN LEBLANC)***

Dee Dee is the new choir leader at Keystone Sanctuary. In her former life, she was an R&B star infamous for the clothes she didn't wear. Alcohol and drugs were her downfall. In the aftermath of a suicide attempt, it was Clinton Brown who helped Dee Dee find her way back, and who took the

risk of giving her a job at Keystone. Clean for the past three years, Dee Dee focuses now on using her musical talent to glorify God. She has a special place in her heart for Mahalia, and a determination to keep this girl from making the same mistakes she did.

Singer and actress Karen LeBlanc has fronted her own R&B band, performed background vocals for the likes of Chaka Khan and Rik Emmet, and appeared on stage in such musical productions as *Rent* and *Outrageous*. Her television credits include *Playmakers*, *Trailer Park Boys*, *This is Wonderland* and a Gemini Award-nominated guest spot on *ReGenesis*. She earned the Best Actress award at the 2008 Atlantic Film Festival for her performance in the feature film *Nurse.Fighter.Boy*.

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### **Clinton Brown (Played by MICHAEL ANTHONY RAWLINS)**

Clinton Brown is pastor of Keystone Sanctuary and father to Mahalia and Malcolm. It was music that got him into trouble back in his teens, and it was his mother who got him out and put him in the army. At university, Clinton played in a band with Dee Dee, only to be left behind when she decided to follow her own path. Happily, it was also there that he met the love of his life, Roslyn. Through her, he became involved in the church, eventually entering the ministry. These days, Clinton focuses nearly all of his attention on the church and his new choir leader, Dee Dee, leaving little time for his wife and kids. He may need to be reminded what comes first.

Michael Anthony Rawlins has more than 20 years of experience on television, in feature films and on stage. His screen credits include *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Total Recall 2070*, *The Best Years* and *Intelligence*.

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### **Roslyn Brown (Played by KIM ROBERTS)**

Roslyn, Clinton's wife, comes from a prominent Jamaican family. Trained as a corporate lawyer, she serves now as a legal aid provider for the community. Roslyn works hard at giving her kids, Mahalia and Malcolm, a solid grounding. But she knows enough to step back sometimes, letting them make their own mistakes and learn independence. It troubles her that Clinton is spending so much time on the church – and on Dee Dee. But can she bring herself to say what's on her mind?

Kim Roberts made her first screen appearance in 1993 on CBC-TV's *Street Legal*. Her credits include *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *I'm Not There*, *Charlie Bartlett* and *Dawn of the Dead*.

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### **Malcolm Brown (Played by ISH MORRIS)**

Malcolm is Mahalia's older brother – a young man with all the makings of a player. He's turning out to be the classic preacher's kid: knows all the right things to do, and does all the wrong ones. A talented musician, Malcolm dreams of becoming a world class hip-hop producer. So far, he has managed to keep his nose clean: he goes to church and stays out of trouble with the law. But under the surface, it's a different story. He's hanging with some questionable characters, and adopting an "any means necessary" approach to making his dream reality. Malcolm and Mahalia have always been tight – and she can sense the change in him.

Actor and musician Ish Morris grew up in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. Educated at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York, he has appeared in numerous film and television productions, including *The Incredible Hulk*, *ReGenesis* and *1-800-Missing*. Signed to Northern Heights Records, Morris released his first single in 2008, and is working on his debut album.

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**Jamil Foster (Played by MPHOKOAH)**

Music producer Jamil Foster has fame and fortune in his sights. Having worked for labels in New York and L.A., he knows the real money is in discovering brand new artists, signing them and breaking them worldwide. His alliance with gang leader Shaka gives him access to the Babylon Fire club, the perfect spot to scout and showcase talent. But Jamil isn't looking to get caught up in gang business. He's out to make Mahalia a superstar – whether she wants it or not.

Toronto native Mpho Koaho made his screen debut as a teenager in *Down in the Delta*, a Showtime movie directed by Maya Angelou. His credits include *The Salton Sea*, *Blindness*, *Four Brothers* and the 50 Cent biopic *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*.

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**Shaka (Played by ANDY MARSHALL)**

Brilliant, focused and utterly ruthless, Shaka leads the United Nations gang, and owns the Babylon Fire nightclub, which serves as his home base. Shaka's goal is wealth by any means necessary – a philosophy that earns him plenty of respect, especially when it's backed up by a gun. No one crosses Shaka. And Shaka answers to no one.

Actor and filmmaker Andy Marshall is co-creator and one of the writers of *SOUL*. A 15-year veteran of the film and television industry, he began his career as an actor before branching out into production of videos, commercials, short films and features. A graduate of the Canadian Film Centre, he produced the award-winning short *The Sadness of Johnson Joe Jangles* and the popular *Shaolin Delivery Boy*. His screen credits include *Mysterious Island*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Monk* and *The Life and Hard Times of Guy Terrifico*.

## **SOUL – Credits**

<b>Created by</b>	<b>Andy Marshall, Abi Marshall</b>
<b>Developed with</b>	<b>Nigel Hunter</b>
<b>Executive Producer</b>	<b>Peter Lauterman</b>
<b>Executive Producer</b>	<b>Floyd Kane</b>
<b>Executive Producer</b>	<b>Michael Donovan</b>
<b>Executive Producer</b>	<b>Charles Bishop</b>
<b>Executive Producer</b>	
<b>Vision TV</b>	<b>Joan Jenkinson</b>
<b>Creative Producer</b>	<b>Andy Marshall</b>
<b>Episode 101, Story By</b>	<b>Andy Marshall, Nigel Hunter, Abi Marshall</b>
<b>Episode 101, Teleplay By</b>	<b>Andy Marshall</b>
<b>Episode 101, Directed By</b>	<b>Stefan Scaini</b>
<b>Episode 102, Story By</b>	<b>Andy Marshall, Abi Marshall, Nigel Hunter</b>
<b>Episode 102, Teleplay By</b>	<b>Andy Marshall, Nigel Hunter</b>
<b>Episode 102, Directed By</b>	<b>Stefan Scaini</b>
<b>Episode 103, Written By</b>	<b>Peter Lauterman</b>
<b>Episode 103, Directed By</b>	<b>Steve DiMarco</b>
<b>Episode 104, Written By</b>	<b>Floyd Kane</b>
<b>Episode 104, Directed By</b>	<b>Steve DiMarco</b>
<b>Episode 105, Written By</b>	<b>Shrinivas Krishna, Andy Marshall</b>
<b>Episode 105, Directed By</b>	<b>Stefan Scaini</b>
<b>Episode 106, Written By</b>	<b>Peter Lauterman</b>
<b>Episode 106, Directed By</b>	<b>Stefan Scaini</b>