



BY BEN WESTHOFF

WENDY MCKENZIE

HOLLYWOOD INTERVIEW

**ACTING
COACH
AND
CASTING
DIRECTOR**



Upon our lunch meeting in Manhattan's West Village, Wendy McKenzie is a bit intimidating. She wears bangs and stands well over six feet tall in sandals, her statuesque figure dwarfing mine. Though her modeling days are behind her, the London—born, Jamaica-bred casting director has seen her profile grow due to her work on the \$40 million-grossing Biggie Smalls biopic *Notorious*.

McKenzie's roots in Trelawny, Jamaica—the home parish of Biggie's mother Voletta Wallace—helped her win the job, as did her experience working with Big while he was alive. She'd auditioned him for the 1995 film *New Jersey Drive*—although the part somehow went to Heavy D. [Notorious producer] Wayne Barrow asked What I was looking for, and I said, "I'm not looking for someone who's 6'5" and overweight just like Biggie, I'm looking for someone with his swagger and charm." In Jamal Woolard she found her man, and also helped cast the film's Lil' Kim, Naturi Naughton. During the audition, McKenzie encouraged Naughton to draw from the pain she felt after parting ways with her former R&B trio 3LW.

McKenzie also works with runway models and acting hopefuls, and has put together countless commercials, MTV promos and music videos over the years. "I call my company In The Wink Of An Eye because I can get things done like that," she says. (See inthewinkofaneyebiz.com for more information.) Her resume also includes casting for an Aretha Franklin video, "A Rose Is Still a Rose," Wyclef Jean's "We Trying to Stay Alive" and the live-action production of Snoop Dogg's *Murder Was the Case* at the 1994 MTV Music Awards. McKenzie credits her success to keeping her ear to the streets. Sure enough, by the time lunch is over, she has given her card to our waitress. You guessed it - the server is an aspiring actress. ■