

erotica collection, came out. The novel *Addicted*, written in 19 days, and another, *Shame On It All*, written in her shortest time yet, 10 days, soon followed. She proved publishers wrong and soon they began courting her once again.

In 2001, she signed with Simon & Schuster (Atria Books), who publish her personal novels. Under Strebtor, distributed by Simon & Schuster, 34 other Black authors are published. She is the first Black author to obtain a distribution deal for a small press with a major publishing house.

"That's one thing I'm doing in the industry is taking a lot of risks," explains Zane, who recently opened a bookstore, Zane's Endeavors Books and Gifts, in Baltimore. "With Strebtor, I do diversity."

Zane lays it all on the line in her steamy novels, but she is more reserved in her personal life. She prefers to keep her real name undisclosed.

"People are so judgmental. When people do meet me, they are like, 'Wow, she's normal,'" laughs the former sales executive. "They expect something totally different."

Finding out Zane's true identity was never a real concern for some of her readers. "I didn't know if Zane was a man or a woman at first and it didn't matter to me," says Hazel Thompson-Bell, an early childhood educator from Chicago. "Her books capture you."

Actor Malik Yoba of "New York

Undercover" TV fame is working with Zane to bring *Addicted* to life as a stage production. It will begin touring next year with his Malik Yoba National Theatre Company (MYNTC).

"To have someone write so freely about sexuality was intriguing," says Yoba, who began reading her work two years ago. "People talk about the sex and wonder how that will be shown on stage. The beautiful thing about theatre, if you're creative, there are interesting ways to treat material like that."

Addicted's main character, Zoe, has a fascination with sex. Later it is revealed that sexual abuse in her past contributed to this addiction.

"I was also a victim of being molested as a child," says Yoba of his interest in the book's deeper message and his reason for wanting to do the play. "I was interested in the healing aspect and to teach young boys not to do that."

As the daughter of a retired elementary schoolteacher mother and a retired Ph.D. professor of theology father who taught at Yale, Oxford, Duke and Howard Universities, education was strongly encouraged.

When she entered college, she scored so high on the placement exam that she tested out of English, having to take only one course in that subject. Instead of majoring in English, she decided upon a degree in chemical engineering at Howard University.

Her father has written more than

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Nancy Wilson

CELEBRATES 50TH YEAR IN MUSIC WITH NEW CD 'R.S.V.P.'

Nancy Wilson says she is "a lady with a song."

And the sophisticated songstylist has been singing her songs for an amazing 50 years.

She celebrates her anniversary in music with the new hit CD, *R.S.V.P. (Rare Songs, Very Personal)*, which is winning rave reviews and thrilling her longtime fans and winning her new ones.

► Nancy Wilson, who is celebrating her 50th anniversary in music with the new CD, *R.S.V.P.*, says the key to her longevity is that she sings "songs of substance" that have stood the test of time.

She reveals the key to her longevity is, quite simply, the songs she sings. Songs that never go out of style. Songs that make you fall in love or help you put together the broken pieces of your life. Songs that say something.

"You've probably heard me say this time and time again, but it is the story that contained within the lyrics that get me," Wilson explains. "Love, found, lost, betrayed, honored and held delicately in your hands and heart are my kind of songs."

She continues, "I am not trying to be anyone else or go with the flow. I'm me. I've been myself. I don't go with the flow. I think that's pretty much



been the key to my longevity in this business. I have remained myself. I'm a songstylist. I sing good songs. I sing songs of substance. You've got to tell a story in a song and that's what I do."

Every track on the CD has a guest performer and a unique arrangement tailored to Wilson's distinctive style of telling a story. Among the guests are R&B singer Kenny Lattimore and jazz musicians George Shearing, Toots Thielemans and Phil Woods.

COVER STORY

"I chose songs that I have always enjoyed but never recorded. Believe it or not most albums that I have recorded have a theme that runs through them and these songs didn't fit into what I was doing at the moment. But they lingered in the back of my mind."

The opening tune on *R.S.V.P., An Older Man Is Like An Elegant Wine*, perfectly describes Wilson's performance on the CD: "Some things improve with age like a vintage wine growing mellow and fine."

Nancy is indeed performing at the top of her game on the CD, which also features a jazzy version of the late singer and minister O.C. Smith's *Little Green Apples*. "That's my tribute to my pastor; it's my first time recording and performing it," she says.

She also puts her Wilson trademark style on another must-listen-to tune, the standard, *That's All*.

R.S.V.P. marks the second collaboration between Wilson and MCG Jazz recordings. Her first recording with the label was the Christmas album, *A Nancy Wilson Christmas*, which was one of the top-selling jazz albums of 2001. Proceeds from *R.S.V.P.* go to support the MCG Jazz program at Manchester's Craftsmen's Guild, a non-profit arts and education center in Pittsburgh.

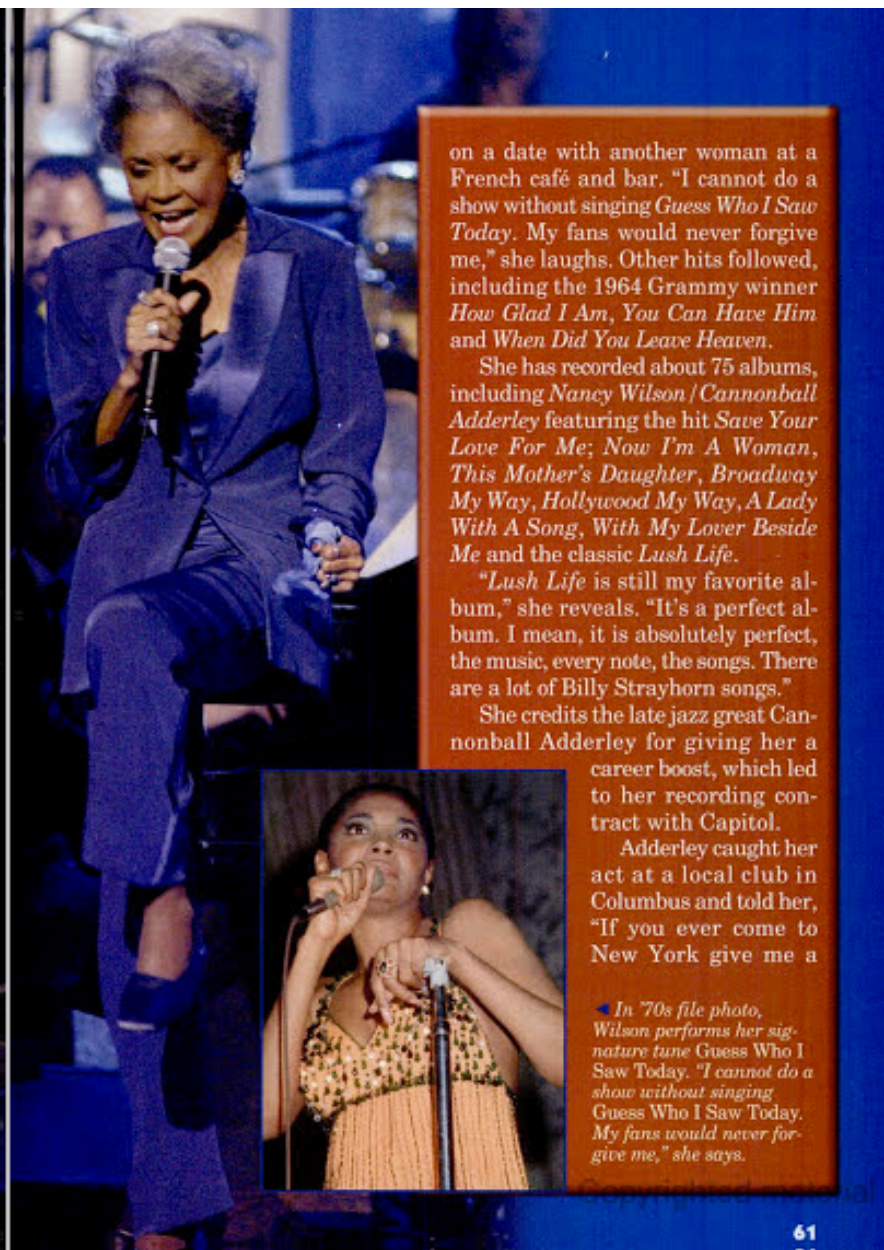
And while some women may be reluctant to reveal their age, the honest and outspoken entertainer doesn't mind at all. "I don't give a damn," she laughs. "Why should I be angry about my age? Why wouldn't I tell my age? It's nice to reach my age and say it. I've reached a great age. I've lived a great 67 years."

A child prodigy, she was singing by the age of 4 and at 15 she had her own twice-a-week television show, "Skyline Melodies," in Columbus, OH. She later was a top attraction at jazz clubs in the Columbus region. Her musical influences included Little Jimmy Scott, Dinah Washington, Ruth Brown, LaVerne Baker, Billy Eckstine and Nat King Cole.

Wilson started her recording career with the Rusty Bryant Band on an independent label near her hometown of Chillicothe, OH. She released her first album on a major label (Capitol) in 1959, the hit album *Like In Love*. During most of her 20 years with Capitol she was second in sales only to the Beatles, surpassing even Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee.

Wilson's signature tune remains *Guess Who I Saw Today*, a song she recorded in 1960, that tells the story of a woman who spots her man out

► Wilson pours her heart into a song during recent performance at the Congressional Black Caucus Awards Gala in Washington, D.C., which honored her with the "Celebration of Leadership Award" in recognition of her stellar career and humanitarian efforts.



on a date with another woman at a French café and bar. "I cannot do a show without singing *Guess Who I Saw Today*. My fans would never forgive me," she laughs. Other hits followed, including the 1964 Grammy winner *How Glad I Am, You Can Have Him and When Did You Leave Heaven*.

She has recorded about 75 albums, including *Nancy Wilson / Cannonball Adderley* featuring the hit *Save Your Love For Me; Now I'm A Woman, This Mother's Daughter, Broadway My Way, Hollywood My Way, A Lady With A Song, With My Lover Beside Me* and the classic *Lush Life*.

"*Lush Life* is still my favorite album," she reveals. "It's a perfect album. I mean, it is absolutely perfect, the music, every note, the songs. There are a lot of Billy Strayhorn songs."

She credits the late jazz great Cannonball Adderley for giving her a career boost, which led to her recording contract with Capitol.

Adderley caught her act at a local club in Columbus and told her, "If you ever come to New York give me a

◆ In '70s file photo, Wilson performs her signature tune *Guess Who I Saw Today*. "I cannot do a show without singing *Guess Who I Saw Today*. My fans would never forgive me," she says.

COVER STORY

► In 1996 file photo Wilson enjoys precious time with her family, husband, the Rev. Wiley Burton and children, (l-r) Sheryl, Kacy, and Samantha. Samantha (below) made national headlines two years ago when she lost about 300 pounds (*JET*, Dec. 23-Dec. 30, 2002).



call." He was managed by well-known manager John Levy.

Recalling her early days in New York, she says, "I gave myself six months to have John Levy as my manager and signed with Capitol. And if those two things did not happen, I would go back home.

"Remember, I was a big fish in a little pond," she laughs. "Big time in Ohio and in the Midwest, so I wasn't hurting. I wasn't going to ask somebody to make me a star. I knew that I needed John because he was a man with the best reputation. I needed a man who realized that life is important to me and not the business. I wasn't in love with the business. I was in love with life and I knew that John would understand that."

Within six weeks in New York, the determined songstylist had everything she wanted—Capitol Records and Levy as her manager.

Levy has been her manager throughout her career. "John is like my dad. I had three fathers. I have John Levy, Sparky Tavares (her late road manager) and my dad (the late Olden Wilson). It doesn't get any better than that."

Throughout her stellar career she has received numerous accolades. In addition to her Grammy for her *How Glad I Am*, she's received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, an Emmy for her 1960s NBC network TV series "The Nancy Wilson Show," an NAACP Image Award for Best Jazz Artist, four Peabody Awards as host of "Jazz Profiles" on National Public Radio and recently was named one of America's "Jazz Masters" by the National Endowment for the Arts.

She has raised funds for the UNCF and received honorary degrees from Berklee College of Music and Central State University in Ohio.



And topping off the accolades is Young America Works, a public charter school in Washington, D.C., which is building a recording institute to be named after Wilson next year.

Along the way, she has found time for acting and appeared in the '60s on Bill Cosby's "I Spy," "Hawaii Five-0" and more recently on "Soul Food," "The Parkers," "Moesha," "The Cosby Show" and "The Parenthood."

Foremost in her life has always been her children, Kacy, vice president of finance at a computer systems company; Samantha, a singer-songwriter; and Sheryl, a graphics artist. Her four grandsons are Sol, 4, Shane, 4, Lane, 10, and Chase, 20 months.

Today, she has slowed down her tour schedule so that she can spend more time with her grandchildren. "Be-

ing a grandmother makes me want to come home more. I want to spend more time with them. I am slowing down. For example, right now, I have the next 10 days on the road, then I am off for a month. Then I work for another week, then I'm off. I refuse to work two shows a night for anybody. I don't care how much money it is."

Reflecting on the warm bond and connection that she has with her audiences, the down-to-earth songstylist says, "I hope they see me as a nice lady. Because I am a nice lady. I have a little bit of class, a little bit of sophistication," she says modestly. "It's not about the singing. It's about what I bring to people, how good I make them feel. I want to always be known as a lady with a song."

—CLARENCE WALDRON

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a dozen books. Zane's oldest sister, Charmaine Parker, also a writer, is senior editor at Strebor.

Two years ago Zane married her childhood sweetheart, an environmental designer. In addition to her three children (17, 10 and 1), she has a 22-year-old stepchild.

This November bookstores will stock shelves with two new Zane books, *Afterburn* (Simon & Schuster) and *Breaking the Cycle* (Strebor).

In *Breaking the Cycle*, which she considers to be "the most important book" she's ever written, Zane tackles domestic abuse and the effect it has on children.

"The stories are very harsh," warns Zane of the work, a collection

of stories penned by her and other writers she hand-selected. "I wanted them to be that way because I want people, when they put the book down, to say, 'Wow, I really need to get out.' And if they know someone in that situation, for them to say, 'I've really got to help them.'"

Two things Zane says she sets out to do in her books: "All of my characters are either already very liberated and empowered or they become that way during the book," she says. "When I sit down and write each book, I have something different in mind of what I'm trying to get across...I do it in a comedic and in a sexual way, but I always have a deeper purpose."

—MARGENA A. CHRISTIAN

