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Which major stars are slotted to return to 'SHIELD'?

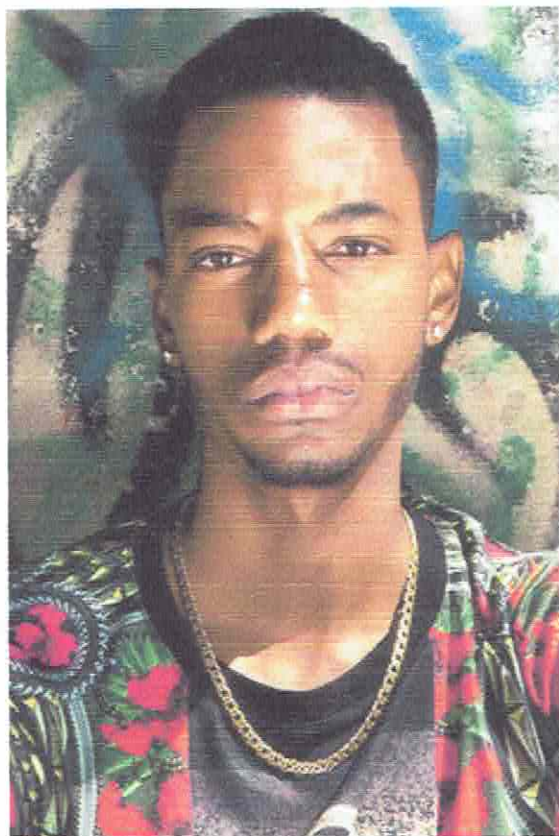
'The Wire' Duquan's all grown up: Singer-actor Jermaine Crawford a triple threat



Shamontiel Vaughn
The Wire Examiner
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Jermaine Crawford can sing, act and any "The Wire" fans who saw Season 5's "Took" know he can dance, too, even if fellow co-star Tristan "Mack" Wilds is in the background singing "Make it rain on 'em." Crawford was the school kid behind the name Duquan "Dukie" Weems in Season 4 and Season 5 of the HBO hit. These days, he's all grown up at 21, standing tall at 6'3, and taking advantage of his musical talent, promoting his youth charity **Code Blue**, and on the lookout for acting and legal roles.

Shamontiel Vaughn: You currently have a mixtape out. Your first single is "Janet." Why the name "Janet"?

Jermaine Crawford: For my very first project, I kinda wanted to really introduce

me to the world as a musician. I grew up listening to a lot of Janet Jackson. I'm probably her biggest fan ever. We're secretly married. She just doesn't know it.

SV: [Laughs] Wait a minute. What happened to Toni Braxton? You tweet about Toni Braxton and Keke Palmer a lot, too. Do they know you're having this affair?

JC: Toni Braxton is new. Me and Keke are actually good friends. I think she is beautiful though. The reason I did "Janet" is because I'm a huge fan of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. Those are my favorite producers. That song "Janet" was kind of like my take on Janet's "Any Time, Any Place." It was my tribute, my homage to her because I developed my R&B sound around the production of Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis. I wanted it to be free. I wanted people to decide if they liked it or not. The single "Janet" is on iTunes of course, but for the whole body of work I wanted people to get it for themselves.

SV: Out of the five songs you did, which one do you like the most? And which one do you feel best represents you?

JC: I feel like "Janet" best represents me, but right now I'm really feeling my song "Work." It's about to be summer time so I'm kind of in an amped mood. Time to party.

SV: Is that you rapping on a couple of songs or is that someone else?

JC: That is one of my good friends Monty Cold who is actually from Maryland as well. We did a Maryland collabo.

SV: Okay, that's "Bad Girl." You have a lot of party music on here. Janet Jackson is old school traditional R&B. Is that your goal with your singing career? Are you learning towards traditional R&B? Are you looking for the pop crowd? Or, are you in the middle where you want that hip-hop R&B feel?

JC: I definitely think I'm leaning towards traditional R&B. I grew up listening to Alexander O'Neal; Luther Vandross; Sam Cooke; Marvin Gaye; and Earth, Wind and Fire. So I'm always going to learn towards that sound. But me being 21, I'm somehow going to always put a spin to traditional R&B.

SV: Sometimes you can tell that there are singers that have been trained to sing and some singers have a natural gift for singing. You lean more towards the natural gift. Did you always want to sing though?

JC: Absolutely. I grew up in church. My dad was a deacon, and he lead praise and worship so I got my start very young, at like three years old. My dad was a great singer as well. I was singing before I was acting. A lot of people don't know that of course because "The Wire" took off. I don't necessarily love one more than the other, but I'm very passionate about music. That's God's gift to me.

SV: In "Janet," there's a lot of posing and a lot of singing but not a lot of dancing. However, anybody who watched Season 5 with that episode . . .

JC: [Laughs]

SV: With you supposedly looking for a job, and you and Tristan Wilds -- who played Michael, you did the "make it rain" dance. So we know you can dance.

JC: Yeah.

SV: Will there be a video of you dancing?

JC: I'm definitely incorporating a lot of dancing into my last performance for "Work." "Janet" I want to sing more for the ladies to serenade and croon a little bit. But you could definitely expect some counts from me onstage and in some of the music videos. It's funny that you brought up that "Wire" video because we see the little videos that people have made of that clip all over the internet. [Laughs]

SV: I was just so surprised. I wasn't prepared for you to start dancing. We hadn't really seen that part of your character.

JC: Yeah, I've been singing and dancing before acting. When I was in church I used to mimic Michael Jackson in the aisle, the lobby. Whenever there were a crowd of people you could expect me dancing like Michael Jackson in the center of it all.

SV: So was that your idea to dance on that episode?

JC: I remember in the script it was talking about there was a position needed for a stripper. Dominic West, who plays McNulty, he directed that episode. And he was like, "Just get up and have a good time." And I got up and had a good time.

SV: It was very cute. Very unexpected but very cute. It was one of my favorite scenes because the show is so dark. It was one of the few times that I saw some kind of comedy incorporated in such a dark episode. Have you ever had formal training for singing or dancing, or is it all natural on both ends?

JC: All praise be to God, it is. My dad coaches me here and there. He helps with vocal producing. He helped me with like seven different versions of "Janet," but the final version is the one he came alongside of me and was like, "Okay, I'm going to push you." It all did come naturally prior to "The Wire." I didn't have acting classes. I was just kind of working.

SV: With so many artists today going independent, would you prefer to stay an independent artist or are you looking to sign with a label?

JC: As long as I could do it my way I don't care. I'm not opposed to listening. I'm not opposed to constructive criticism. I'm not opposed to help. I'm not opposed to molding. However, I know that I am my own artist. The lyrics I write are my life, my story, my journey. I couldn't be no one's puppet. That's never been me ever.

SV: Considering your background with the church, what made you go for R&B as opposed to gospel? I know they walk hand in hand, but what made you lean more towards one than the other?

JC: I grew up singing in church, and I love Jesus. But just as much as I was listening to gospel music I was listening to Earth, Wind and Fire, and the Commodores and The Temptations. I never saw myself as a gospel artist. I will always give my gift back to the kingdom in some way, shape or form.

SV: All right, let's get into "The Wire." How did you start off on "The Wire"?

JC: When I first got on that show, I was 12 or 13 years old. I was way too young to even know what the show was. I just knew that I had an audition for this HBO TV show. And like most of my auditions at the time I had to curse a lot. And I asked my mom for permission.

She said, "This is what you love to do. Just don't bring it in the house." And it happened. My brother, who's six years older than me, he was a huge fan of the whole movement. I had no clue. My parents didn't allow me to watch it.

SV: Were you allowed to watch the episodes you were in? Or, did you do your part and go home?

JC: My mom definitely made that exception. My mom wanted me to have the experience of seeing myself on television. I watched that kind of stuff on TV. At 12, 13, you kind of know every curse word there is. Just being realistic. But that just wasn't one of the shows that I gravitated to because of the mature content. If I was already in it, let's watch it!

SV: You talked about a rapper friend Monty Cold who was from Baltimore. Were you born and raised in Maryland?

JC: Born. Raised. Family. Everything.

SV: Once you were on the show, did you go back to watch Seasons 1 through 3 or did you start from Season 4?

JC: Here's the funny thing. I didn't watch the show in its entirety up to my season until last summer.

SV: Why so early?

JC: I know that sounds crazy. Before I turned 21 in October 2013, I said I wanted to see the history that I was a part of. All of my cast mates had watched it all so my sister and I watched it all. The show was great.

SV: Who was your favorite character?

JC: Lester [Freamon (played by Clarke Peters)]. He was such a genius, and I love how his character was written. He was so intelligent. He was so witty. And my second would have to be Stringer Bell [played by Idris Elba]. He's the epitome of a cool hustler.

SV: You were already on Season 4 so I'm sure the shock value had worn off. No

spoiler alert that he was killed in Season 3.

JC: I knew that Stringer was going to die, but I didn't know anything else. I wasn't surprised at all, but I was completely devastated. You become attached to those characters. So it's like, "I forgot that was going to happen."

SV: Who was your favorite actor to work with?

JC: My favorite actor to work with would probably have to have been Mr. Prezbo [Detective Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski (played by Jim True-Frost)]. We had a good time filming together. That was really my first time on a set filming a major production like that so he made sure that I was good. He always asked if I wanted to run the lines. It was just a blast with him.

SV: Who was your favorite actress to work with? There weren't a lot of women who interacted with you all on Season 4 especially.

JC: We really didn't interact, but I would say Sonja Sohn who played Kima Greggs. I loved her. She's dope. We never had scenes together, but she was very welcoming on the set. She was almost kind of like the mom of the set. She made sure everybody was good.

SV: Do you feel like "The Wire" was an important show?

JC: Absolutely. I felt like it transformed the way that we see urban America regarding how everything connects -- how the corner boy affects the White House. It was a great show for its time. Even to this day I have people retweet me or stop me to say, "I just started watching it." We went off in 2007, and seven years later people are still hooked to that show.

SV: For your character, what did you feel was the most important part of the character you played -- Duquan?

JC: He was a necessary character. It was almost as if you could see Bubbles [Reginald "Bubbles" Cousins (played by Andre Royo)] from the beginning. Stringer Bell and Avon Barksdale [played by Wood Harris] were kind of like Michael Lee and Dukie. One was very very smart. One was very much so muscle. One saw red. One saw green. It showed you

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how the influential characters came to be.

SV: Were you surprised at what happened to Duquan or did you feel like it was bound to happen?

JC: I felt like it was bound to happen, but I forgot that we were on the most real show on HBO. It was something in me that I was hoping this could be the Disney Channel, and I could get adopted. But it didn't really work out that way.

SV: Before he ended up working with the homeless guy and being on drugs, once Michael decided to cross Marlo Stanfield and he decided to let his brother Bugs go with another family and you off on your own, do you feel like he made the right decision? Or, do you feel like Duquan's character should've rolled with him? Because I do.

JC: We all feel like that. But that would've been too much of the fantasy. It would've been too much fiction. Because if you're on the run you would rather be by yourself. And Dukie was never the type of person that was just quick to shoot somebody in the face. I think that he did make the best decision. It wasn't the nicest but essentially it was the best decision.

SV: What was it like working with David Simon?

JC: He's one of the greatest writers of all time when it comes to television. I had the opportunity to work with him first. He basically started my career.

SV: I know where you want to focus on musically, but acting -- character wise -- what's the next type of character you'd like to play?

JC: I would like to play Matthew McConaughey in "A Time to Kill." I would love to play a lawyer on a really good case -- a suspenseful thriller. Something heavy. And I would love to play something like Will Smith in "Independence Day."

SV: Why a lawyer?

JC: If I wasn't an entertainer I know that I would've been a lawyer.

SV: When you were a kid did you always argue? Were you interested in debate?

JC: Still to this day. It's not just about me being argumentative. It's just how I naturally support my arguments with facts, and I research. Then I come back to an argument. Try to hear both sides. During the Michael Jackson case, I could not move from the TV. I love law.

SV: What made you go for an entertainment role as opposed to law school?

JC: Entertainment definitely chose me. I accepted. Law is something that would be nice to do, but I know that entertainment is what I was sent to this Earth to do.

SV: It's never too late to go to law school should you want

JC: Nah, I'm okay. I'll just live vicariously through my character.

SV: At 30, where do you want to be? You said you and Keke Palmer were friends. She's as much a singer as she is an actress. Are you also going for that dream, or do you want one to be the bigger priority than the other?

JC: I absolutely want to do both. By the time I'm 30 I see myself just getting started. I want to do everything that's in me to do. At the same time I know it's going to be a lot of hard work. I see myself being one of the wealthiest men in the industry because of my businesses, my work as an actor and my work as a musician, including the songs I've written for people. I also want to have different shelters built around the country for homeless children.

SV: Did Duquan have a say in that? Is that the reason that topic is close to your heart?

JC: Absolutely. I have a campaign for homeless children called **Code Blue campaign**. The first big event we held was for Obama's first election so it's probably been about six years. We've raised a lot of money over the years helping fight for our cause, which is homeless children in the United States. Dukie definitely inspired that whole campaign. That character really stuck with me and got into my subconscious. That is my cause to give back to the youth.

SV: What's been your most memorable moment with Code Blue?

JC: We raised \$200,000 and were able to partner with Prince George's County in Maryland. That's where I'm from, born and raised. We opened the very first shelter for homeless youth called the **Promise Place**. Beyond the music and beyond the acting I did something great that wasn't even about me.

SV: There was a television documentary [mentioned on the site] called "Teenage and Homeless in America: Change Is Gonna Come." Were you seen in it or is it focused on the children?

JC: We haven't had a television documentary just yet. We've done PSAs and infomercials, but we haven't done the documentary yet. We've been talking about that since we started this campaign. Eventually it will happen, but right now our primary focus is to raise money by way of doing events.

SV: Who was the most memorable child that you met while working with Code Blue?

JC: This kid -- well, he's not a kid anymore but he was when I met him -- a kid named Vincent. He was homeless, and he was really going through a tough time. We've kept in touch with one another now. He has his own place. He has a baby. He's with his girlfriend. They're thinking about getting married. He has a great job. That'll always stick with me. I won't necessarily say that I had a part, but it's an honor to have had a front-row seat in all that God did for his life.

SV: Who is the most memorable fan you've encountered for "The Wire"?

JC: There's a lot. Probably Michael Vick and Carmelo Anthony. When people like that say, "Oh, that's my favorite show," the job is totally dope.

SV: What's been the most memorable moment with the everyday fan who sees, "Hey, Duquan is still around."

JC: The most memorable moments are when women actually come up to me and are like, "Wow, you look good." When we were filming the show people just didn't understand that I was in wardrobe, hair and makeup. They really thought that I looked the way that I did on

the show. So now when women come up to me, I get a different reaction. That's kind of cool.

SV: R&B will get the girls anyway. There will never be a shortage of women paying attention to you.

JC: [Laughs] We shall see.

To contact Jermaine directly, visit him on Instagram at [JermaineCrawford](#), on Twitter [@JermzCrawford](#) or on Facebook under his name.

*Shamontiel is the **Scandal Examiner** and the **National African American Entertainment Examiner**, too.*

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