

**E**vie Rhodes' novels have been called religious or Christian thrillers, but that really is too easy. She has authored *Expired* (in her words a "supernatural psychological thriller"), *Criss Cross* (a "supernatural suspense thriller") and *Out "A" Order* ("urban supernatural street fiction"). Although her work is not easily defined and she was not always interested in writing fiction, one thing has always been constant—spirituality. An award-winning songwriter and music video scriptwriter, whose gospel album *Standing in da Spirit* won a Canadian Music Award for Best Gospel Album and music video "Changed" won for Best Gospel Music Video, Rhodes produced and performed gospel music as Prophecy 1 in the gospel/hip-hop field. "I was telling stories just in a musical and visual arena via the songs that I wrote. I decided that I'd like to tell stories on a larger landscape so I ended up casting an eye toward being a novelist," she says. "I sort of gravitated toward that genre because of the type of stories that I wanted to share. Fiction was an unlimited platform, and since I possessed a wealth of unlimited ideas, I thought this would be an area in which I could excel."

Rhodes continued to work on her music while writing her first novel, *Expired*. "I managed to write at the same time because I've always been a very avid steward of any time that I have. I believe it is important to be organized, and to utilize time to its maximum effect. Because of my strong organizational skills, and ability to focus, I was able to be very versatile in my creations. Also, when you have a passion for what you do, you find a way to make it happen. I wrote *Expired* in approximately four months or so once I knew where I really wanted to go with the story. But, prior to that, I did a great deal of research as well as character profiles before knowing what I ultimately wanted the entire creation of the story to look like."

Rhodes doesn't take credit for coming up with the idea to do Christian thrillers. "I really think the idea came after me, so to speak. Whenever I would write, I noticed that my writing continuously took a slant in the direction of religion, and most specifically in the direction of religious thrillers. It seemed to be a natural gravitation of my pen in many ways. My gospel roots just naturally seemed to mix with what I had to write."

When asked how she can balance religion with supernatural thrillers Rhode says, "It balances itself. Regardless of what genres or labels are attached to the works I create, Christianity is an all-encompassing blanket. *Expired* had a lot of mind games and psychological aspects, but, at the end of the day, its foundation was rooted in Christianity, and the channels of good and evil. *Criss Cross* was extremely suspenseful with layers upon layers of suspense interwoven throughout the plot, but, at the end of the day, its foundation, too, was rooted in Christianity, and the same thing with *Out "A" Order*, which was laced with urban aspects, and many street antics. But it too was mixed with the belief of Christianity as well as with evil that spawned its head in the story because of the Urban and Christian mix."

Rhode's new novel is also not readily defined. *The Forgotten Spirit* is definitely a departure from my previous works of thrillers," she admits. "It is in a class of its own. *The Forgotten Spirit* falls more into the realm of what I would consider 'popular fiction.' It is family oriented, generational, and historical just by being the first story of its kind. It will have a significant impact on literature. It is a story of inspiration, joy and miracles."

*The Forgotten Spirit* is a tale about a special young girl named Jamie Lynne Banks who possesses a magical gift, whose hope is that her mother, who is in prison, will be home for Christmas.

"My story came from a deep need to raise people's awareness of the profound effect and power that Jesus Christ's ministry can have on a person's life. I also felt it was important to have a story that could be embraced from so many different aspects, one that was limitless in its

## Evie Rhodes

BY GERRIE E. SUMMERS



love. I (also) wanted to write an African-American Christmas story. I wanted to write a story that was timeless, and classic, one that knew no bounds, a story from which any person could benefit. *The Forgotten Spirit* is it. And it is my way of saying, "Don't forget about the Lord Jesus Christ."

Rhodes does not believe that the Christian slant of her thrillers will limit her readership. "I can't say that I ever thought of the work as being limited. The audience is growing and growing. I know that the Lord is mighty in my life, and as such I figured He didn't have any limits, so it never occurred to me. I believe the Christian slant has been ever so helpful. I receive letters from people who tell me how the stories have either changed or affected their lives in one aspect or another. Or how they had forgotten what it was like to have faith and were reminded during the reading of my stories. They also tell me how they've overcome personal obstacles, and difficulties in their lives from reading these stories, and how the stories are so personal for them. They can relate because the stories feel like home for them in many aspects. I've even had a person tell me they thought of ending their life, and how the reading of my novel *Out "A" Order* kept them going, and led to a change of heart for them. That is powerful stuff," she says.

Rhodes has another "urban supernatural street fiction novel" scheduled on Dafina for July 2008. "I'm also in the throes of working on another Christmas story entitled, *The Last Christmas*," she says. "I'm building a speaking platform because my audiences seem so enthralled and touched when I share these themes with them in person. We get to embrace the bond together, and that is exciting for me as an author, as well as for them as readers and recipients of the works. ■"