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Gladys Knight, a Dose of Fresh Inspiration — and Romance

The Hollywood Exclusive by Marilyn Beck and Stacy Jenel Smith

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Gladys Knight admits she would never have thought of tackling a [romantic](#) role in the just-wrapped "Seasons of Love" if [Taraji P. Henson](#), executive producer and star of the Lifetime movie that just finished shooting, hadn't brought her into it.



"This part is one of the main characters of the film," the seven-time Grammy-winning singer lets us know. Speaking of Henson, with whom she worked previously in Tyler Perry's "I Can Do Bad All By Myself," Gladys goes on, "I don't know what she saw in me that she would think I could even do a part like this, but they called me and, oh! I prayed so hard about it, because I wanted to do well. It's a [love story](#) even though it's coming out at Christmas time. I just really didn't know if I could pull it off. I've never been in a situation where I had to be like this with a partner."

So how was it to be affectionate on camera? "I felt like I was cheating on my husband!" admits Gladys, and lets out a great big laugh.

And her husband? "My husband is pretty protective when it comes to me," she replies. "We share everything. I asked him, 'How do you feel about this?' and he was okay, you know, but at that time I didn't know I was going to have to kiss the guy!" She laughs again.

Gladys' mate since 2001, William McDowell, wasn't on the set as she was going through her romantic paces. In fact, he wasn't even in the same state. "We bought a school," she explains, "and he's working so, so very hard to get the school renovated so we can get going in making a difference in young people's lives — young adults' lives. He's down in North Carolina working on that."

Right now, Gladys is in the midst of a media blitz on behalf of her new "Where My Heart Belongs" inspiration/[gospel](#) album.

She wrote some of the material on the album as far back as the 1970s, when she was performing with her brother Merald, William Guest and the late Edward Patten, a.k.a. The Pips.

"I was looking for certain stories, certain information I could put on this album, just as a reminder to people about the spirit that we should have and that God is still amazing and we need him in our lives," she explains. "I wanted to give people just a peek into the most important part of my life and how I feel about that."

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She says she was prompted to start the album as a response to the troubled shape of the world: "I think sometimes a little message is like a candle in the dark.

"At first I thought it was going to be a Christmas [holiday album](#), where we would talk about the spirit of the Lord and loving each other and that kind of thing. And then the closer I got to it, I felt like his love for us and our love for him should be for all seasons. I started putting songs in there that people usually just listen to around certain holidays, like 'Happy Birthday, Jesus,' like 'Were You There When They Crucified My Lord' — songs that we should be thinking about any time of year."

Gladys has been out touring this summer, including some dates with [Kool and the Gang](#), and has more performances ahead. The devout Mormon (since 1997) is also still managing to find time to do Latter-day Saints firesides in-between. Then, too, there are her 16 grandchildren and eight great-grands. Gladys tells us that she does indeed get time with them, that "If we're away from North Carolina too long, they come to see me."

That the beloved Empress of Soul and her husband are embarking on brand new major enterprises at this time of life is no small inspiration in itself.

How does she do it? Answers Gladys, "I just take it all in stride and be grateful for the blessings that I have, and if I stay focused on the blessings, I ain't got time for nothing else."

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