

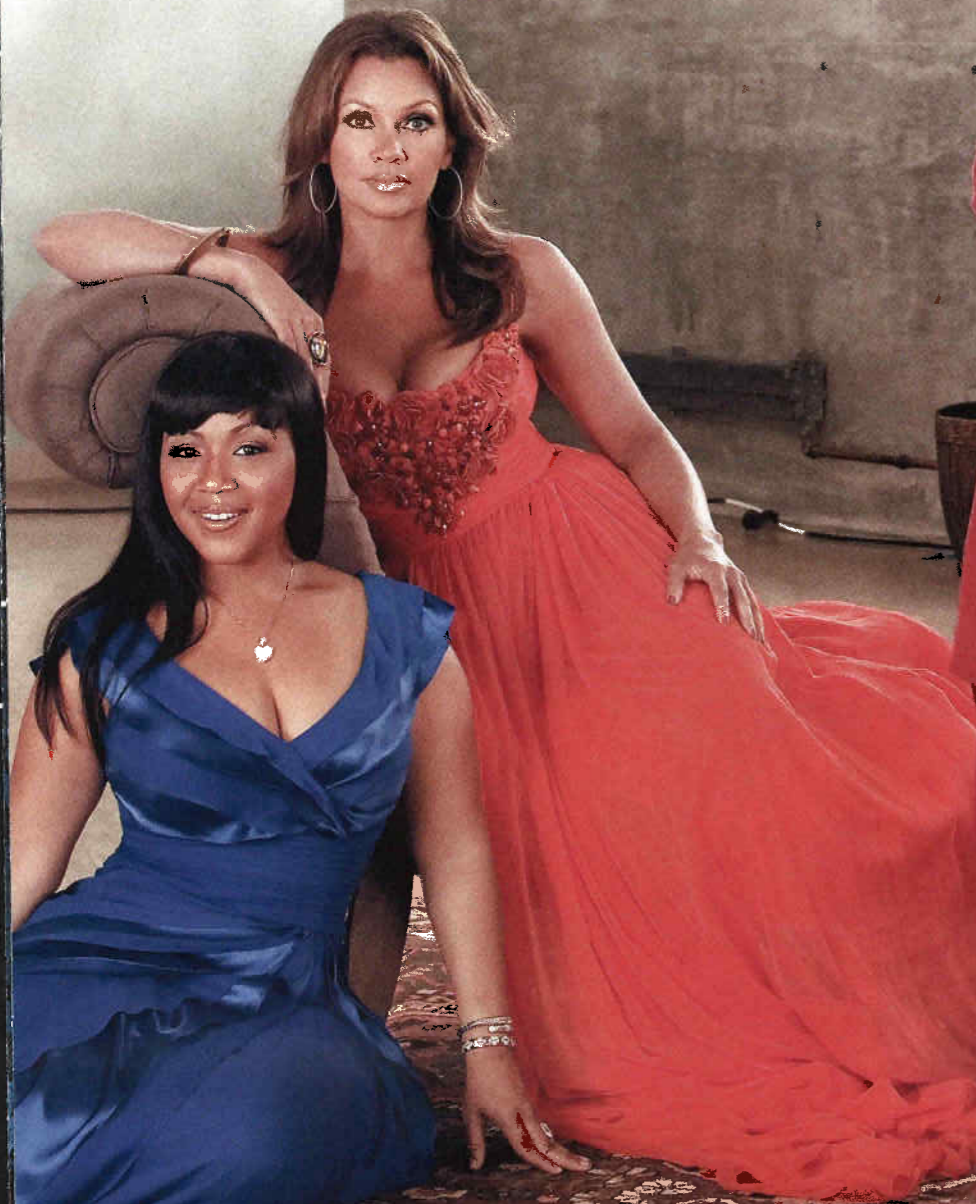
40 Fierce & Fabulous!

Vanessa L. Williams, 47
Actress, singer

FIERCE FACTOR: She conquered Broadway, the music charts, and the big and small screens. The first Black Miss America has two words of advice: "Stay working." And that's exactly what this Grammy-, Emmy- and Tony-nominated artist has done for more than two decades. "It's important to have a thirst for trying new things," she says. Her next stop? Shaking things up on Wisteria Lane as the newest addition to *Desperate Housewives*. —Lynna Floyd

Faith Ringgold, 79
Visual artist, writer

FAB FACTOR: People soar in her stirring, vibrant masterpieces. "I chose the quilt as a canvas because it was a link to our ancestors and that connection to Africa," Ringgold says of her powerful, vivid paintings. Her best known work, 1988's "Tar Beach" featuring a family on an urban rooftop one summer evening, was adapted into an award-winning children's book. Look for the Faith Ringgold Children's Museum of Art and Storytelling in Harlem in 2012. —Patrik Henry Bass



THE ARTISTS

THROUGH GOSPEL MUSIC, ACTING, PAINTED QUILTS, LITERATURE AND DANCE, THEY CREATE BRILLIANTLY

Erica Campbell, 38,
Tina Campbell, 35

Chart-topping gospel duo *Mary Mary*

FAB FACTOR: The Campbell sisters spread *The Word* with conviction and flair.

Since their 2000 debut of the club-friendly "Shackles (Praise You)," the former R&B backup singers have delivered anointed soul with cross-generational appeal. Their hip-hop-infused anthem "God in Me" made history as the longest-standing gospel song on the R&B/hip-hop and dance club charts. "And," Tina notes, "we're good mothers and good wives too." —C.M.

Maya Angelou, 82

Author, poet, activist, actress, dancer, singer

FIERCE FACTOR: The Presidential Medal of Arts winner became the voice of a nation.

The trademark grin tells you that the best-selling author and great-grandmother knows a whole lot more than you do. Angelou clarifies how one becomes a tour de force. "Be on your own side," she says emphatically. "Don't ask somebody to be on your side and you're not already there. Expect yourself to be good, bright and excellent in all you do, but if you do fail, don't beat yourself up about it. Every failure is not a defeat." —Wendy L. Wilson

Judith Jamison, 67

Artistic director, *Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater*

FAB FACTOR: She showed Black girls they belonged at center stage—and in the corner office.

At a 1965 audition, dance maestro Alvin Ailey took one look at the gangly 22-year-old Jamison and invited her to join his troupe. Together artist and muse collaborated on many of the dance world's greatest works, including Ailey's spellbinding 1971 solo "Cry," a tribute to Black women. "Black women have what I call the rhythm of life," says Jamison. "We're strong. We're women of triumph." —P.H.B. ▷

From left: Erica Campbell of *Mary Mary*, Vanessa L. Williams, Faith Ringgold, Tina Campbell of *Mary Mary*, Maya Angelou and Judith Jamison