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'All American' star Bre-Z lands in New Orleans to serve as grand marshal at Xavier homecoming parade

BY SUE STRACHAN | sstrachan@theadvocate.com NOV 17, 2018 - 12:24 PM

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Bre-Z, a rapper and actress, smiles outside of St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans, La. Friday, Nov. 16, 2018.

Advocate staff photo by LESLIE GAMBONI

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For Bre-Z, getting out of the car and making her way to the restaurant Sylvain for an interview and photo shoot on Friday afternoon took a little time.

Fans wanted to engage with the barber, rapper and actress, currently starring as Tiana “Coop” Cooper in The CW Television Network’s “All American” and on the recent album “The Grl.”

And engaging is a key word with Bre-Z, who through her many talents has caught the public’s attention. In return, she is ready to bring it all to her fans, including those at the Xavier University homecoming Saturday, where she was to serve as grand marshal of the parade and attend the tailgate afterward.

She landed in the city on Thursday night, excited because “I can actually take time to see it. I am usually in and out quickly. I now have some downtime to be a tourist.”

Her plans included shopping and anything else that might strike her and her friends’ fancies. “I am looking forward to experiencing New Orleans,” she said. “There is so much culture here. See what I can see. Feel it.”

Born Calesha Murray in Philadelphia in 1987, Bre-Z grew up in nearby Wilmington, Delaware, moving to Atlanta when she was about 15 when her mother got a job there.

“Music was always a passion of mine,” said Bre-Z, and working in the studios in Atlanta is where “I actually developed my sound and craft.”

She also became well-known as a barber, continuing a family tradition. Her father and grandfather were barbers.

After almost 10 years in Atlanta, Bre-Z had the opportunity to move to Los Angeles. “I wanted a change. A change of pace and scenery. I felt I had plateaued,” she said.

Acting wasn't on the original agenda, but someone recommended she audition for Fox's “Empire.” “It was the rap part of the role got me, not the acting,” Bre-Z said. “It was the first time I auditioned for rapping and acting.”

Producers fell for her, and from 2015 to 2017, Bre-Z portrayed rapper Freda Gatz. On the show she performed her own raps.

“The writing is 100 percent me,” she said, something she still does on “All American,” which debuted this fall.

As Coop in “All American,” Bre-Z is the best friend of Spencer James (portrayed by Daniel Ezra), a high school football player from South Los Angeles who is recruited to play for Beverly Hills High School. The show was inspired by retired NFL player Spencer Paysinger.

“I love Coop. Coop is a lot like myself, which makes it easy for me to settle in with her, be able to really translate through the TV,” said Bre-Z. “With Coop, everything comes across as authentic, and that’s what I like about her: her giving to people, and as a source of inspiration for people because she is strong-willed and grounded. At that age it is hard to come by.”

So when The CW proposed having Bre-Z come to Xavier University in New Orleans, one of the nation's historically black colleges and universities, it fit right in. “This is something our show touches on — our culture, our spirituality; it is a perfect match-up,” she said.

“To be able to come down and share our show for this generation, which our audience is targeted to, it makes perfect sense.”

Bre-Z was also looking forward to homecoming, something she hadn't experienced before at a university, as well as being grand marshal in the parade.

She's never been to a professional football game, either, but she'll miss the New Orleans Saints game against the Philadelphia Eagles on Sunday in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. “I have to get back to work!” she said.

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