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TLC LEGENDS

This past October, for the first time in far too long, TLC was not synonymous with toddlers, tiaras, extreme cougar wives, or anything called *Say Yes to the Dress*. TLC, the four-time Grammy-winning, 65-million-albums-selling R&B girl supergroup named for members Tionne “T-Boz” Watkins, Lisa “Left Eye” Lopes, and Rozonda “Chilli” Thomas, reclaimed the initials with the premiere of the VH1 original movie *CrazySexyCool: The TLC Story* and an accompanying greatest hits collection, *20*, which delivered a new single, “Meant To Be.” Written by Ne-Yo, the song, according to Thomas, “sums up the whole 20 years of the relationship between the three of us and the ongoing relationship between T-Boz and myself.” As any true pop-culture enthusiast knows, this is no small feat.

TLC’s story is no less breathtaking than the scope of their influence. From humble Atlanta beginnings to global superstardom, the band has lived a triumphant, outrageous, often tragic tale perfectly suited to a “Behind the Music” segment. Watkins would struggle with chronic sickle cell anemia (and later be sidelined by a brain tumor). Thomas publicly endured the throes of a relationship with Usher. The group suffered an astounding bankruptcy. And then Lopes, after infamously burning down the house of her boyfriend, Atlanta Falcons football player Andre Rison, and acrimoniously challenging her bandmates to a solo album showdown, suddenly passed away, in a 2002 auto accident while on a spiritual retreat in Honduras. (Her last days are recorded in the 2007 documentary *The Last Days of Left Eye*.) “In our hearts and within our music, she’ll always live,” Watkins says. At the *V* photo shoot, which their publicist cites as their first since Lopes’s death, the duo became emotional when their 1995 slow jam “Red Light Special” began playing, and requested it be replaced with the Notorious B.I.G.

While there has been but a flurry of TLC-related happenings in recent years—including unrealized solo projects, a run of reality-show programming, and a 2011 performance on *American Idol*—appreciation for their talents has only grown. Stylistically they are a crucial touchstone for the lighter side of ’90s revivalism: consider sporty elastic attire, Cross Colours brights, sharp video-game-fighter bangs, and Olympic midribs. (“I’m going to be 85 years old still with a six pack, I’m not playing,” says Thomas with a laugh. “I’m going to have these abs until I go home to Jesus.”)

CrazySexyCool: The TLC Story is an appropriately extravagant biopic, executive produced by Watkins and Thomas, written by Kate Lanier (*What’s Love Got to Do With It*, *Set It Off*, *Glitter*), and starring Keke Palmer as Chilli, Drew Sidora as T-Boz, and Lil Mama

(who filled in for Lopes at the group’s July 2013 performance at the Mixtape Festival, in Hershey, Pennsylvania) as Left Eye. It details their saga and features exactly reenacted music videos from “What About Your Friends” to “No Scrubs,” with choreography coached by Watkins and Thomas and even costumes pulled from the TLC archives. “Lil Mama wore Lisa’s, because she was that size, but the other two girls are more top heavy, because, you know, we’re the tittiless crew, T-L-C, Titty-Less Crew, so those outfits had to be re-created,” explains Watkins, who admits to being shaken up while watching her life played out on set. “It was really, really weird. Especially with Lil Mama, because her real eyes are hazel and so they put these big, round black contacts in, like Lisa’s eyes. She looked up at me one time and I was like, “This is weird.”

Fortunately the TLC renaissance is in its early stages. An as-yet-untitled full-length album, their first since 2003’s *3D*, is currently in the works. “I’m telling you, it’s a blessing even being in the studio recording. I can’t wait till you hear some of these songs! It’s TLC 2015! It’s TLC today and tomorrow!” says Thomas, who promises more futurism, signature dance moves, and a familiar sound that continues what began with Left Eye. “It’s definitely just a different period, because she’s not here physically. But even when she was alive we had a lot of songs that did not have her on there. So with Tionne’s voice and my voice it still sounds like our stuff. But we’ll have a few features, because we’ve never had features before,” she says, mentioning likely but unconfirmed contributions from Drake, T.I., 2 Chainz, and Lady Gaga.

“I don’t think you can ever have enough records about self-esteem and loving yourself and not taking no crap, especially females,” says Thomas. “That girl-power thing is just missing right now. And it’s not like we’re in the studio trying to make songs like this—we’re naturally like that, so it naturally comes. We’re still being who we are. And by saying that, it’s going to help a lot of people. And that’s all we care about. We want jams to make you jam but at the same time make you think.” **MARK JACOBS**

PHOTOGRAPHY **CHRISTELLE DE CASTRO** FASHION **HALEY WOLLENS**
FROM LEFT: T-BOZ WEARS JACKET **DKNY** EARRINGS **NOIR** RINGS **TRINE TUXEN JEWELRY**
CHILLI WEARS BRA AND STOLE **MARC JACOBS** EARRINGS **ALEXIS BITTAR** CUFFS **TRINE TUXEN JEWELRY**

TO SEE A VIDEO OF THIS SHOOT, GO TO VMAGAZINE.COM

Makeup: Geeta Khanna (Creative Production Partners) Hair: Shomi Mor (Atelier Management) Manicure: Bernadette Thompson Photo assistant: Richard Luong Stylist assistant: Julia Gail Videographers: Patrio Lima Quintana and Agostina Galvez Location: Dune Studios, NY

FROM LEFT:
T-BOZ WEARS JUMPSUIT ANNE SOFIE MADSEN
SHOES MAX MARA NECKLACE MICHAEL KORS
EARRINGS NOIR EARRING (HER LEFT) REPOSSI
CUFF (HER LEFT) EDDIE BORGO
CUFF (HER RIGHT) ALEXIS BITTAR
RING PATRCIA VON MUSULIN

CHILLI WEARS DRESS ANNE SOFIE MADSEN
SHORTS DIANE VON FURSTENBERG
BOOTS ALPINE STARS
RINGS AND CUFFS (WORN ON LEGS)
TRINE TUXEN JEWELRY

