

CREATIVITY IS KEY FOR *Mercy B*

MERCY BALOGUN talks to Renée Davis about helping people make the most of their music – and their relationships

MERCY BALOGUN, aka **Mercy B**, was busy running a hair salon when an episode of *The X Factor* prompted her to give her career a whole new look. She developed a TV talent competition for gospel music. On top of creating an opportunity for gospel singers to make their mark, she has also blogged about romance and marriage and written a book on the subject. No wonder she says she has 'always had a passion for music, writing and anything creative'.

'But,' explains Nigerian-born Mercy, 'when I came to the UK, I got distracted doing everything to survive. For a long time, my husband and I worked hard to build our lives here.'

Mercy took a variety of jobs. She worked as a chambermaid, cleaner and housing officer until it was time for a total career change.

'I needed time for my children,' she says. 'After having a bad experience with a childminder and my daughter, my mind wasn't at peace. So my husband suggested that he worked while I stayed home and that when the time was right, he'd support me with whatever career I wanted to make.'

In 2000, with the promised encouragement of her husband, Mercy opened Radiant Hair and Beauty Salon in South London.

'My husband said: "You love hair, and you're always in the salon having it done, so why not open your own?" The crazy thing was I didn't even know how to style hair. I had to go and learn. But that's how God works with



DOROTHY OGINNI



Mercy B

me – he shows me something and then tells me to go and learn how to do it. I have to sink or swim.'

Mercy ran the salon until 2010, but after watching a certain episode of *The X Factor*, she found herself on another unexpected career path.

I got distracted doing everything to survive

'Even when I was running the salon, I always loved music,' she says. 'I was on the worship team at my church and also recorded music.'

'Then one day, I was sitting at home watching *The X Factor*. On that particular episode, there were more Christians than

normal auditioning and singing religious songs for the judges. Some of them were telling Simon Cowell that he needed to give his life to Christ or he'd go to Hell. It just didn't seem to be the right time or place to start doing that.

'I complained to God: "Somebody needs to create a TV platform where Christians can be free and sing songs about Jesus without diluting the gospel message." I then heard God's Holy Spirit say to me: "Why not you?"'

'I thought I was speaking to myself and then God continued: "Do you know how many people watched that episode of *The X Factor* and it didn't bother them? This bothers you because it's your passion and purpose."

'But I didn't know where to start. The vision was bigger than me, and I gave God thousands of reasons why I shouldn't be the one to

Turn to page 10 ➔

From page 9

do it. I didn't have experience or know anything about the industry.

'I ran the idea by my husband, hoping he'd look at it from a business perspective and think it was not good. But he agreed that I should do it because God told me to and that it would work. That's where *Time2Shine* started.'

The gospel talent competition *Time2Shine* aired on Sky channel OH TV. In a similar style to *The X Factor*, contestants went through auditions, callbacks, a boot camp and then a live final where a winner was chosen.

The show – which, after four series, is on a break – wasn't just a way of finding gospel talent, but a place where aspiring artists could be nurtured and showcase their abilities.

Mercy reflects on the challenges of putting the talent competition in the spotlight.

'Making the TV show was the toughest part of running the competition, because I didn't really know anyone in the field,' she says. 'But I realised that a woman who worked with me on one of my music projects knew things about the industry. She said she could help me, so we started working together on the idea.'

'Though we didn't have a clue of what we were doing, we went to meetings with our plans, and pitched the idea to TV networks. Some of them would tell us that it wasn't going to work or that we were just wasting our time. But as we went along in the process, we met

The show has changed people's personal lives. It's mind-blowing

people who were willing to work on different parts of the idea. Before we knew it, we had a production team. It was like a dream come true.'

The show has produced successful winners such as UK gospel artist Annastasia Baker. And it has provided Mercy with many memorable moments when she has seen people

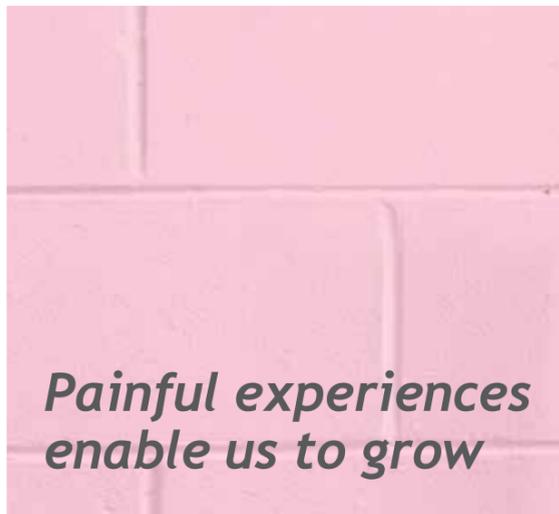
go through positive changes in their lives.

'One particular guy did his first audition in a wheelchair. When we returned for callbacks, he was using a walking stick. On the day of the final, he walked onstage using nothing. Every time he came back, something was changing in his life. I can never forget that.'

'There are so many stories about how the show has changed people's personal lives. It's mind-blowing,' she says.

Through writing and blogging, Mercy has been communicating lessons she has learnt from the story of her own life in order to encourage people through hard times. She remembers being hurt by people who she had thought would support her when she was developing *Time2Shine*.

'Some thought I was crazy,' she remembers. 'It was hurtful, but if that hadn't happened, I



probably wouldn't be who I am today. 'God allows us to go through certain painful experiences because they are what will enable us to grow. I wanted to let other people know that so I began to blog about my life. 'The response to my daily posts was huge. People would ask me for advice via Facebook so I started a YouTube channel called Ask



Mercy B, where I would answer various questions.'

In July, Mercy published *Fall in Love with his Vision not his Wallet*. The book – written primarily for single women who hope to be married – came as a result of Mercy's popular blog and Facebook posts on marriage and relationships.

'I've realised that a lot of people are confused on such subjects,' says Mercy. 'Marriage is an institution but when you enter into it there's no day for graduation. I've been married 29 years and I still don't know everything. I'm learning more and more every day.'

Mercy advises people to look out for warning signs of selfishness in potential partners and to make sure they marry someone who will support them in achieving their goals.

'So far the response has been amazing, and I'm happy that people are getting wisdom from the book. I'm trusting God that people will use what they read and apply it to their lives and that the testimonies will keep coming.'

Off the back of the book, Mercy will be holding workshops for single people and married couples, as well as offering one-to-one mentoring and studying to be a counsellor.

'I don't know what God will ask me to do next, or what doors he will open, but I'm trusting that his plans for me are good.'



● For more information visit mercyb.co.uk



DOROTHY OGINI