

June 18, 2007

ENTERTAINMENT

Ciara Lands Lead Role In Film Based On Legendary Stage Play, 'Mama, I Want To Sing!'

Grammy-winner Ciara will make her feature film debut in the movie *Mama, I Want To Sing!*, based on Vy Higginsen's historic 1983 off-Broadway gospel musical.

Emmy-winning actress Lynn Whitfield and Grammy-winner Patti LaBelle will also star in the movie, loosely based on the career of Higginsen's late sister, R&B singer Doris Troy, known as "Mama Soul," whose big hit was 1963's *Just One Look*.

"I've always strived to inspire and uplift my fans through music," said Ciara. "It's refreshing to now have the chance to do so through film, along side such an innovative, enterprising company."

Produced by CodeBlack Entertainment, the movie will begin filming this month in Baton Rouge, LA. It is scheduled for theatrical release early next year.

The musical, produced by Higginsen's husband, Ken Wydro, ran for eight years at Harlem's Heckscher Theatre and made history as the longest-running Off-Broadway Black theater musical in history (JET, May 21).

Acclaimed playwright Charles Ran-



Ciara



Patti LaBelle



Lynn Whitfield

dolph-Wright, noted for Off-Broadway's *Blue* which starred Phylicia Rashad, will direct his own screenplay for the film (JET, Dec. 11, 2006).

"It's a contemporary version and adaptation," said Higginsen, who will appear in the movie, while her real-life daughter, Knoelle Higginsen, will play the rival to Ciara's character.

Higginsen notes that things have come full circle. She recalled learning that she was pregnant with Knoelle the same day that the show opened at the Heckscher Theatre. Now they will appear together in the movie.

"The legend continues," said Higginsen, executive director of New York's Mama Foundation for the Arts. "I'm feeling excited, anxious and prayerful. My hope is that people will love the movie as much as they loved the play."

—Margena A. Christian