



Henry Angelo Ellerbee takes clients for a certain reason. Recently, he took Mary Moore to Saks Fifth Avenue. She tried to buy a dress, but she didn't buy anything.

Is It Hip to Be Cool? Not in This Charm School



THE NEW YORK TIMES STYLES SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 1994

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Ellerbee, who usually bills his clients an hour, grew up in a housing project in Jamaica, attended the Fashion Institute of Technology, lived in Paris, and at the Alvin Ailey Dance Theater in New York and worked in the publicity department of Chrysalis Records before starting his own business.

"On some days," he said, "children sing raised by children. Who's to teach them respect?"

Ellerbee's first client of the 1980s was a handsome young rapper named Yvond (pronounced yev-ond), who lives in rural Jamaica and recently signed with the Tuff record label. Yvond would be a second dose of Mr. Ellerbee's "interviewing technique" class heading out for 10 press interviews in the afternoon.

Mr. Ellerbee's situation, Mr. Ellerbee told Yvond, who was sitting across from him with a staff member who carried the role of a non-physical critical journalist.

Mr. Ellerbee told the singer to wear his music — you. You're going to be a friend by turning this interview into a conversation. You're going to play into his negative — you're going to play over it."

Ellerbee clapped his hands and began Yvond, a shy, fast-talking man with an appealingly languid, wasn't aggressive enough to be anybody. He's a listener, a long pauses and stroking his white thinking.

"I don't think about the question, answer it," Mr. Ellerbee yelled point.

"I look so bored!" he interrupted later, as he yanked a big off the wall. "You have to be more excited! I'm going to be a mirror right here so you can



Angelo Ellerbee coaches the singer Yvond on the art of being interviewed.

look at yourself and tell me what you think your facial expression is saying. Do you feel you have good eye contact? Do you feel yourself looking out the window or at the floor? Be honest!"

Yvond looked more patient than a patient in a dentist's chair.

"When I pause," Yvond said, "it's just because I'm thinking. When I lower my head, it's just a thought coming."

It wouldn't do.

"You have to think of each interview as the sale of records," Mr. Ellerbee said. "Let's say 300 units. This interview could be a platinum record for you."

Yvond nodded. He may come from a highly spiritual culture, but he also understands record sales. After a few more harangues from Mr. Ellerbee, it was time for him to go off and meet some real press.

"I don't want to hear from anybody after your interviews today that you're shy," Mr. Ellerbee told the singer. "Look them dead in the eye and sell it like you've never sold it before."

Yvond, who believes that his music comes from the spirit within and that his work is just a part of "the Father's wish," smiled.

"All right," Yvond said, as he walked out of the office. "One love."

"One love," Mr. Ellerbee replied.

Nothing is new under the show business sun. Several decades after Louis B. Mayer was having his stable of stars clothed and groomed to reflect the good life as he saw it, Berry Gordy set up a finishing school at his Motown Records. Then, under the direction of Maxine Powell, Marvin Gaye improved his walk and learned to keep his eyes open when he sang. The Supremes, three young women from a Detroit housing project, learned to shimmy in a nonvulgar way and to look happy, not pained, when they sang.

Mr. Gordy's goal was to make his stable of artists acceptable to white, middle-class America. Although Mr. Ellerbee believes every artist should be able to dine with the Queen of England and the chief executive of Sony, not to mention Barbara Walters, his etiquette training is often about harm reduction, rather than fine-tuning.

"Angelo takes the element of surprise away," said Mary Moore, the publicity director for black music at RCA records, a frequent client of Double XXposure. Surprise, she said, is the behavior that new artists exhibit that sometimes offends execu-

tives, listeners and journalists.

A couple of years ago, for example, Shabba Ranks, a Grammy Award-winning reggae star, stated on network television that if God had wanted homosexuality, he would have created Adam and Steve. Mr. Ellerbee was contacted by Epic/Sony Records to work with Mr. Ranks right after that.

Ms. Moore knows the dangers of becoming too smooth and slick in a field in which being bad or even a criminal isn't necessarily bad for record sales. "There's nothing wrong with a rapper being real," she said, "as long as they're not awful."

Having been out on promotional tours with newly signed rap groups, Ms. Moore has seen awful. She's seen singers in restaurants reject fancy meals and show up at private parties with large groups of rude friends she couldn't accommodate. She's seen rappers throw fits in hushed hotel lobbies when their rooms weren't ready. She's seen young artists tell morning radio hosts that it's too early to be doing an interview, then take CD's from the bins on the way out of the station. She's seen them do all kinds of things to sabotage their careers long before they're successful enough to be calling all the shots.

"I usually just tell them that they could use some work," said Ms. Moore, whose company, RCA, signed Elvis Presley in the mid-1950's.

"Elvis was the original behavior problem at RCA," she said.

Mr. Ellerbee takes credit for masterminding the image make-over of Patra, the Jamaican "ragamuffin" reggae singer, who went to him in ripped jeans and departed with a penchant for Todd Oldham and Dolce & Gabbana. Mr. Ellerbee's time last summer with Mary J. Blige, the rhythm-and-blues singer who has two platinum albums and a terrible reputation for rudeness, ended more disconcertingly.

Ms. Blige left Mr. Ellerbee's 14-week course in the fall with only seven classes to go. Not long after

that, the singer was captured at her worst in a profile for interview magazine by Veronica Webb, the supermodel. In the article, Ms. Webb described how Ms. Blige smoked pot, opened a Heinekken bottle with her teeth and tried to pick a fist fight with her.

"That interview bothered me," Mr. Ellerbee recalled. "Does the public need to know that Mary opened a beer bottle with her teeth?" he asked, adding that the singer should have canceled the interview if she was having a bad day. "Mary J. Blige doesn't need a bodyguard at her side night and day. She needs a publicist."

AT about noon, another singer whose background and demeanor are about as different from Ms. Blige's as rap is to easy-listening music appeared in the carefully lit downtown offices of Double XXposure.

It was Rhonda Ross, an unsigned jazz singer and songwriter who also happens to be the daughter of Diana Ross and Berry Gordy. This day's session was an image consultation. Mr. Ellerbee loaded her into a hired sedan to go shopping.

"I do not shopping," said Ms. Ross, 24, a petite Brown University graduate who prefers bookstores and having clothes made for her by a designer friend. "But I like looking good." And she was, wearing a black ensemble of knee-length boots, miniskirt, her father's coat and a turban-like hat that belongs to her mother.

On the fifth floor of Saks Fifth Avenue, Ms. Ross and Mr. Ellerbee jolined up with his creative director and an assistant. Like a little bird, Ms. Ross flitted from one item to another. Nothing appealed to her on

the fifth floor, so the designer clothing floor, where prices were as high as Ms. Ross aspired.

She tried on some of that Mr. Ellerbee cocooned her in. A shambing silk blouse, a black dress, a black dress, a black dress.

Because she's engaged, she looked over her shoulder.

"Everyone says I'm a princess," she said, looking like a queen. "I want to look like a queen, not like a queen."

Mr. Ellerbee, who is looking with Laura Branigan, looked a little bit like a princess. He recommended "It's very nice," a polka. "But it's not having something new like a crown."

Back in the car, he purchased nothing, said herself. "Another hat, a pair of shoes, a pair of shoes, a pair of shoes."

Mr. Ellerbee laugh found himself on a street with recently wealthy, post-adolescents who what they want or what they are, and seemed fit for the taste and in Ross.

"Rhonda," he said after saying goodbyes to her.

Then he let out a little turned his attention back about all his clients would or in this case, world of the real.