

Everybody Loves Tichina

Drawing on experiences from her own childhood, Tichina Arnold plays a ghetto snob perfectly

As the brash and protective matriarch on UPN's critically acclaimed *Everybody Hates Chris*, Tichina Arnold is poised to follow Esther Rolle as a new generation's favorite mom in the 'hood. The funny thing is, Arnold, who made a name for herself as the set-'em-straight Pamela James on *Martin*, almost missed out on this opportunity. "I had a Jerry Bruckheimer TV project I was auditioning for. That's the role I really wanted," says Arnold. But the 36-year-old actress became excited about *Everybody* when she was greeted at her audition by executive producer Chris Rock himself. "I found out later he had already made up his mind to use me for the part," she says.

Indeed, the casting couldn't have been more perfect. Arnold, who grew up in Jamaica, New York, the daughter of a police officer father and a mother who worked for the city's department of sanitation, says every week she sees something in the script she can relate to. "My life was very much like Chris's," says Arnold. "My parents made just enough for me not to get free lunch. By the time I got to junior high, I was taking three trains and a bus to get to school because my mother thought I'd get a better education outside our neighborhood."

While some of the show's appeal is due to its depiction of a strong traditional Black family, in real life Arnold's a single mother of a 2-year-old girl, Alijah Kai, with no plans to get wed anytime soon. "I never expected to be a baby mama," says Arnold. "But I had a husband for two years and was in a relationship with my baby's father for another two and a half years. Now I have no desire to get married again because I know when things get difficult, I'll always pick my career over a relationship."

And for now, Arnold's career is giving her a lot of satisfaction. "*Everybody* proved that if you put money behind a Black show, it will work," she says. "I'm hoping we'll set a precedent. I don't mind making history." □

—SHERRI MCGEE MCCOY