



# SCENT OF A CITY

By Amy Fallon

**Growing up in Bayelsa State, in the heart of the Niger River Delta on Nigeria's southern coast, Belinda Brown remembers her mother smothering herself in Stella Pomade, a jasmine and vanilla body cream. "It makes you feel like you are wearing a ball gown - every woman should feel like that," she says of the memorable scent.**

**S**ince there were no independent perfumeries in Nigeria in the '60s and '70s, her Ghanaian mum bought the fragrance from the market. At that time perfume was so scarce in Nigeria that when the girls at Belinda's school discovered her special scent, they became desperate to be her friend. "It was very luxurious. To own a whole pot of Stella Pomade was very rare," recalls Belinda, who was 11 at the time. "I remember covering myself from head to toe with the cream, but of course this was in Nigeria, so all the dust stuck to me!"

It was forty years later, a friend introduced Belinda - now married and living in the UK - to leading perfumier, Roja Dove and the invigorating jasmine and vanilla fumes of Belinda's past came floating back. Although she had always dreamt of designing her own fragrance, it wasn't until Belinda met Roja in late 2009 that she realised her long-time ambition could become a reality - "He was the only person I believed in that could realise the level of excellence I dreamed of."

Creating a fragrance for someone who is not a celebrity was an unusual request, but Belinda commissioned

Roja, known as "the world's most famous nose", to create her own bespoke perfume. It was a long journey, both physically and emotionally. In 2010 Belinda even made a trip back to Nigeria to find a pot of Stella Pomade after Roja said he would love to see the source of her inspiration.

Roja wanted to avoid bias against certain scents and to enable his clients to fully feel and experience them. Initially, Roja insists they smell the scents and flower oils before he reveals the names. Similarly, he won't reveal the identity, potency, quality or cost of an ingredient until the end of the process. Belinda's knowledge of price can influence her choice. "Roja showed me many oils that conjured up my old memories, some of which I had almost forgotten. It was a wonderful process and such an amazing and alluring experience."

The end result of Roja's collaboration with Belinda is Blessings - a "rich, feminine blend of jasmine (Stella Pomade is made of jasmine from Grasse - the rarest kind in the world.), rose and ylang-ylang on a soft bed of vanilla and rare orris, where gentle sandalwood reigns."

"It is a scent which is sensual and instills a feeling of tranquillity," Belinda enthuses, "When I first smelled Blessings, I fell in love with it and I knew that it would not be fair to keep it all to myself. I had to share it."

As a result, 30 limited edition copies were created and Blessings began selling exclusively by the Roja Dove Haute Parfumerie at the upmarket department store Harrods last September. "It's magical (seeing it on the shelves)," says Belinda. "It is like watching a child being born and then growing up. It exceeded my wildest dreams."

Not content with sharing her scent with only 30 other people, Belinda is currently searching for stockists in Africa so that she may one day bring Blessings to her homeland. She already has two customers for when Blessings does hit African shelves - her mother and her old friend, the First Lady of Nigeria, Turai Yar'Adua. "They've said, 'Well done' and are happy to see my dream has become a reality," says Belinda.

Blessings is exclusive to Roja Dove Haute Parfumerie, 5th Floor, Harrods +44 (0)207 893 8797 100ml retails for £75. Blessings Eau de Parfum will be released in the UK by Easter.