

# BILLIARD VMSSOA

Norfolk, VA | \$7.57

September 2024

## Virginia's Educators: The Real MVPs

Where inspiration meets hustle—these educators are flipping the script and elevating the game in and out of the classroom.

## DEJA UNIQUE

### THE ART OF BREAKING THROUGH

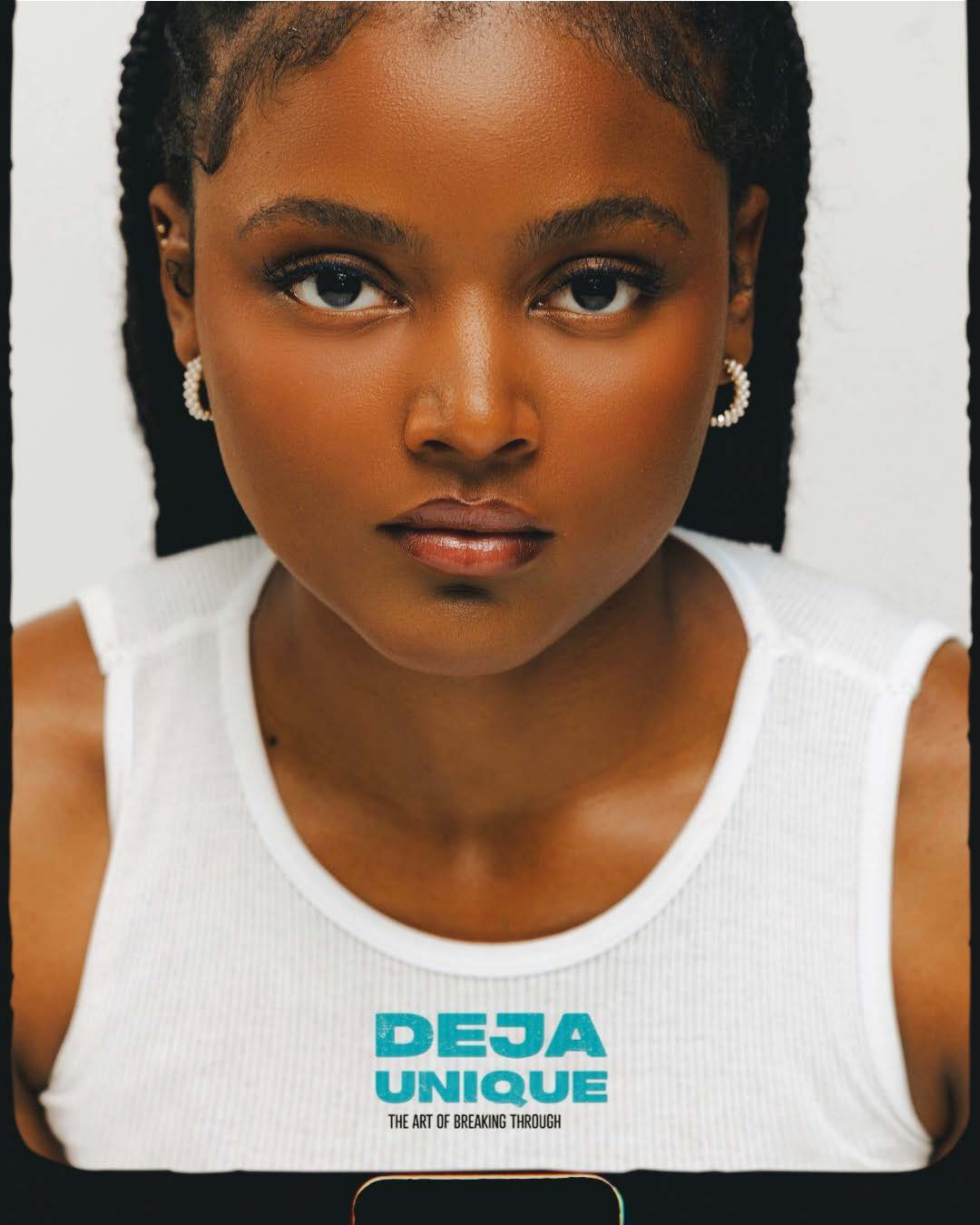
Actress, artist, and all-around creative making moves from the heart of VA to the big stage

### THE BILLIARDS CANVAS: WHAT'S TEA?!

Shining a light on the squad making waves in the art scene and beyond—one masterpiece at a time.







**DEJA  
UNIQUE**

THE ART OF BREAKING THROUGH



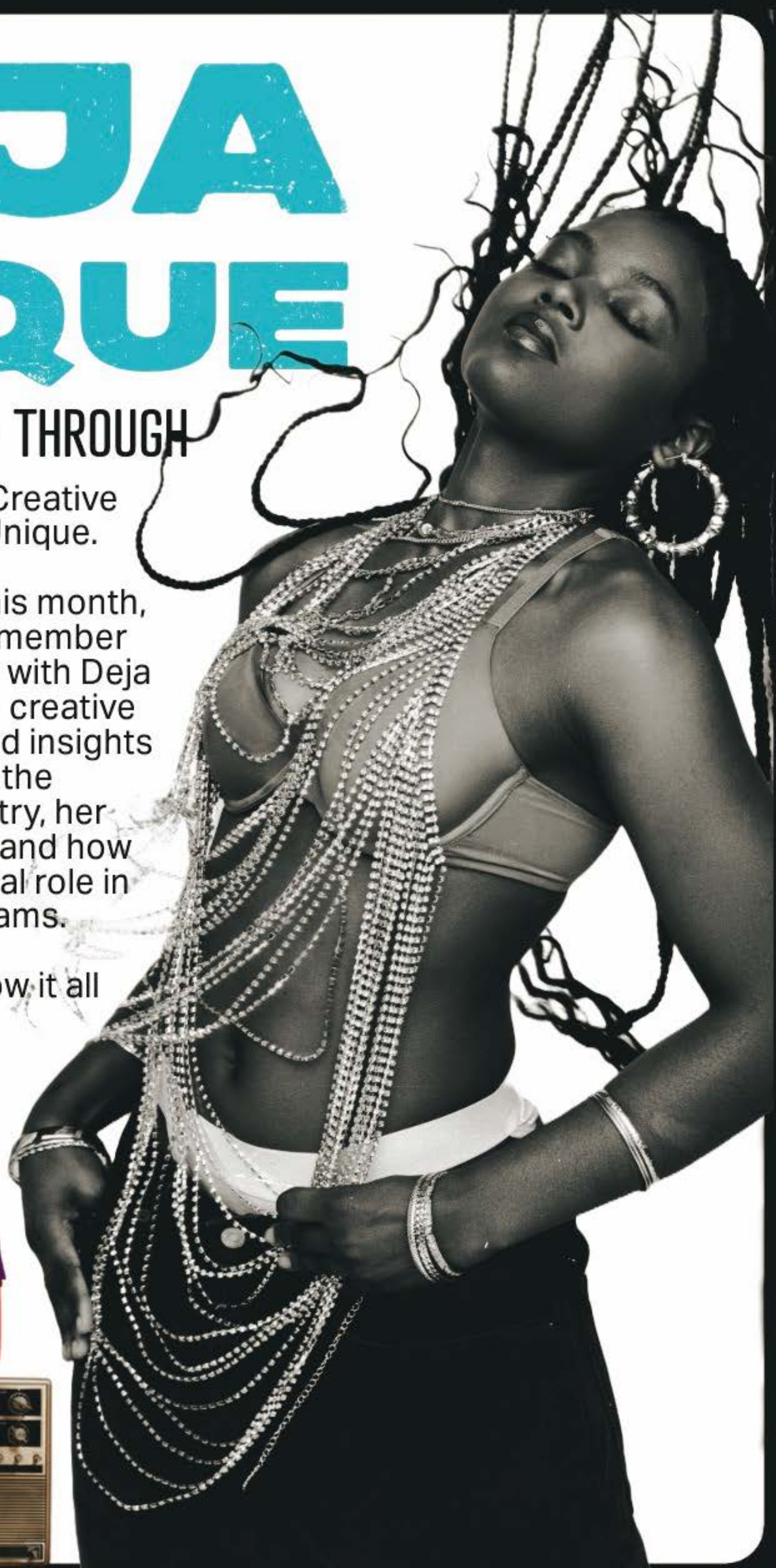
# DEJA UNIQUE

## THE ART OF BREAKING THROUGH

Meet Virginia's Own Creative  
Powerhouse: Deja Unique.

The name says it all! This month, Billiards Canvas CCA member Vania Alonnie sat down with Deja Unique, a multifaceted creative and actress. Deja shared insights on her journey in the entertainment industry, her unique place within it, and how Virginia played a pivotal role in launching her dreams.

Scroll left to read how it all unfolded!





Deja Unique, a talented actress and creative, credits her Virginia roots for shaping her career. In a recent conversation with Billiards Canvas CCA member Vania Alonnie, Deja shared how her journey in the industry began and the role her home state played in her rise. Here's what she had to say.

# DEJA UNIQUE

## THE ART OF BREAKING THROUGH

**VANIA:** Billiards VM SOA is back in full swing after a very long hiatus, and we're showing love to some of Virginia's and the DMV's dopest artists. Here today to kick it all off is the 757's very own, Deja Unique! Welcome!

**DEJA:** Thank you so much for having me!

**VANIA:** Okay, Deja, tell us a bit about yourself. Where are you from?

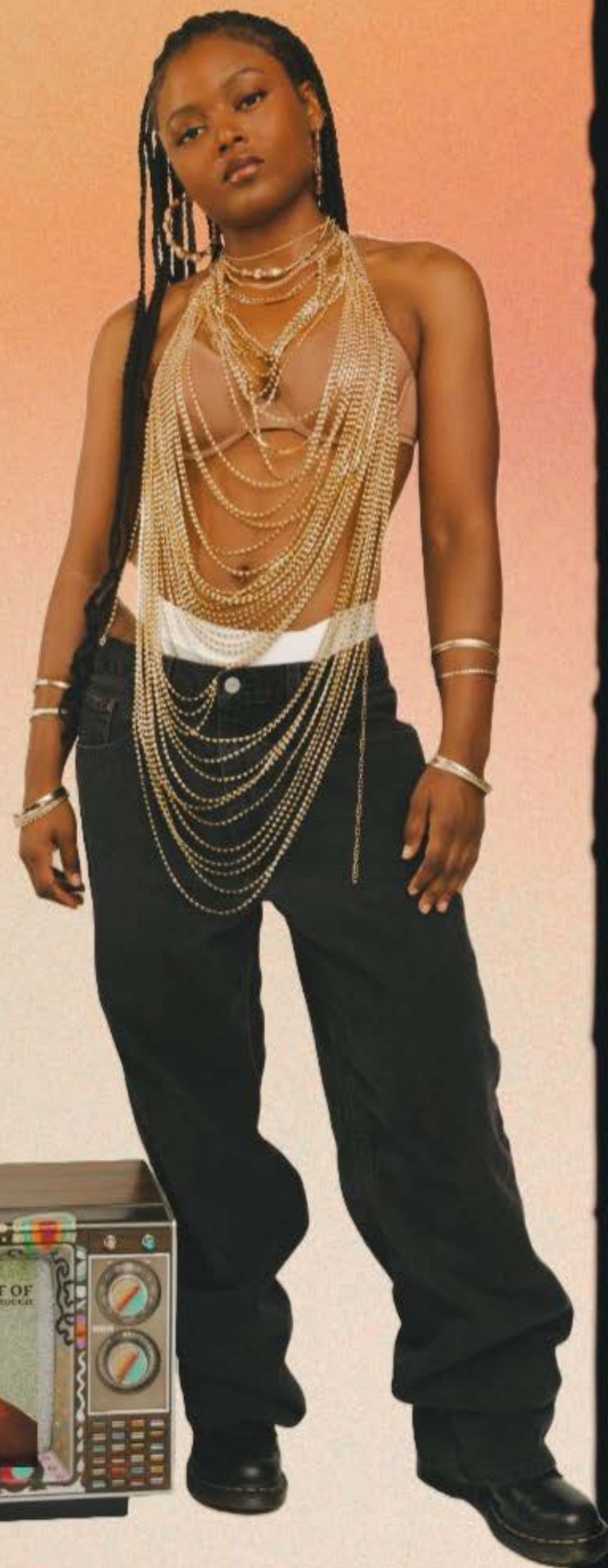
**DEJA:** Well, I was born and raised in Norfolk, Virginia. I'm an artist of multiple mediums—I paint, direct, write, and, of course, I'm an actress.

**VANIA:** Okay, we have a fellow Norfolk baddie! I'm also from Norfolk. What do you think about your Virginia upbringing that influences you to gravitate toward certain projects, if at all?

**DEJA:** Yeah, I think just being around the melting pot of people here in Virginia. I feel like we're very grounded here—raw and authentic. And I think that influences the shows I want to watch, which in turn influences the shows I want to be a part of.

**VANIA:** That's dope! So, what about growing up in VA do you feel like was a plus?

**DEJA:** All the different vibes we have here. You can go 15 minutes from Norfolk and be at the beach, laid out in the sun, or you can go downtown and catch a cool vibe there. We've got mountains, snow—it's like everything you want is here.





**VANIA:** Very niche question, but very 757-coded. What beach are you talking about? Ocean View? Oceanfront? Chicks Beach? Virginia Beach?

**DEJA:** Virginia Beach—the Oceanfront.

**VANIA:** Yes, that gives \*outside\*. I don't know about laid out there, though! That gives outside, shaking tail! Okay, now, this next question is super cliché, but I gotta ask: What is the ultimate dream? What's the goal?

**DEJA:** The ultimate dream for me is to be able to pull people from where I once was and bring them to the forefront, you know, so they can tell their stories. I feel like I come from a family full of artists, and I just want to put them in positions—wardrobe departments, behind producers' desks, acting in front of the camera. I want to reach out and bring people up.

**VANIA:** I love that! Now, taking us back a bit—you actually have history with **BILLIARDS**, which is where I remember you from. We were part of a 9-week workshop for a TV series in development. I remember you had so many hilarious moments! You were so good. Can you walk us through what that experience was like for you?

**DEJA:** That was so much fun! Just being able to get those scripts the day of really informed me because that was before I did any episodes of TV or wrote my first play. It taught me so much—being on set, getting scripts day by day, and just trusting the process.





# DEJA UNIQUE

## THE ART OF BREAKING THROUGH

**VANIA:** Fast forward about a year later, in 2023, you were part of a workshop at Zeiders American Dream Theater in Virginia Beach for **BILLIARDS: The Play**. Could you tell us more about what that was like?

**DEJA:** That was my first time doing a live read for a group of people. It was a lot of fun—preparing that week before, diving into the script. I learned so much about writing, analyzing scripts, and how changes happen throughout the process.

**VANIA:** Wait—you said live read. Can you specify what you mean by that?

**DEJA:** It's when you have the script in front of you, not completely memorized, but reading with all the characters beside you and being in the world, but not fully immersed.

**VANIA:** Wow, okay. So, you stay booked and busy. What keeps you grounded through it all, especially now that you're fully submerged in the industry?

**DEJA:** I would definitely say God. This industry—nothing is certain. One day you're at your highest high, and the next week, you're at your lowest low. Trusting in God teaches me not to focus on the industry because it will drive you crazy. I focus on Him, knowing that what's for me is for me.

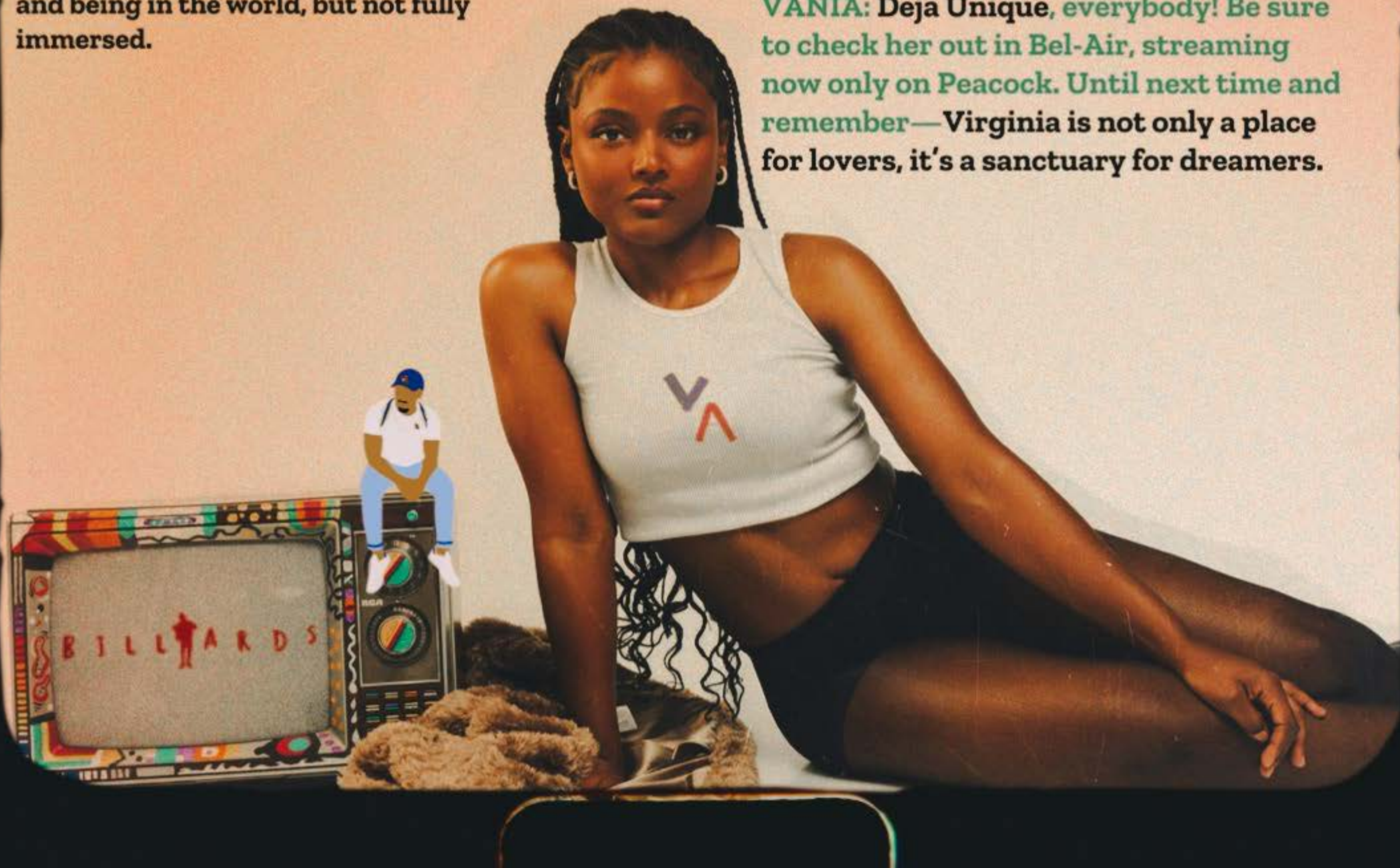
**VANIA:** Amen to that! Last question, because I'm nosy—will you be at *Something In The Water* this year?

**DEJA:** I plan on it!

**VANIA:** Okay, we'll see you there! Well, this was fun. You always have a home with us, and we wish you nothing but success in your long and beautiful career. Thank you for making time for us today!

**DEJA:** Thank you so much for having me!

**VANIA:** *Deja Unique, everybody!* Be sure to check her out in *Bel-Air*, streaming now only on Peacock. Until next time and remember—Virginia is not only a place for lovers, it's a sanctuary for dreamers.





# VIRGINIA'S EDUCATORS:

## THE REAL MVPS



BILLARDS





# PORTER TAYLOR

**Third Grade Lead Teacher  
Arthur Ashe Jr. Elementary School  
Henrico County, VA**

I didn't get my first Black teacher until I was in the 8th grade. I went to a predominantly white primary and intermediate school. It was hard getting close to a teacher that didn't understand me. My goal in education is to be that for a child—someone they feel they can talk to and who will listen to them. Someone who understands them for who they are and will work with them no matter what.”

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**This year Mrs. Taylor is looking forward to her new leadership roles and opportunities, with the aim of giving her students the best version of herself. She is excited to see the tremendous growth her ambitious group of students will achieve in the coming months.**







# DIAMOND BROUGHTON

**Lindsay Middle School  
Hampton, VA**

"Knowing that I have a direct influence on the next generation fulfills me the most. Teaching also allows me to be a lifelong learner. When you aren't enrolled in school, sometimes it can be hard to remember to continuously grow your mind. Being an educator allows me to elevate my mindset every day."

**This school year, Diamond is most excited about using the power of music to build her students' reading and writing skills. Her goal is to help students master rhyme schemes, figurative language, letter sounds, and more by incorporating songs from both today and yesterday.**





**A BIG THANK YOU TO OUR**



**VIRGINIA  
EDUCATORS:**

**THE REAL MVPS**







**THE BILLIARDS  
CANVAS**

*WHAT'S TEA?!*



# THE BILLIARDS CANVAS

WHAT'S TEA?!



The Billiards Canvas Creative Change Advocates have been splashing color across the map all summer, from LA to NY, the Berkshires, and VA. This crew is blending bold strokes of talent with a vision for change, leaving their mark in every city they touch. Dive into the vibrant journeys of these artists as they paint the future of the scene, one masterpiece at a time.



# QUAN & JON

## BILLIARDS CO-FOUNDERS

Co-founder JaQuan brought his talents to LA this summer for the Sony Pictures Television Actors Showcase, where he was one of just 10 actors selected from over 4,500 applicants. It was a transformative experience full of growth, connection, and pure joy. Co-founder Jon was right there to celebrate the magic at the live screening on the Sony lot. Both are fired up to bring these new insights back to THE BILLIARDS CANVAS as we push the boundaries of what's possible.

## THE BILLIARDS CANVAS

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# VANIA

A&R SOUTHEAST REGION, HOST OF THE BILLIARDS MAGAZINE  
A huge shoutout to Vania for taking charge of the Billiards Magazine relaunch this fall! From discovering new talent to hosting our first-ever Billiards Magazine Interview Series, Vania has been a driving force behind the scenes. Her dedication has earned her the new role of A&R for both Billiards Music and Billiards Magazine in the Southeast, and she'll continue as the host for the magazine. Get ready for more game-changing content under her leadership!

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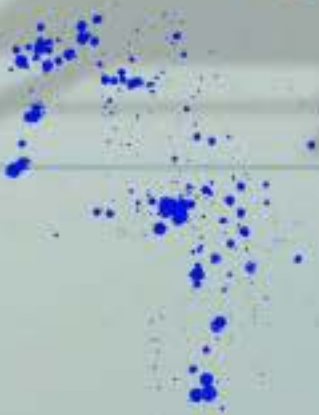
# TIA

CREATIVE CHANGE ADVOCATE

Big congrats to Tia for continuing to secure funding for The Billiards Canvas! On top of that, she's stepping into the role of Assistant Stage Manager at Virginia Stage Company (VSC) this season. VSC is known for bringing dynamic, community-driven stories to life, and we know Tia will bring her own magic to their stage. Keep an eye on her—big things are happening!

## THE BILLIARDS CANVAS

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# NAIRE

CREATIVE CHANGE ADVOCATE

Shoutout to Naire for wrapping up a stellar run in *The Comedy of Errors* at Shakespeare & Company in the Berkshires! Performing in this scenic, artist-friendly paradise is a dream, and Naire brought that beauty to the stage. We can't wait to see where this journey takes them next!

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# RAYNA

CREATIVE CHANGE ADVOCATE

Huge congratulations to Rayna for opening her latest show at a prestigious Black theatre in New York City! We're so proud to know that she's commanding the stage with a powerful performance in an incredibly important work. And, of course, she's celebrating her birthday all month long—Virgo style! Happy Birthday Rayna!

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