

Nigeria is renowned for its literary greats but in recent times, younger writers such as Chibundu Onuzo, Chika Unigwe, Noo Saro-Wiwa and Taiye Selasi are also increasingly becoming household names. Belinda Otas tells us more.

Keepers of the literary flame



Chibundo Onuzo is the youngest writer ever signed to the Faber and Faber publishing stable, at just 19. Her debut novel, *The Spider King's Daughter*, which she started

writing aged 17, is a coming of age love tale between two young people across the class divide of Lagos, Nigeria. When Abike, the favourite child of a wealthy man takes unusual interest in a hawker who lives in a Lagos slum, a love connection develops that transcends social status. But secrets start to unravel which threaten to destroy this seemingly innocent bond. With a two-book deal, there is more to come from this young talent.



Chika Ungiwe's critically acclaimed 2009 debut, *On Black Sisters' Street*, took us into the seedy world of Antwerp's red-light district in Belgium as

she introduced us to her Nigerian characters and exposed a world far away from the glossy Europe some of us know. Unigwe returns with *Night Dancer*. Set in contemporary Nigeria,

where modernity and tradition clash, it is the story of Mma, a 25-year-old woman, who has recently lost her mother, Ezi. Ezi was a wealthy woman in a society where marriage is the only route to respectability, yet she chose the single life.

Unigwe takes the reader on a powerful journey about the relationship between mothers and daughters, the bonds of family, knowing when to fulfil your duty and when you must be brave enough not to. She presents a vista of Nigeria over the past half-century; a vibrant, heartfelt exploration of one woman's search to belong.



Noo Saro-Wiwa is no stranger to the literary world; her father, the late activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, was widely respected for his body of work.

Noo was born in Nigeria and raised in England. It was a tradition to return to Nigeria for the summer holidays, a tradition she didn't particular like. When her father was executed in 1995 by the brutal military regime of Sani Abacha, her trips home came to an end. For 10 years, she did not set foot in Nigeria, but in 2008 she decided it was time to reacquaint herself with the

motherland. Saro-Wiwa went back as a travel writer was intrigued by what she found, which she documents in her book, *Looking for Transwonderland: Travels in Nigeria*. It is an engaging and humorous observation of all that she experienced, from the maddening bus drivers to the complexities of what it means to live in Nigeria and survive. *Looking for Transwonderland* reads like Saro-Wiwa never left.



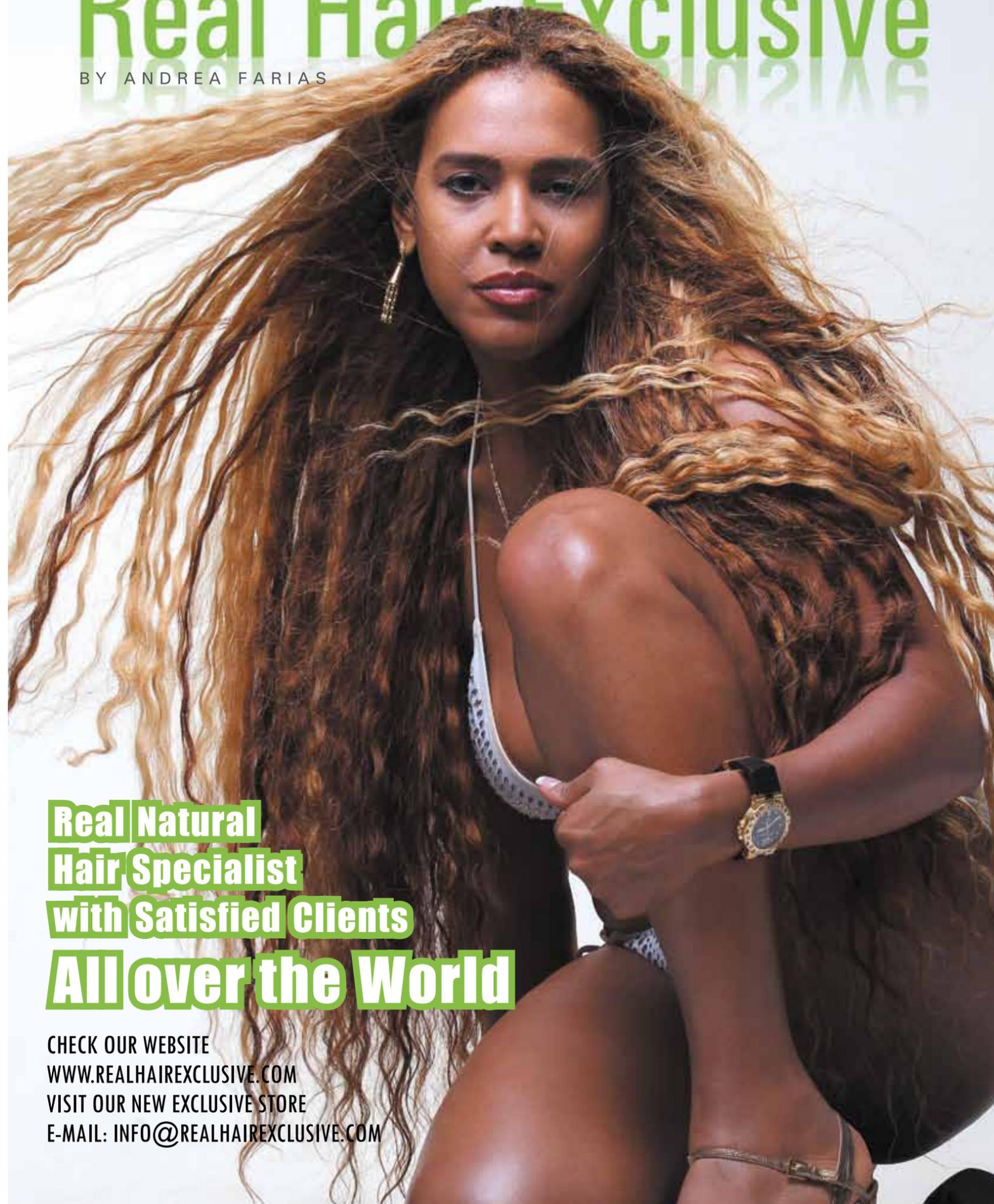
Taiye Selasi's debut short story in *Granta's* 2011 F-Word edition, *The Sex Lives of African Girls*, was described by *Time Out*, London, as "prose that glitters with

beautiful, splintered poetry". Selasi can count American Nobel laureate, Toni Morrison as a mentor and Salman Rushdie speaks highly of her. Her debut novel, *Ghana Must Go*, due out in the winter of 2013, tells the story of a West African family whose members spread out across the US, England and West Africa. Selasi, of dual Nigerian and Ghanaian heritage, says the book charts the 'Afropolitan' experience. A term used to describe a new generation of young Africans with dual African and western heritage, and proudly accept that they belong to both worlds. ■

PHOTOGRAPHS: CHIBUNDO ONUZO BY JOHNNY RING; CHIKA UNGIWE BY STEEN HANSEN; TAIYE SELASI BY NANCY CRAMPTON

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