album's hit single 'Jollof on the Jet' (jollof being a Nigerian rice dish). It also features a major Nigerian rap star, Rema, as well as Tanzania's next big thing, Rayvanny. As with all subjects, Cuppy is bracingly frank about both her abilities as a performer and her savvy decision to hop aboard the unstoppable Afrobeats train with her choice of collaborators.

"Just because I play music doesn't mean I'm good at making it," she admits. "But even though I may not have a great voice, I have a good ear." Cuppy has a masters degree in music business from NYU. Given the family's business background, do all the Otedolas believe music represents a sound investment? "My parents were excited but they were also concerned," she says, with fresh hesitance in her voice. "They wanted me to find my calling but they also wanted to make sure that I had some sort of steady income. And it's all about excelling in whatever you do. I even remember my mum famously saying, 'If you want to be a pole dancer then just make sure you're the best pole dancer.'"

Talk of the Otedola clan and, by implication, the African media's fixation with them brings us to the elephant lurking in the gilded penthouse suite of Cuppy's career. Because of her father's fortune, and her own inescapable internet profile, Cuppy's music is sometimes seen as secondary to her sheer, luminous internet star power.

"IT'S IMPORTANT TO MAKE SURE THAT MY PEOPLE ARE REPRESENTED. SOMEONE'S GOT TO DO IT"

"They call us the Kardashians of Nigeria," she tells me, with barely concealed pride, of younger sister Temi, elder sister Tolani and younger brother Fewa. Anyone this famous is sure to have detractors, and Cuppy has a simple message for hers: "I have a right to express myself." Plus, she is determined to use her influence for good, most significantly through her own Cuppy Foundation. The organisation was set up to protect and provide education for vulnerable children in her home country. It also supported Nigerian regions with hand-washing and other resources during the pandemic. "Because of the opportunities I was given I just feel it's important to create opportunities for others," she says.

Then there's her decision to return to fly-on-the-wall TV in a new documentary, *Highlife*, aired on Channel 4 as part of 'Black to Front' – a series of shows pushing Black creators to the fore. "This show is much deeper [than *Lagos to London*] and I have a voice," she explains, of putting her trust in a television programme again. "It's always a risk, but it's one I'm willing to take because it's important to make sure that my people are represented. And, you know, I hate to say it, but someone's got to do it. I'm doing this for more opportunities to come for Black women, especially in the UK."

If that wasn't enough, she's also just launched a jewellery brand, Cuppy Cuts, and there's the small aside of her enrolling at the University of Oxford to study politics and African studies. "My music is going to change direction because of this move. It's not just African music – it's African music for the world."

As our time comes to an end and another engagement beckons, Cuppy's desire to change global perceptions of young African women is palpable. To underestimate her intellect, entrepreneurial spirit or unblinking drive would, you feel, be a mistake. "I'm working so hard so that young girls in Nigeria can look at me and know that they can have it all. You don't have to be uneducated to be an artist, and you can be a scholar and still make your own music. You don't have to follow the crowd.

"The world is now recognising our scene, our race, our music," she adds. "I wouldn't switch who I am. I feel like I can save the world and still party at the same time."

Listen to Cuppy's Original Copy and The List with Cuppy – exclusive to Vera

Cuppy recommends...

THREE NIGERIAN MUSICIANS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Nissi
Burna Boy's little sister, Nissi blends Afrobeats with dance music, drawing on her experiences of life between Nigeria and London.

Ayra Starr
After working with Don Jazzy – the force behind Nigeria's influential Mavin record label – Ayra's debut LP *19 & Dangerous* put her on the map.

DJ Frizzie
A DJ Frizzie set sees her blend dancehall and pop, house and Afrobeats. She also has an MSc in environmental science.



STYLIST: ZOE KOZLIK **PROP STYLIST:** PROPPED UP **HAIR:** THE SNOBB STYLIST **MAKE-UP:** MAHNNA MAKEUP **ADDITIONAL PHOTOS:** JOLADSO WASIU ADEBAYO, XCLUSIVFILMS