

by ANJALI MEHTA

THE strikingly beautiful face of British model Tia 'Kinx' Ward will be familiar to anyone who has admired the cover of glossy Asian bridal magazines, attended one of the many high-profile desi fashion shows or watched a big music video in the past five years.

Apart from being one of the leading faces on the British-Asian modelling circuit, Tia has done big campaigns in India and for major western mainstream clients and has walked the ramp at high-profile international fashion shows.

The leggy London-based beauty describes her time in modelling as a journey and says she has been fortunate enough to meet a wonderful set of people who have become great friends.

"Although I've travelled the world and worked with some very influential people, it's a continuous learning curve. Like with anything you need to be vigilant and avoid being taken advantage of! But thus far I've had a blast," explains Tia.

Definitely a beauty with brains, the 24-year-old hasn't taken success for granted and speaks with the wisdom of someone who has been in the competitive modelling industry for a lot longer. She balances that out with good humour driven by a personality as attractive as her knock-out figure and sculpted face.

Some of the more memorable assignments that stand out for Tia was a show in Dubai where she had to wear millions of pounds worth of diamonds and the many Asiana bridal shows.

"Travelling to Barcelona with Oops Media was memorable for the wrong reasons. I got food poisoning and ended up in bed for the majority of the trip," she says, laughing.

In terms of the achievements she is most proud of, two stand out for Tia. "Walking in London Fashion Week was a huge achievement for me. I'm only 5'7" and by modelling standards that's quite short. So to be chosen was fabulous. The Seasons India campaign was also a huge achievement, as the billboards and calendars are in countries all over the East."

'Sexiness is very personal'

Like most models, Tia says that walking the ramp is a very different experience to striking poses. She describes the energy and anticipation backstage at a show as wonderful, but the show as frustrating because she can't experience it as a part of the audience. However, she says nothing beats seeing the final images from a shoot because a lot of work goes on behind the scenes and those images become a permanent document of the model's hard work.

Even though she has been modelling since the age of 13, has an impressive list of achievements and is hugely in demand, Tia still doesn't feel like she has made it and is studying business management, accounts and fashion at university.

"For me, modelling is a part-time job that I am still a bit of a beginner at. I have been blessed with being able to do while studying. It's been my stepping stone to financial independence while I was at high school and since I've been at uni. But it is a nice feeling to have girls up and down the country read the magazines and recognise you, ask for advice and offer kind words. I always respond to questions about how I got in to the industry and things like what foundation or make up I use."

Tia reckons the secret of striking a really good pose is practice and learning the various tricks of the trade.

"Honestly, you have to learn how your face works, what angles are the most flattering, what your 'best side' is. The same goes with your body – you learn how to pose to best display the clothes or jewellery you are selling. As a model you are a mannequin – you are employed to make sure the brand sells."

Although models are under pressure to look good all the time, Tia likes the normality that having a university life gives her. She agrees that everyone, including men, are under pressure to look good nowadays, but is adamant that being happy and a good person on the inside is more important.

"I think people forget that what you see in a magazine is airbrushed and tweaked. In reality if I don't have the time to do my eyebrows then they are left to get wild. With my schedule at university and the gym, sometimes jogging bottoms and whichever coat is hanging by the door is the only option."

Tia, who manages to look good in whatever she wears, revealed her beauty and fitness secrets.

"Always wash your make-up off before bed, cleanse, tone and moisturise as often as you can, drink plenty of water and get those eight hours of sleep regularly. As for fitness, I walk a lot and just recently started going to zumba. It's fun and that is the key to staying committed to exercise."

The curvy Tia doesn't agree with the size-zero culture and finds the super-skinny look scary and unattractive. Although she is aware that it is the fashion industry which has perpetrated the size-zero trend, she hopes more is done to promote a healthier lifestyle by the fashion industry.

"Fashion is one of the biggest influencers on body image. I understand from an industry perspective that this type of frame is seen to be the most appropriate for showcasing designer clothes but

unfortunately, young girls who are passionate about fashion then see that as an ideal, consequently putting pressure on them to be that size. It's unhealthy for nine-year-old girls or teenagers to aspire to that. But it doesn't look set to change any time soon."

So what does Tia think makes a woman sexy? "Effortlessness. The finer details are like signatures as such. It could be a perfume, a slick of red lipstick, a contagious laugh, a prolonged glance, the waves in her hair, a perfectly-lined eye, a top-knot. Sexiness is very personal. Anything can be sexy, apart from a person trying too hard."

The key piece of advice Tia would give aspiring models is to not let rejection affect them in any way. But she admits that it is a huge part of what is a fiercely competitive industry and that you need to be tough to succeed.

"You have to harden your shell, dust yourself off and head to the next casting. It's tough. Also, I would remind them that it is a very short-lived career. So perhaps try to have a fall-back plan and again, do not to get caught up in politics and gossip, or drugs and alcohol."

The best piece of advice that Tia herself received was from her grandfather.

"He always said you have one mouth and two ears – use them in that proportion. Another good piece of advice given to me is always follow your heart, but take your brain with you."

Tia will continue to balance high-profile modelling assignments with her studies. After that she is planning to branch out into make-up artistry and hasn't ruled out making the move to acting because she did drama before her modelling career took off. The natural beauty finishes off by revealing what her idea of happiness is.

"It's far too complex to put into a single sentence, but the basics are being surrounded by good people, trying to always put out positive energy and bettering yourself constantly, travelling and experiencing different cultures. Always pushing my limits and striving for excellence. Pursuing my passions and ultimately finding true love, settling down and starting a family."

Log onto www.rpman.co.uk to find out more about Tia 'Kinx' Ward.

TIA'S FIVE FAVOURITE FASHION ACCESSORIES:

- I have a complete obsession with sunglasses, so a vintage, handmade statement pair is a must. I'm thinking YSL, circa 1980s.
- A classic watch, one that matches your mood that day. My favourite is a black and gold Michael Kors with quite a large face.
- A Supreme Beanie. I love this brand, it is the epitome of skater chic. They come in all kinds of awesome colour ways and are a quirky way to add interest to daywear.
- The black leather YSL Cabas Chyc bag is so timeless, and can take an otherwise casual ensemble into the realms of fabulousity. Definitely on my wish list this year.
- A bad-ass pair of shoes can really take your outfit up a few notches. My favourites right now are a coral suede sky-scraper wedge from Kurt Geiger called 'grass'.

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Friends with benefits

FRIENDS with benefits is a term coined by our generation (and also Hollywood) for two people whose friendship also includes having sex just to satisfy their physical needs, without any expectations of monogamy. But when someone recently said to me that the friends with benefits situation doesn't really happen in the Asian community, I thought, really? Maybe it is just the people I know but I have come across many a couple in such a relationship. This scenario is more common within the community than you might think.

So it works like this – the two people involved are most likely single, have just come out of a serious relationship, don't have time for a long-term partner because of career or other commitments, aren't ready to settle down or just don't want to be tied to one person. But they still have physical needs and they end up having an arrangement with someone whom they have sex with on a regular basis to satisfy their physical need and for a little closeness.

The pros to such an arrangement are that they can, erm, get intimate with no explanation and won't feel guilty or 'cheap'. A lot of the times the two people in the 'arrangement' know each other well enough to share personal details of their respective lives. For example, they might both be coming out of a relationship and could be feeling hurt, then that feeling of sharing hugs and kisses culminates in sex. It feels nice, they want to do it more, but neither wants to commit to anything. And sometimes, they could be involved in a friends with benefits situation and decide to give a full-on relationship a go.

Of course, there are cons to such a union. For example, two friends could hook up, the guy might develop feelings and tell the girl, but if the girl doesn't feel the same then the friendship may be lost. Even though there are no expectations from the outset, there is a risk of dependency and again someone may get hurt when the other eventually does find someone other than the benefits buddy they want a relationship with.

I'm not saying having a friend to turn to in your time of need is right or wrong, but all I will advise is be careful. It is easy to go into such an involvement with the romantic notion of 'we will eventually fall in love'. It has happened, yes, and what better than seeing someone at their worst and then that turning into love? But try not letting emotions get involved if you are in such a situation.

It's easy for you and your best male friend who you have always kinda fancied to say, 'yeah, let's get it on but not be boyfriend-girlfriend' but when you see yourself falling in love and he doesn't give you the sign, take a step back. We all have physical needs, but it's not fair on your emotions to let yourself get carried away and then be hurt.

But what I will say is if you do find yourself falling in love, then tell the other person because if you don't, you won't know how they feel. We don't want to give up the opportunity to find love now, do we?

A QUICK Q&A WITH TIA 'KINX' WARD

What is the biggest lesson the industry has taught you?

That there are a lot of sharks out there and you have to have your wits about you at all times. Gossip and politics are unfortunately rife, but if you just go in, do your job well and get out, you'll be fine.

Do you remember your first photo shoot?

Yes, I was 13 and it was for an agency called Kids London. It was head shots and full-length shots for my Z Card in order to be put on their website

and on their books. But the first proper shoot I did was for *Asian Woman* a few weeks after that.

How do you feel about being the face of British-Asian modelling in the last five years?

If I have made a mark on the industry that can only be a good thing. I only ever want to be a positive role model for young females, regardless of race or geographic location.

Are guys intimidated by you?

I don't think I come across as intimidating. I know what I want and I'm not afraid to work towards

those goals. But I can't answer for anyone else. I'll have to ask some of my male friends.

What features would you change about yourself?

(Laughs) My ears. I have weird ears. And my kneecaps. Yeah.

Who are some of your favourite fashion designers?

Alexander Wang, Balmain, Helmut Lang, YSL, Christopher Kane, Haidar Ackermann to name a few. As for the Asian industry, Ekta Solanki is by far my favourite and Ziggi Studios is a brilliant menswear brand.