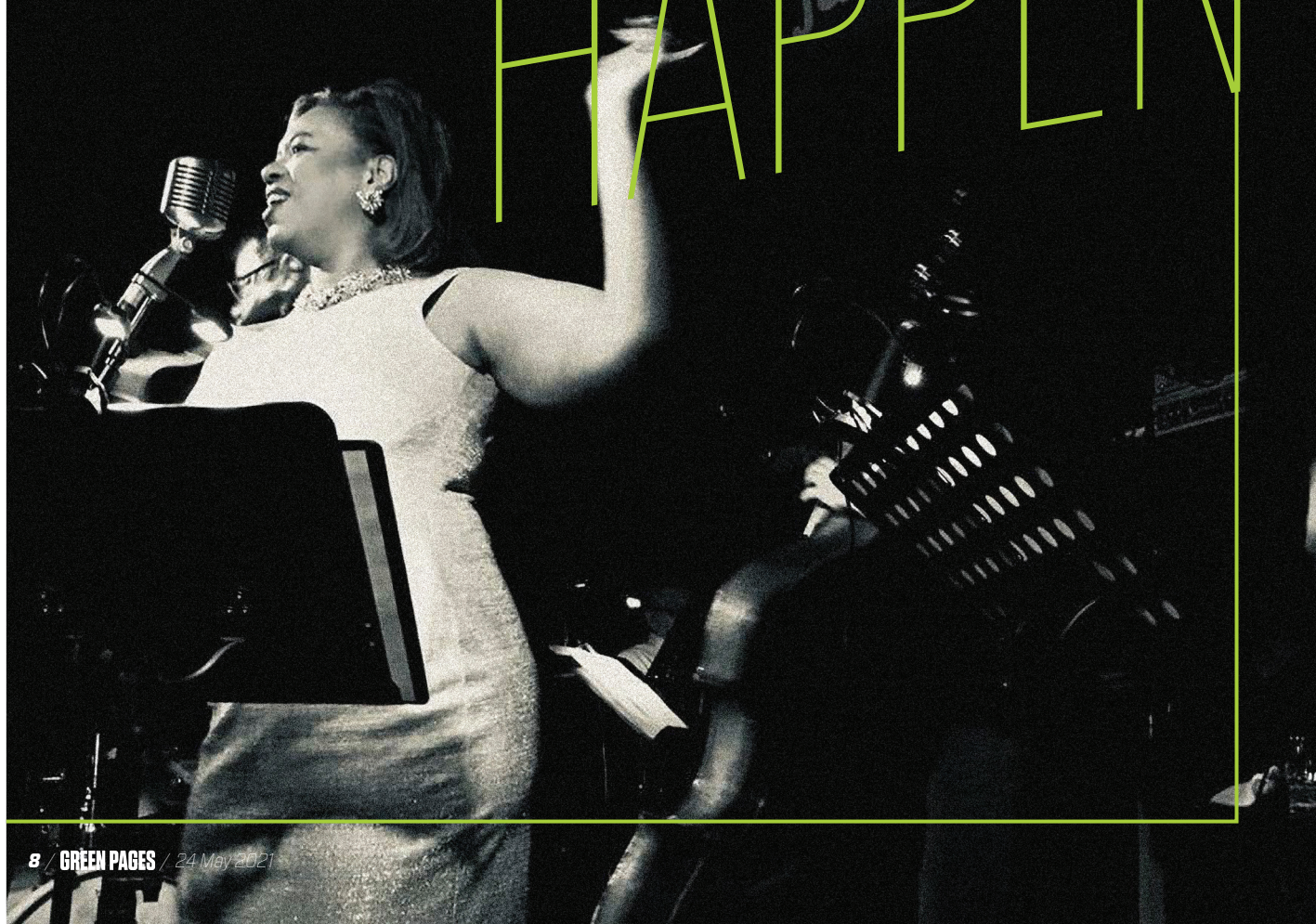


# MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN







**Lolita Jackson, jazz singer and former climate diplomat for New York City, reflects on a career forged by tragedy**

By Jack Thomson • Photos courtesy of Lolita

Lolita Jackson was in a conference room on the 70th floor of the World Trade Center's South Tower on 11 September 2001 when, looking out of the window, she saw the immediate aftermath of a plane hit the North Tower.

She and her Morgan Stanley colleagues immediately began to evacuate, taking the elevators down to the 44th floor, where she felt the building move – not knowing at that moment that a second plane had crashed into the South Tower.

Jackson proceeded on foot downstairs and made it to the bottom in 10 minutes. Her friend, however, was sadly one of the thousands of people who lost their lives in the attacks on the Twin Towers.

New Jersey-born Jackson, who was also in the World Trade Center when it was targeted in 1993, decided after 9/11: "If they're trying to kill me at work, I better really love my job."

And with that realisation, she quit.

Reliving her exit from the building, Jackson tells *Holyrood*: "At the time, I didn't know what was going on. I just had to get out, but people were not panicked."

"The people who didn't know and were just trying to get out, we weren't panicked... you're walking fast, but nobody was running. Nobody was screaming."

"Some people got upset and were crying but not a lot, you'd be surprised, like when you're in a situation like that you're

just trying to live, so you can't get frozen."

Jackson was able to get one of the last trains before the lines were closed and was on the subway as the towers fell. It was when she had returned home that she realised the gravity of the situation.

"It was a scary situation after, when I realised what could have happened to me," she says. "And then we realised that my friend didn't make it out. "It took a couple days because they had all the missing posters. We recognised a few days later what happened to him and found out that he was in an elevator by himself unfortunately when we got hit by the plane and the cable snapped and so he died."

"That was a traumatic experience. It took about a year and a half or two years for me to work through it and realise that I want to do something else in my life that actually was more helpful to other people than working for Morgan Stanley. So that's why I left."

Jackson had grown up on welfare and without parents but defied circumstances to graduate with a chemical engineering degree at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. From there she pursued a career in finance and worked on Wall Street, but her experience of 9/11 provoked a significant change of direction in her career – a shift which she concedes would not have happened otherwise.

"I would totally have stayed because I had grown up pretty poor. I worked at Wall Street and [there were] very few black people and women back then on Wall Street. I was the vice president, I got this big promotion, I was in charge of a \$10bn product area. Everybody in the firm who was senior knew me. I was on the up and up; I was on the rise."

"If I'd stayed there, I would've become a managing director one day and that's a big dream for a girl who grows up on welfare, with no parents, to be managing director on Wall Street."

"I felt that that was my calling, what I should be doing, and then when I

recognised that I almost lost my life at work, it's like, what am I willing to die for? And it's not this, I'm not motivated by money."

Jackson, who is also a jazz and funk singer, left Wall Street behind. She took some time out, and did everything that she loved to do outside of work, knowing that the next chapter of her life would come out of that. She was the lead singer in two bands, organised her college reunion and travelled to Australia.

She got involved in politics in New York and would eventually go on to run operations in Manhattan for Michael Bloomberg's second election campaign in 2005, which paved the way for a career spanning 15 years in the New York City Mayor's Office, where she did six different jobs during Bloomberg and Bill de Blasio's respective tenures. Most recently she was the climate diplomat, before returning to the private sector with Sustainable Development Capital, a climate finance and investment firm, in March of this year.

Among the roles Jackson had at the Mayor's Office was one as the Manhattan director of community affairs. "I had to figure out how to problem solve for all these really interesting and very diverse problems, depending on the neighbourhood," she says. "It could be street vendors, it could be buses parking in places that they

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didn't want them to park, noise, crime, you name it. I really had to figure out which agencies, which people to talk to, to help them solve their problems."

She became director of special projects for the Mayor's Office and was put in charge of operational city agencies for the Second Avenue Subway and Barclays Center projects. A month after the opening of the arena in October 2012, Hurricane Sandy happened and Jackson was brought into the leadership team for the Special Initiative for Rebuilding and Resiliency, which produced a 400-page report addressing the challenges and potential resiliency solutions for the effects of the hurricane.

"We had people coming to our meetings, who had lost their business or had lost their homes," she says candidly. "Some of them, even people in their families had died because 44 people in the five boroughs died from Hurricane Sandy. They either drowned in their homes or other things happened to them. So, it was really a sense of calling and urgency because it was such a big disaster and \$19bn in monetary damages."

From there, she had a series of climate-related roles. Jackson was part of the housing recovery office, which reached out to people who lost or had their homes damaged, helping them through that process. She went on to be a chief of staff to a senior adviser, before becoming the climate diplomat for New York City – working with cities around the world and the United Nations.

"It was not boring," the 53-year-old says. "It was not like I was doing the same thing every day for 15 years."

Through her work and music, Jackson has travelled the world and Scotland, where she has visited parliament and performed at the Voodoo Rooms in Edinburgh and the Blue Arrow in Glasgow, is a country that is close to her heart. The singer, who grew up playing the bass clarinet and tenor sax, has a band here that comes together whenever she visits. She hopes they will be able to reunite for a performance after COP26.

"I just love the warmth of the Scottish people," she says. "Every time I come into Waverley and I take the train, I almost want to tear up. I see the flags; I just have a heart for Scotland. So, the fact that COP26 is in a place that I love, I'm really excited to go to it and I'm really excited to be part of it."

The UN summit is due to be held in Glasgow in November and Jackson is



certain Scotland can showcase the progress it is making in tackling climate change. "Scotland is so far ahead of a lot of other countries and nobody knows it," she asserts. "I met with Tom Shields last time I was in Scotland, who is on the Just Transition Commission, and I was really transfixed by the fact that they understood they have over 110,000 workers in the fossil industries, and they have to eventually get those people thinking about doing other roles."

"But they were also talking about the whisky industry, the clothing industry, how do you make those greener, and it's just a really interesting way of looking at it and how to talk about it."

"I actually do feel that Scotland has a great story to tell, and I'm hoping during COP26 that story can really come out because it is the UK Government hosting it, but the story of Scotland is really remarkable."

The threat of climate change is a global problem, but it also affects local people and that sentiment is captured by Jackson, as she reflects on the journey that she has been on in her life and career. Her mother was unable to take care of her as a child, so she lived with her grandmother, who died when she was 15 years old.

She says: "We were not wealthy, so I was on public assistance and lived in public housing... The work that I do now and work I've done in climate I think, there but by the grace of God go I, meaning had I not gone to a good school and been reasonably intelligent, I would have been in poverty or I would have been a single mother. All kinds of things could have happened to me."

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"So, I feel I'm speaking for and representing those people, when I'm in a room trying to help with climate policy, or how we should characterise things that we're doing."

"A single mother, who has a child with asthma, she has to take that child out of school a couple days a month, because they may have asthma attacks or have some health problems. So she can't go and get another job that might take up more of her time, she may not be able to do things at night, be involved with her community, she might not be able to go back to school, that child's behind in class because they're missing class a couple times a month."

"If you clean up the air quality, she can go back to school, maybe get another degree or another qualification, or get a job that allows her to have more steady hours. That child is then able to either go to a better school, or at the very least be able to not miss school."

For Jackson it's all about helping others: "You change people's lives by changing their air quality and changing the circumstances that they're in and that's – it's many steps later, many steps removed – really the business that I'm in when I'm working in climate. That's the way I look at it."



# Scotland has an opportunity to create a true circular economy



## British Glass



The Covid-19 pandemic has had an enormous impact across the economy and sectors including the packaging and recycling industries have not been immune from its reach. During the pandemic, Scottish local authorities saw their recycling rates rocket during the lockdowns, as households made increased use of their kerbside collections, according to Wrap.

There is cross-party agreement for a broad, green recovery that should be grasped by government, industry and consumers as part of the wider economic recovery from the pandemic. All the main political parties supported the re-introduction of Circular Economy Bill in their manifestos, so the next session of the Scottish Parliament has an opportunity to create a true circular economy for Scotland.

We agree with the Scottish

Government that an innovative circular economy can improve productivity and sustainability if we transform the way we produce, consume, reuse and recycle materials linked to the goods we need. There is a huge amount that the government and other sectors

can learn from the glass industry to make this a reality.

Glass is one of the most sustainable materials on Earth - it is 100% recyclable, can be melted and re-melted without ever reducing its quality. Using recycled glass to make new bottles reduces the energy required and the carbon footprint to make glass bottles. The British glass industry was an early adopter of circular economy principles for these reasons; it makes economic and social sense.

And consumers agree. Research by Friends of Glass, finds 9 in 10 consumers would recommend glass as the best form of packaging, as purchasing decisions are increasingly driven by recyclability and environmental considerations.

While British Glass and its members do not agree with the inclusion of glass bottles in Scotland's deposit return scheme (DRS), we continue to argue that the Scottish Government should revisit the materials in scope. It is right that the gateway review on the DRS's implementation date examines the impact of

the pandemic on the hospitality and retail sectors; however, given the introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility and proposals for schemes elsewhere across the UK, there is an opportunity for Scotland to revisit the regulations and deliver a successful DRS that the other UK nations can replicate.

We are concerned that glass' inclusion will incentivise a switch to plastic packaging, increase the use of raw materials and carbon emissions. When schemes were introduced in Germany, for example, there was a 60% increase in consumption of plastic. In Croatia, since the introduction of a DRS, plastic has become the market leader for beverage bottles. And in Finland, when PET plastic bottles were introduced into a DRS in 2008, the quantity of single use PET increased from around 50 million units in 2007 to 375 million units in 2017.

We believe that a more effective and efficient kerbside recycling system would be a better vehicle for increasing the quantity and quality of recycled glass. The UK glass

sector has an excellent recycling record of 71%, but we know there is more to do. That is why we have set out our ambition to achieve a 90% collection rate by 2030.

Worryingly, one in four Scottish consumers say they won't be returning their glass bottles to collect the deposit according to our research. If

kerbside glass collections become less viable due to reduced participation, this means more glass ending up in landfill and less back in the furnaces making new bottles and jars. By installing an expensive and cumbersome infrastructure to enable glass collection, the government is ignoring alternative methods, including digital solutions, that could make reverse vending machines redundant in a matter of years.

We all know more needs to be done to increase recycling, tackle litter, and move toward creating a circular economy for all packaging formats. While we do not think a DRS will achieve this for glass, we will continue to work with government to find solutions to making a circular economy in Scotland a reality.

**"Glass is one of the most sustainable materials on Earth - it is 100% recyclable"**

Phillip Fenton  
Lead Packaging and Recycling  
Adviser, British Glass