

## Citizen Bono Brings Africa to Idle Rich

By DAVID CARR

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If you are a rock star with a touch of the messiah complex, saving the world one song at a time has its limits. Even John Lennon didn't make much progress on world peace before he died.

So Bono, the rare rock star with an ability to make a dent in something besides the pop charts, has met with everyone from Pope John Paul II to President Bush in an effort to achieve debt relief and address poverty and AIDS in the undeveloped world. He is also pushing his agenda one T-shirt at a time with a product line called Red that includes clothing, iPods and credit cards.

But even those combined efforts have been slow going. So now Bono is opening up another front with an unlikely weapon: as the guest editor of the July issue of *Vanity Fair*, he will try to rebrand Africa.

"We need to get better at storytelling," Bono said, sitting in the 22nd floor of the office of Graydon Carter, the editor of *Vanity Fair*. "Bill Gates tells me this all the time. We've got to get better at telling the success stories of Africa in addition to the horror stories. And this magazine tells great stories."

*Vanity Fair* does tell great stories and serious ones, but it sits atop the American magazine industry, in no small part because it takes as its preoccupations the needs and doings of the idle rich. The current Hollywood issue is its biggest ever, 500 pages jammed with glitz, celebrity and so many ads that the magazine could injure someone if it fell off the coffee table. Just outside Mr. Carter's office, a framed to-do list with hundreds of items details *Vanity Fair's* preparations for one of its past Oscar parties, which is a long way from Mogadishu.

"Bono will make a different issue about Africa than we would," Mr. Carter said. "I think there isn't one editor in the world who would not pay attention if Bono pulled up and said he wanted to edit a magazine."

It would be easy to render in a cartoon — storied rock star, fizzy magazine, collaborating to noble ends. But Bono doesn't look at wealth (fantastic wealth in his case) and charity as a contradiction. At a time when many people think they can consume their way to virtue, he is happy to accommodate.

"We are trying to deal with the Sally Struthers thing," he said, a stack of story ideas in front of him. "When you see people humiliated by extreme poverty and wasting away with flies buzzing around their eyes, it is easy not to believe that they are same as us."

Mr. Carter has used his magazine to political, even partisan ends, including the second impending "green" issue and a relentless drumbeat against the current administration. Bono, on the other hand, gives the current president very high marks for making practical efforts to address the AIDS epidemic in Africa.

"Hey, I'd meet with Lucifer if I thought it would do any good," Bono said. Mr. Carter gives up a sporty laugh at that, pretty sure he is talking about someone else.

Bono has traded out his sunglasses for the editor's eye shade before. He guest edited *The Independent* in London and was the first guest editor of the French newspaper *Libération*. And back in



Graydon Carter, editor of *Vanity Fair*, left, and Bono discussing his Africa issue. Bono suggested changing the issue's name to "Fair Vanity."

August, Elevation Partners, a private equity group in which he is a partner, bought an interest in *Forbes* magazine.

Some rich guys buy baseball teams or soccer teams, but Bono's tastes lean toward the sport of kings — publishing.

"I live in that world, the world of media," he said. "I don't want to talk about *Forbes* right now, but I will say this: One of the things that I have learned of in Africa is the crucial role that commerce will play in taking its people out of extreme poverty. Everyone talks about China being the next big thing, but if you spend any time in the bars or hotels in Africa, you see a lot of Chinese doing deals there. There is tremendous opportunity there."

There is, of course, the danger that the effort to chic out Africa — "Africa is sexy and people need to know that," Bono said — will seem like a hobby born of extreme wealth. His eyes narrow and he stands up rather suddenly when it is suggested that there is something a bit cheeky about the whole enterprise.

"Really?" he said. "What is more interesting to me is that we are losing the fight against AIDS in Africa. There are still 5,000 Africans dying every day of a preventable, treatable disease, dying for lack of drugs that are available at any corner drugstore."

Mr. Carter frankly said that he hopes a co-mingling of brands will help sell a tough subject. "We plan on making this an event with more separate cover treatments than the magazine has ever had."

"I wanted him to change the title and call it 'Fair Vanity,'" Bono said. "He said he'd do that just as soon as I change the band's name to 2U."

Mr. Carter said, "Bono really does see the world through rose-tinted glasses."

As a writer, it is tough not to wonder what it might be like to get a call: "Bono doesn't think your story is working." Bono explained that if he wasn't singing in a band, he would have been a journalist, but that he may not be the writer's best friend.

"Strangely, maybe not," he said. "I want this issue to be a best-selling issue of *Vanity Fair*, I want to make a hit record. These are the best writers in America, but I am a devotee of the 45," he said, referring to the predigital single that required economy and precision.

"I want to turn some of these novels into pop songs," he said. "My colleague here," he said, indicating Mr. Carter, "will fight for the writers, but I don't want the reader to be weighed down."

He's already learned the first lesson of editing: strike fear in the hearts of writers.