

Q&A WITH FANTASIA

BY NEKESA MUMBI MOODY
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Few people at 22 years old merit an autobiography and a biopic. But Fantasia, the former *American Idol* champ with the raspy, gospel-tinged voice of a weathered R&B veteran, has always been an old soul — and one who has had more life-changing experiences than some twice her age.

A single mom as a teen, she also endured sexual assault and learning difficulties before she became an overnight star two years ago — all of which she chronicled in her book, *Life is Not a Fairy Tale*, and this year's Lifetime movie, *The Fantasia Barrino Story*, in which she played herself.

But after reliving heartache in the public spotlight, and expressing it in song on her powerful debut album, 2004's *Free Yourself*, Fantasia is looking to have a little fun — like a lot of people her age. Her new self-titled album, released this month, has more party jams and sassy love songs, instead of heart-wrenching love ballads.

And while she's always had an effervescent, engaging personality, she's feeling happier and sexier these days — an attitude in everything from her songs, which she describes as “urban rock,” to her clothes, which fit a little tighter and reveal a bit more than they did two years ago.

As Fantasia says: “It’s like a brand-new ‘Tasia.”

How have you changed musically since the last record?

A lot of women loved that album. It was like their medicine. And that’s because a lot of women were going through similar things. But my question is now to my fans and to the people who follow me and love to hear my music: What’s after the hurt? Do you continue to be hurt, do you contin-



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ue to sit around or do you pick up and move on? So that’s what I want to let them know now, you pick up and you move on; I’m looking for love again. Yes, I’ve been hurt, but, hey, you never know unless you try. You’ll be by yourself all your life if you don’t get out and try.

You put yourself out there last year with the book and the movie, and got some criticism for what was revealed.

Whenever you do something, you’re going to get criticized. Somebody is going to have something to say, somebody is going to have their own opinion. But I always say to people, my main goal in putting my book and movie out was to encourage other young people who have been through the same thing. I want to put my story out there as a testimony. There was a young lady who came up to me and said, “I just want to tell you that you saved my life.” And it hit me, and I was like, how? And she told me that “I was on drugs, I was out there, I was about to lose my life, but you inspired me.” So I said to myself: Mission accomplished.

What was the hardest part of the movie?

Of course, the rape scene. You can’t just play that. So I walked off the set a couple of times. They all understood. I made it through because I had a lot of people on the set who were supportive. ... People would come out to the set and people would watch, and there were times even during the movie where I would be like, “Man, I can’t do this,” and then people would come up to me and say, “I just want to say, just sitting here watching you encourages me,” and it kept me going.

Do you think you still get a boost from being a former *Idol* winner or has that dissipated?

I don’t know because I still get a lot of *Idol* questions, I still get a lot of interviewers asking me about the *Idols*. I can’t break away.