

FANTASIA

Fantasia possesses one of the most soulful new voices to hit the music scene in over a decade. She is a dynamic performer whose energy and vitality captured the hearts and ears of over 65 million television viewers. 'American Idol 2004' shattered previous voting records when fans from all over the country crowned Fantasia this year's brightest new star, from a competition that included over 70,000 talented young men and women.

Immediately following the show Fantasia went on to the make Billboard history, becoming the first artist ever to hit #1 on Billboard's highly regarded Hot 100 Chart, with her first solo record, "I Believe," in its first week of release. The single also hit #1 on the Billboard Top 200 Singles Sales chart and the Billboard R&B Singles Sales chart, and has been #1 on the Billboard Top 200 Singles Sales Chart for 11 consecutive weeks (as of 9/8), the longest run in nearly two years. The success of "I Believe" (coupled with her rousing rendition of Aretha Franklin's classic "Chain Of Fools" and her show stopping cover of the standard "Summertime"), is no surprise given Fantasia's eternal love for music.

Unlike other households in Fantasia's hometown of High-Point, North Carolina where gospel was the only kind of music played, Fantasia was exposed to a range of musical styles during her formative years: "I listened to it all – rock, jazz, country and, of course, R&B. My mother loved Aretha so I heard a lot of her music when I was growing up. I would say she was one of my primary influences - along with Anita Baker, Luther Vandross, Whitney Houston and the gospel groups the Clark Sisters and the Anointed Pace Sisters."

Dedicated and committed to following her musical dream, Fantasia participated in local groups and sang with local bands after school. "You always hear how tough it is to get out there and make it in the music business, but I felt like God had given me a gift and it was up to me to share it with the world. To me, music was everything. Music is what helped me get through some really tough times in my life."

Fantasia's earliest attempts to break into the music business started through recording for a local gospel label; when a friend suggested she try "American Idol," Fantasia considered it. "I had a dream and I knew that I had to break through somehow. I was inspired by women like Angie Stone, Jill Scott and India-Arie who showed me that you can succeed by expressing your inner beauty through your music."

As legions of devout fans know, Fantasia triumphed after weeks and weeks of competing on the show, but she remembers how she almost didn't get into the contest: "I went to the first round sign-ups in Atlanta and when I got there, they weren't going to let anyone else in! To this day, I still don't know how I got in, but I figured God had a plan for me because I made it into that first round." Fantasia's way of relating to "American Idol" helped as each week, she found herself advancing forward, encouraged by the show's judges: "I didn't look at it as a competition," she says with the same 'realness' and down-to-earth manner that made her a favorite with the listening public. "I just kept thanking God for allowing me to be on the show. My mindset was that I would go as far as I could: I just wanted the chance to do my music."

It was her soulful rendition of songs made popular by legendary superstars that consistently kept Fantasia in the running: "I think it was when Simon Cowell (one of the judges) heard me sing Bonnie Raitt's "Let's Give Them Something To Talk About" that he really started to pay attention. And honestly, it did take a while to get used to singing in front of the cameras, but I'm used to letting loose onstage!" One of Fantasia's most

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striking performances was her reading of the classic "Summertime" (from the Gershwin musical "Porgy & Bess") but, amazingly, it was not a song she had ever heard before. "I remember I had to pick a second song for one of the rounds and the keyboard player started playing the music to 'Summertime'. I didn't know it came from a musical or anything else about it. However, when I heard the words, I knew I could relate to what the song was about. I just did my thing with it on the spot and I was surprised at the reaction!" The overwhelming reaction to "Summertime" took Fantasia to the final round.

Acknowledging that the toughest part of her journey so far is being apart from her family (especially young daughter Zion). Fantasia hopes her initial success "will send a positive message to all young single mothers—your life is not over because you have a child. If anything, having Zion has helped push me to work harder and become a stronger woman, because I want her to have the best. I don't feel my life has been a fairytale. Just the opposite, I feel I have gone through and overcome struggles that many young women face everyday. I've started writing songs myself because I have stories to tell!"

Fantasia went straight from her win, to a three month American Idol 3 tour with the top ten finalists, during which she began recording her highly anticipated debut album to be released by J/19 Recordings. Fantasia was signed by music industry legend Clive Davis to J Records through Simon Fuller's 19 Recordings. "I am so excited to work with producers like Missy Elliott and Jermaine Dupri" she grins. "There are amazing writers like Scott Storch, Harold Lilly, Jazze Pha, and R Kelly submitting songs and I can't believe they're writing songs just for me! I want the songs I record to show different aspects of what I can do musically... I can't wait! I feel like as much as God has blessed me, now I just want to give back..."

9/8/04