

# cover story

## An 'American Idol' walks right into a 'Fairy Tale'

By SARAH SCHOOLCRAFT  
Zap2it

"My life looks like a fairy tale in many ways, but you have to remember that life is not a fairy tale. I'm the American Idol ... but I can't even read a fairy tale to my 4-year-old daughter."

In her best-selling 2005 memoir, "Life Is Not a Fairy Tale," Fantasia Barrino came clean about her illiteracy (she's now working with tutors and pursuing her GED), sexual abuse and wild years

growing up in North Carolina.

While most people in the spotlight might be inclined to hide such a past from the media and fans, this 22-year-old believed that being real was more important than creating an image.

"(When) I came out with the book," she says in a recent interview, "everything was out there, and it was a release. That was my past, and where I am now is my future. We all go through things, and the things I went through made me who I am today."

Who she is today is Fantasia, Grammy-nominated recording artist and, with the Saturday, Aug. 19, premiere of "The Fantasia Barrino Story: Life Is Not a Fairy Tale," movie actress. The Lifetime original co-stars Loretta Devine, Viola Davis and Kadeem Hardison in the inspiring story of the "American Idol" champion's journey from poverty and struggle to fame and fortune. The film also marks Fantasia's first starring role — a starring role she didn't know was hers until after she'd agreed to the film.

"I was like, 'Well, who is going to play me, and what is she going to look like? I want to meet her!'" she says, laughing.

Luckily for Fantasia, she had some great tutors. "I have not had any act-

ing classes or anything, so it was just getting out there and being myself," she says. "I would watch Loretta and Viola and Kadeem (who play her grandmother, mother and father, respectively), and they would sit me down and I'd ask, 'OK, now what is this camera doing?' They didn't have to do those things, but they actually took a lot of time with me, and I learned so much."

Fantasia's appreciation for her co-stars is characteristic of her grounded outlook on fame and how she presents herself. "It's kind of tough, when young people look up to you so much," she says. "You have to watch everything you do, because you know at every angle, at every corner, every which way you go, you've got somebody watching you. It's so crazy because even during the movie, on set, I had women who were a lot older than me, that were single moms, saying, 'You inspire me.' It teaches me that I have to walk right. I still live my life, and I still have fun, but I have young

people and I have my own little lady myself that I have to walk right for, and do things that are respectable."

Searching for her own role models, Fantasia finds inspiration close to home, as well as in some more illustrious ladies. "I watch my mom," she says, "and Miss Patti LaBelle and Aretha Franklin. When I sit down and I talk with them, it's like these women are legends. They're so classy in my eyes. That's the way I want to be."

Striving for that level of class is something that hasn't been easy for Fantasia. During her time on "American Idol," it was a struggle for her to rise above her detractors. "They wouldn't allow us to go on the Internet," she explains. "But people from home ... would call and say, 'You know, they are saying that you are not good for kids and you are not a good role model! And I could have given up then. But I said, 'Do you know what? I'm going to tough it out. I'm going to fight it to the end.'"

Looking back on another aspect of her "Idol" time — the first moments of which are portrayed in the final scene of "Fairy Tale" — Fantasia reminisces about a man who likely changed her life.

"The last scene we had was us in the Dome," she recalls. "There (is) this scene where I walk down the hallway by myself, and the man who actually got me into the Dome — I call him my angel — he begins to speak, and he says, 'Fantasia, you're going to be ...' And I began to cry because it took me back. All those steps got me to where I am right now. That man was my angel."

One of the biggest differences in her life now as opposed to during "Idol," she reveals, is that she finally understands the hype.

"People used to come to me and say, 'Girl, I'm so addicted!' And I thought, 'Are they serious?' But when I started watching it, I was like, 'Oh, OK — now I get it!'"

### SATURDAY

"The Fantasia Barrino Story: Life Is Not a Fairy Tale"

TIME: 9 p.m.,  
Lifetime



Fantasia Barrino