

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

BRANDY

Your name is Brandy...
 You're a superstar singer with a four-million selling debut. You've won an American Music Award, many Soul Train Awards, including the Lady of Soul "Entertainer of the Year" Award, several NAACP Image Awards, several new artist award, multiple Grammy nominations, and six consecutive Top Ten singles, including two platinum hits, "Baby" and "Sittin' Up In My Room," and two gold hits, "I Wanna Be Down" and "Broken-hearted."

You've worked with industry heavyweights like Babyface, Lenny Kravitz, and 14-time Grammy winner David Foster. What do you wanna do next?

Well-believe it or not-the answer to that easy question was, for a while, "not sing." Not sing? Yep, not sing.

Why? Had the acting bug that bit the beautiful, charismatic singer damaged her vocal chords? Was it the packed schedule that included *Moesha*, her hilarious and touching number one rated show on the UPN network? Or her dazzling turn as Cinderella in the top-rated ABC-TV motion picture, in which she held her own against a superstar cast that included her idol, Whitney Houston? Was it rehearsals for another show stopping tour or preparations for her upcoming featured role in *I Still Know*, the sequel to last year's teen-scream hit, *I Know What You Did Last Summer*? Nope...none of these.

Brandy didn't want to sing for a very simple reason, a reason that proves why she's the dynamic yet down-to-earth vocalist that stars are made of. She just didn't feel it. And if she didn't feel it, she couldn't sing it. Artists talk all the time about "keeping it real." Brandy was ready to do just that. She refused to take the easy way out; she owed her fans something real, something heartfelt, something different.

"If I can't feel it, then I won't sing it," says the 19 year old singer, with a firm shake of her braids and a smile that shows that she means business. "And



Brandy

many of the songs I heard were not 'me.' They didn't express what I wanted to say at this point in my career. And I critiqued myself. I'm not the little girl I was when I made my first record. My voice is a stronger instrument now, my vocals come from both my heart and my diaphragm. My heart, because I've matured in the four years since the last album, I'm more emotionally there. The diaphragm, because I've been practicing, doing more scales with my father, just strengthening my sound."

From the sassy opener, "The Boy Is Mine," a duet with Monica, to the

slinky, stylish funk of the title track, to the joyous, percussive groove of "You Make Me Happy," *Never Say Never* is a document from the soul of a young woman on the move, figuring out the winding roads of romance, the sure footed initial steps to independence, the exhilaration and freedom of her own soaring vocals.

Perhaps the most telling tack is a sure fire hit called "Top Of The World," which feature hiphop star Mase-in which Brandy manages to both address her critics who say she "thinks she's too good" as well as conquer her

own youthful insecurities about life as she makes her way in the world. Over a slamming persuasive beat and a funky scratch guitar, she sings, "Just tryin' to be me, doin' what I got to do. Just tryin' to be me, provin' what I gotta prove." Some people think that I'm just sittin' on top of the world."

Because, for Brandy, sittin' on top of the world is not what it's all about. Each project she's taken on throughout her career has been a challenge-hard work and sacrifice-that makes the beautiful moments worth it all.

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