

# Music Boulevard



It is moments after dusk in the lush life metropolis of Manhattan, and Total are preparing to record the last track for their highly anticipated second album *Kima, Keisha & Pam*. Chilling in the famed Daddy's House Studios (owned by their Executive Producer Sean "Puffy" Combs) while looking like a stylish 90's version of *Three The Hard Way*, group members Kima, Keisha and Pam all seem quite excited by their latest project. "I think both our fans and foes will all be surprised by the direction of this project." Says the sexy Keisha of the album. "On this record we were determined to explore our various personal personas, yet still keep it pure Total."

Indeed, having worked with a stellar line-up of producers and songwriters including Missy Elliott, Puffy, Heavy D., Mario Winans, R.Kelly, Kelly Price, Diane Warren, Stevie J. and Chuckie Thompson, Kima, Keisha & Pam promises to be the perfect combination of electric-ladies soul and pre-millennium funk. In addition, the album features collaborations with label mates Mase ("If You Want Me"), 112 ("Giving You All Of Me") and Bad Boy newcomer Carl Thomas ("Press Rewind"). While specially crafted to socially define the future of America's girl group sound, *Kima, Keisha & Pam* has also been designed to zoom past what others might define as "the next

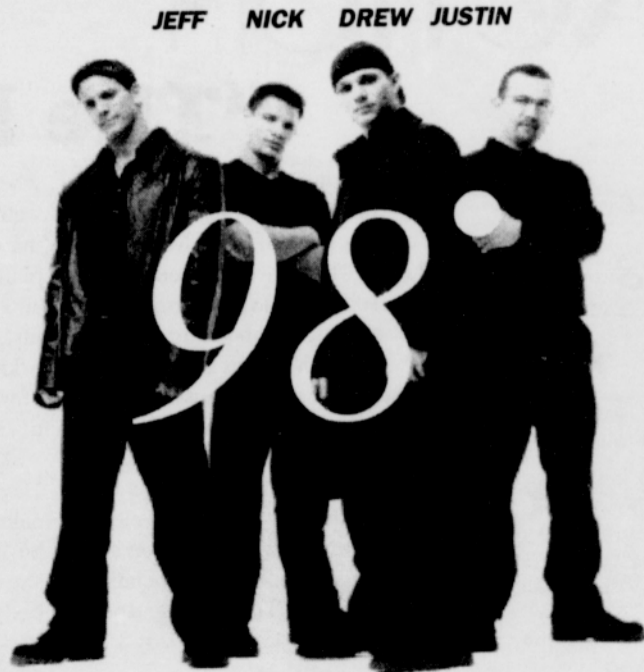
level." Or, as Kima softly explains, "Our main goal with this album is simply to win."

On "Trippin'," the sassy first single to drop from the album, these three New Jersey natives high-heel stomp through the fiery sound-jungles constructed by their homegirl Missy Elliott.

Although Total has had a personal friendship with Missy for a few years, their first professional teaming occurred on 1997's Platinum soundtrack to the hit flick *Soul Food*. "From the fans and the media to Puffy, everyone was feeling 'What About Us,' so we decided to continue working in that vibe. And, our friendship made it all a lot easier," explains Keisha. "Missy is willing to take chances that others won't."

Daring to be different and succeeding with a vengeance, Missy Elliot was commissioned to produce and write six steaming sides for Total. Opening with the crash of broken trust and cheating hearts, "I Tried" is an enticing web of deceit that is as compelling as an all-black version of an Alfred Hitchcock film. "As soon as I heard the track I told Missy, 'I'm loving this!' explains Pam, whose smoky vocals lace the grooves. "It's basically a song about being in love with your friend's boyfriend, and though you know you're wrong... you just can't help it."

For the harmony-driven Ohio Foursome 98, it's not hard to get noticed. After all, for the past year, brothers Nick and Drew Lachey, Justin Jeffre and Jeff Timmons have been busy wowing crowds worldwide due to the success of their self-titled debut album. Their new album, which finds the group collaborating with music's biggest producers, is sure to have them heating up the charts again. With their group appeal and soulful harmonies, Motown's 98 are on the steady track to stardom with their sophomore release, *98 and Rising*. Though they did some writing and producing on their self-titled debut, which spawned the goal hit "Invisible Man", the guys stepped up their song writing and producing efforts on their follow up CD. "We had more of a hands-on approach," Jeff explains. "We've had so much influence and control from the very beginning," adds Justin about their involvement during the marathon recording process, which took place during a two-and-a-half month period in locals including New York, Nashville, Los Angeles and




JEFF NICK DREW JUSTIN

Vancouver. "It's a got a more diversity and the songs are on a whole other level. There's something for everybody." With a host of major producers-including The Trackmasters (Mariah Carey, Will Smith, LL Cool J, and Mary J. Blige), Pras of the Fugees, Keith Thomas (Vanessa Williams and Brian McKnight), Anders Bagge (Robyn and Ace of Base)-contributing to *98 and Rising*, the album spans the world of hip-hop-influenced R&B and pop to Euro-dance and beyond. Drew explains, "It was an enlightening experience making this album. Working with such an electric group of producers

opened us up musically." the first song recorded for *98 and Rising* was "True To Your Heart," an upbeat duet with Stevie Wonder. Also appearing on Disney's *Mulan* soundtrack, "True To Your Heart" has a distinctively old-school Motown flavor. For these lifelong fans of Stevie getting the chance to do a duet with the music legend was a dream come true.








"When they sent the tape to us at home, I was almost in tears listening to it," recalls Nick. "It was an awesome feeling to hear your voice with Stevie Wonder exchanging riffs and singing harmony parts together. It was completely unreal." Drew and Justin even got the chance to lead on *98's* collaboration with The Track masters, the party jam "Do You Wanna Dance" (featuring a dancefloor-ready sample from Kool & the Gang's "Get Down On It"). And for the groups fans are familiar with their reputation as premier balladeers, *98 and Rising* is full of romantic songs.



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