

COKO

As a member of the now-defunct New Jill Swing trio, SWV, Coko stood out as the commanding lead vocalist behind several chart-topping hits, including "Right Here," "I'm So Into You" and "Weak" from SWV's double-platinum first album, *It's About Time*. Now, with the release of her long-awaited solo debut, *HOT COKO*, the former choir girl sets out to establish herself as one of contemporary music's leading female vocalists and songwriters.

Born and raised in the Bronx, New York, Coko (né Cheryl Gamble) grew up singing in church and eventually would like to come back to gospel music be-

"sisters with voices", Coko says that SWV's success only intensified tensions that had begun to rattle the group. "Things were not working out and we were growing apart. The friendship was gone and there was no unity within the group," she explains. "No one can continue to work like that because it's

as an opportunity to fulfill her lifelong dream of recording a solo album. "It was a lot of fun," she says of the recording process. "It was also a lot of hard work because it's just me now and I did all the background and lead vocals. Plus, I wrote some of the songs," she says with a proud smile. In total, Coko co-wrote

five songs on *HOT COKO*:
"Sun-

gives me what I need."

Having put the ups and downs of the past behind her, Coko is optimistic about her future and excited about the creative freedom that she now has as a solo artist. "It's easier now because I can do what

I want to do, wear what I want to wear and sing what I want to sing without worrying about somebody else not wanting to do it." And why should she? *HOT COKO* is undeniable proof that Coko can do good all on her own.



cause that's her roots. "I was singing in Hezekiah Walker's Love Fellowship choir when I decided to leave and start singing secular music," explains the 25-year-old songstress, who cites gospel singers Twinkie Clark, Tramaine Hawkins and Men of Standard as her biggest influences. That's when she teamed up with childhood friends Lelee (Leanne Lyons) and Taj (Tamara Johnson) and formed SWV—an acronym for Sisters With Voices. The trio recorded a demo tape and shopped it around to various record labels. The tape soon caught the attention of producer Teddy Riley, the originator of the ubiquitous early '90s New Jack Swing sound who played an instrumental role in launching the successful careers of acts like Jodeci and Mary J. Blige. Riley helped SWV craft their debut LP, *It's About Time*, which gave way to two later releases 1996's *New Beginning* followed by *Release Some Tension* in 1997.

Despite the group's popularity and public image as a happy collective of -well-

very hard, especially when you're not speaking and things like that. Finally, we decided that we were either gonna get it together or we would just go our separate ways," she continues. "We could never get it together, so we went our separate ways."

Instead of brooding over the break-up of SWV, Coko seized the moment

shine," "You and Me," "Don't Take Your Love Away," "I Ain't Feelin' You" and "All My Lovin'."

Staying true to the heart and soul of R&B, love and happiness are the themes that prevail on *HOT COKO*. The first single, "Sunshine," for example, is a loving tribute to Jazz, Coko's 3-year-old son. "I thought that track was really happy and it made me feel really good, so I wrote about being in love and being happy. For me, it relates to my son because he brings sunshine in my life." On the sexier side, however, is "All MY Lovin'." "It's about being in a relationship with a guy and giving him my all, but he's not giving it back to me," says Coko, adding, "So I turn to someone else who

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