

Kevon Edmonds voice woo's listeners in on new album

CONTRIBUTED STORY
FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

There's something about Kevon Edmonds' voice. A certain tone, a sublime familiarity way beyond the singer/songwriter's work as a lead vocalist in the hit trio After 7; beyond Milestone, the supergroup he augmented, which scored the 1997 hit, "I Care About You" from the film "Soul Food." It is a cosmopolitan wonder that voice. A voice without peer? Listen to Kevon's debut RCA solo album, 24/7 and consider the notion. With 24/7- featuring the first single and video of the title track, Kevon re-introduces to the game a soulful ingenuity, dynamism and grace conspicuously absent from urban pop/soul of late. During such tracks as the urgent groove "I Want You More," the delicious mid-tempo songs "Love Will Be Waiting" and "No Love," and ballads such as the haunting "How Often" and the big scoring "Baby Come To Me," Kevon sings with an emotional verve that finds its target every time. It's his distinctive tone that sets Kevon apart, and his intuitive, heartfelt

approach that immediately makes him one of the great. That supple voice is the crucial center of all-star assemblage of songwriters,

producers and players on 24/7 that includes Kevon's brother, the indefatigable Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds, who is also his duet

partner during the sumptuous ballad "A Girl Like You"; hitmakers Daryl Simmons (Boyz II Men, Toni Braxton) and Tim & Bob (TLC, Jon B, Monica), with contributions from Walter Afanasieff (Mariah Carey), ambitious comers Damon Thomas, Tommy Sims, Marc Harris, Robin Thicke, Greg Curtis, Angelo Ray and A-list musicians Greg Phillinganes, Nathan East, Ricky Lawson and Michael Thomson.

"Making 24/7 was exciting because it called for me to move, both as a singer and a collaborator, to another level," says the soft-spoken Kevon. "I wanted to work with people I respected and people who could respect what I have to offer as well, and that's exactly what happened—a complete collaboration between everyone involved. It was fun, but it was hard work, too. The best kind

of work you can get doing something you love."

Kevon hails from Indianapolis, Indiana, not exactly renowned as cradle of soul music, but certainly, a place where a young singer might unwittingly hone a style that effortlessly crosses the boundaries of R & B and pop. Of six brothers, three of them — Kevon, Kenneth and Melvin — would go on to sing professionally. "I grew up listening to some of everything, Kevon recalls, "but especially the good stuff — Stevie wonder, Gladys Knight, the Temptations, you know, the classics"

Too shy to sing in the church choir, Kevon sang to himself "for my own satisfaction" until his teen-aged years, when he joined his buddies in the junior high and high and high school choirs.



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work I must to make a living? How far am I living off the mark of how I would like to live? What changes can I make to alter the course of my life?

Day 6 KUUMBA (CREATIVITY). More than simply "making something," I prefer to think of creativity as bringing forth that which has not existed before. When I apply this idea to myself, I can ask on the sixth day: To what part of myself must I give birth (create), in order to meet the challenges and promises of my life? Courage, wisdom, strength, determination, faith, and love may be some of the inner resources I feel must bring forth.

DAY 7 IMANI (FAITH). Imani has many definitions in Swahili, compassion, conscience, conviction, faith, and kindness. Of all these, compassion touches me most, and I find myself asking on this last day of Kwanzaa: In what ways do I (can I) lead a compassionate life? By compassion,

I do not mean simply having empathy or sympathy for those less fortunate. Racism, sexism, homophobia, poverty, homelessness, abuse, loneliness, disease, ignorance, grief; these are just a few of the sources of pain and suffering we all face daily in the world and in ourselves.

Compassion seeks healing in the face of such pain and suffering. I ponder where I can find that compassion and healing within first, before I can offer it to the world outside.

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When I was approached Kwanzaa in this way, these seven days help set the tone of the year to come, and the life I choose to lead.

Clyde W. Ford is the author of The Hero With An African Face: Mythic Wisdom of Traditional Africa.

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