

ENTERTAINMENT

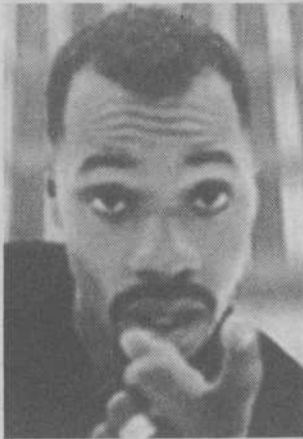
Franklin's book charts route from poverty to applause

By Berta Delgado
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Life was tough for Kirk Franklin, the wisp of a kid who grew up in the rough Riverside neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas. He had no family except the great aunt, who adopted him when he was three, no friends, nothing.

But, his great aunt — who he called "Mama"— Gertrude Franklin, wanted him to be rich in the spirit of the Lord. She took him to church several times a week and got him involved in the choir.

Franklin quickly grew into a musician, leading the choir by the time he was 11. To pay for piano lessons, his mom would collect aluminum cans. She was so proud of Kirk, but



KIRK FRANKLIN

he lost his way on the journey to manhood.

When she died, Franklin had just started making tracks in the right direction. In the years that followed, the skinny kid everyone called "church boy," became a popular musician with his own style of hip-hop gospel

music that crossed into the secular market.

In "Church Boy," the Franklin autobiography that arrived in stores earlier this month, the Grammy Award-winning artist recalls his early years and the woman who helped shape his life.

In it, he details his climb to the top of the charts and praises his Lord and Savior, who he says was with him always, even when he didn't realize it.

"I don't want this to just be a book about gold records or Stellar Awards or Grammys," Franklin writes in the book, published by Word.

"It's not about doing things the world's way. Instead, I hope the story of my life and music will

demonstrate how God can take a kid from the inner-city, give him a message, and then put his name on the record charts — because it's the message in the music that really counts."

Franklin, 28, said that more than anything else, he wants to reach out to the children who are growing up as he did — "right on the edge of poverty most of the time." He wrote the book for children who know their real mothers don't want anything to do with them, for kids who never seem to fit in.

When he was in the fourth grade, he put his own isolation into words in a rhyme: "There once was a kid named Kirk; the kids called him a jerk. When he went out to play, it turned into a rainy day. That goofy little kid named Kirk."

He hopes the book, as his new CD, "The Nu Nation Project," will let kids know there is a light in their lives. He wants them to know that if he was able to do something with his life, they can too.

Franklin is the king of

cross-over. His first album shook up the music industry when it logged 100 weeks as the No. 1 gospel album, and his singles and CDs have topped the R&B and Christian charts as well.

Industry experts are predicting that the new album will be the first gospel or Christian album to ship platinum — one million copies — before it goes on sale.

With the book, he's crossing over into a new medium, one that's becoming increasingly popular with Christian music artists. Still, he said, it blows him away to see a book with his name on it.

"You have to understand, I didn't even graduate from high school," he said. "I don't even have a GED, and I have a book."

Franklin said Word Publishing approached him last year and talked him into writing the book.

"I kind of thought it was a little premature because I was 27, and I'm thinking

autobiography? Auto what?" he said with a questioning look on his face. "It's hard for me to even spell the word, you know?"

He said that working on the book with Jim Nelson Black was challenging because he had to remember so much.

"There's so many things I've just put in the back of mind because there's been so many tragic points that, that's what you try to do, put all that in the back," he said.

But his rags to riches story is expected to grab readers' attention, book industry experts say.

"I think one of the most important parts of the message of the book is the inspirational aspect, that he overcame a lot of things in his life to become successful," said Craig Stoll, senior book buyer for Mardel, a chain of Christian book stores based in Oklahoma City.

"I think it will translate into interest in his life."

Berta Delgado writes for the New Pittsburgh Courier.

Poetry in the Raw

Tinseltowners are really taking about Shari Randolph and her self published book of poetry "Raw," which could well become one of the newest best sellers on the national book list. Trademarked by her sassy style and barefoot performances, this elocutionist invites you to join her on a riveting poetic journey through life's experiences in her book "Raw." Confronting such issues as race and beauty, the education of black youth and the roots of black inspiration, Ms. Randolph explores the heart of a people in the daily battles and circumstances of being Black in America, of being a woman in America ... or just being in America.

Ms. Randolph made a recent visit to Zaliwa Creations in Las Vegas for poetry readings of her new book as well as book-signing.



Ms. Randolph (seated) takes a few moments to speak with proprietor Collen Jordan of Zaliwa Creations.

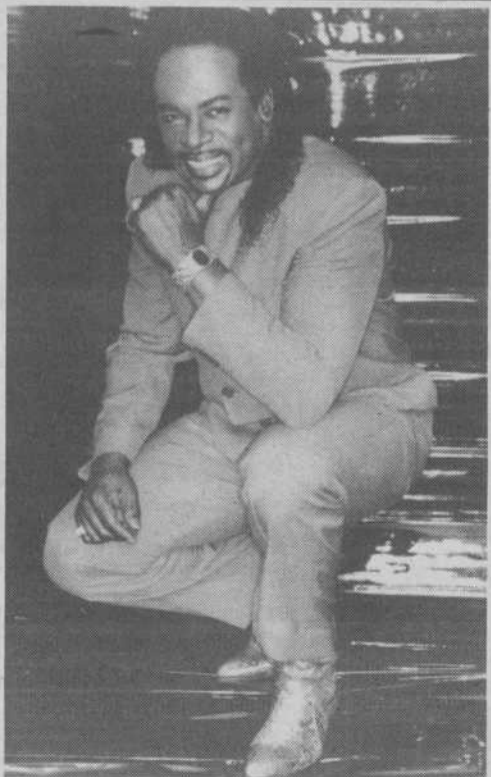
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