

'Idol' alum's book details life of downs, ups

Life Is Not a Fairy Tale
By Fantasia Barrino;
Fireside Books; Hardcover,
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By Kam Williams
Sentinel-Voice

"Faith is a legacy for many women in my family, as are the legacies of teen pregnancy, being single mothers, emotional and physical abuse, and poverty. We have all survived it because of the church and our powerful belief in God and prayer. I have been praising God since I was 5-years-old. I continue to thank and bless Him every day. I could have given

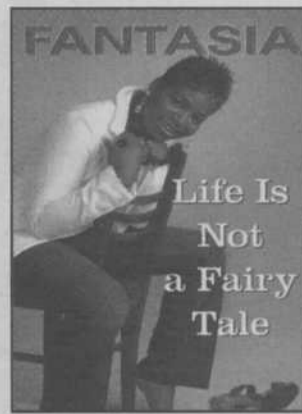
up long ago. God has a hand upon my life. God has put me here for a reason. Maybe he has put me here to share what it means to recognize the gifts that God has given you and hold on to them with everything you have. God's gifts are real." —Excerpted from Chapter 1, "Recognize Your Gift"

Fantasia Barrino was only 19 when people all across the country voted her the new "American Idol" in May 2004. Even judges Simon Cowell, Randy Jackson, and Paula Abdul agreed that she was their favorite winner ever on the popular TV show.

As a proud single-mom, she became an instant role-model for girls without much hope, who found themselves in a similar predicament. Soon thereafter, 'Tasia, as her fans call her, recorded her first CD, "Free Yourself," which went platinum in just a couple of months.

Now she has written a tell-all autobiography, describing a life which has had more than its share of challenges. Besides having a baby out of wedlock at 17, she recounts a litany of woes she had to overcome growing up in the town of High Point, N.C.

For example, although



she was raised by religious parents, a preacher grandmother, and started singing Gospel music at the age of five, she turned her back on the church and became sexually active right after entering high school and dressing flirtatiously. She was raped by one boy, but was ultimately impregnated by her pastor's son. Unfortunately, his reaction to the news of his impending fatherhood was, "It ain't mine."

Although she had been warned by her grandmother not to get knocked up because, "You will be on your own. No man will help you," Fantasia had to find out the hard way. She dropped out of high school, unable to hold down a job because she was unable to read or make cor-

rect change. She went on welfare, but that money brought her "baby-daddy" around. And his style was to beat her silly before taking all the infant's money, forcing 'Tasia to shoplift for milk, diapers and other necessities.

She bottomed out while sharing an apartment in the projects with another single-mom, drinking and smoking and frequenting nightclubs where she met more of the wrong types of guys. Obviously, her fortunes changed with "American Idol," and she constantly credits her faith in God that she would find a way out of the ghetto.

Since no co-author or ghost-writer is credited as having contributed to the memoir, Fantasia deserves the highest of accolades for having crafted such an honest, heartfelt, insightfully, well-written book. Though now only 21, she shows evidence of having grown wise beyond the harsh teen years which threatened to take a great toll on her soul.

Best of all, she has plenty of advice for anyone thinking of following in her footsteps in chapters with titles like, "It Ain't about the

Bling," "Don't Be a Hootchie Mama," and "Learn from Your Mistakes." She breaks it down in plain English, when she explains, "In the ghetto where I come from, big butts and tight jeans are the way to get certain men's hearts. My days of being a hootchie mama started probably in the eighth or ninth grade."

The author proceeds to explain, and rather clearly, exactly how she was misguided into imitating behaviors she saw in music videos, and why that was an inappropriate way of attracting a man. Finally, Fantasia warns young girls of the pitfalls of teen pregnancy, such as the fact that, "the cost of daycare is more than a minimum-wage job earns."

Given its sincerity, its spirituality and its sobering message, "Life Is Not a Fairy Tale" is highly recommended for any at-risk teenager with low self-esteem and in dire need of a reason for hope and of inspiration to keep the faith.

For Fantasia makes a convincing case that if she could overcome all her obstacles, anybody else can, too.

Keys' song almost went unheard

NEW YORK (AP) - Although "Unbreakable," is proving to be another hit for Alicia Keys, the song spent about two years in her vault before she decided to record it.

"Unbreakable," which is on her just-released "Unplugged" album, was intended for 2003's "The Diary of Alicia Keys." But Keys decided to leave it among the outtakes.

"It's always been one of my favorite songs, but it just didn't fit properly with the second album, so, I kind of put it on the shelf waiting for the perfect time," she told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

That time came when she decided to resurrect MTV's "Unplugged" concert series; it was one of the new songs she premiered during the concert, which recently aired on the network; the companion album was released Tuesday.

The up-tempo groove, which references real-life couples such as Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, got an enthusiastic response from the audience. Radio response has been strong, too — it's a top 20 hit on Billboard's R&B/hip-hop chart.

"For me, as a musician, sometimes it's really a lot of fun to just debut a new song without any expectations,"



Alicia Keys tickles the ivories while belting a heartfelt tune.

she said. "The response for it was so great, so it's a lot of fun to do that."

Next month, Keys starts filming her role as an assassin in "Smokin' Aces," also featuring Ben Affleck, Andy Garcia, Jeremy Piven and Ray Liotta.

Keys, 24, is thankful for her big-name co-stars.

"It doesn't all rely on my shoulders, it's a very much ensemble piece," she said of the movie, which she de-

scribed as "very dark and gritty."

Though Keys is known for her soulful love ballads, she decided to pick this role for her film debut to showcase her range as an actress.

"For me, personally, to go outside my character completely and become this whole new person is something that's going to be actually therapeutic in many ways," she said. "It's totally unexpected for me."

Harvey

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pire still has a long way to go.

"We're still very much a work in progress," she says of her company launched on Oct. 3, 1980, with the acquisition of WOL-AM in Washington D.C.

"We're growing our cable network [TV One], we're the fastest growing cable channel in the history of the cable industry. We're almost up to 30 million households; we're

not two years old yet. We just bought a new radio station in St. Louis and we're trying to get into the New York market and the Chicago market now."


She dismisses rumors that her company is in the process of buying New York's WBLS from Inner City Broadcasting.

"I doubt if 'BLS will ever sell," she said, speculating on the issue. "It's not even a deal in the works. It's not true."


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