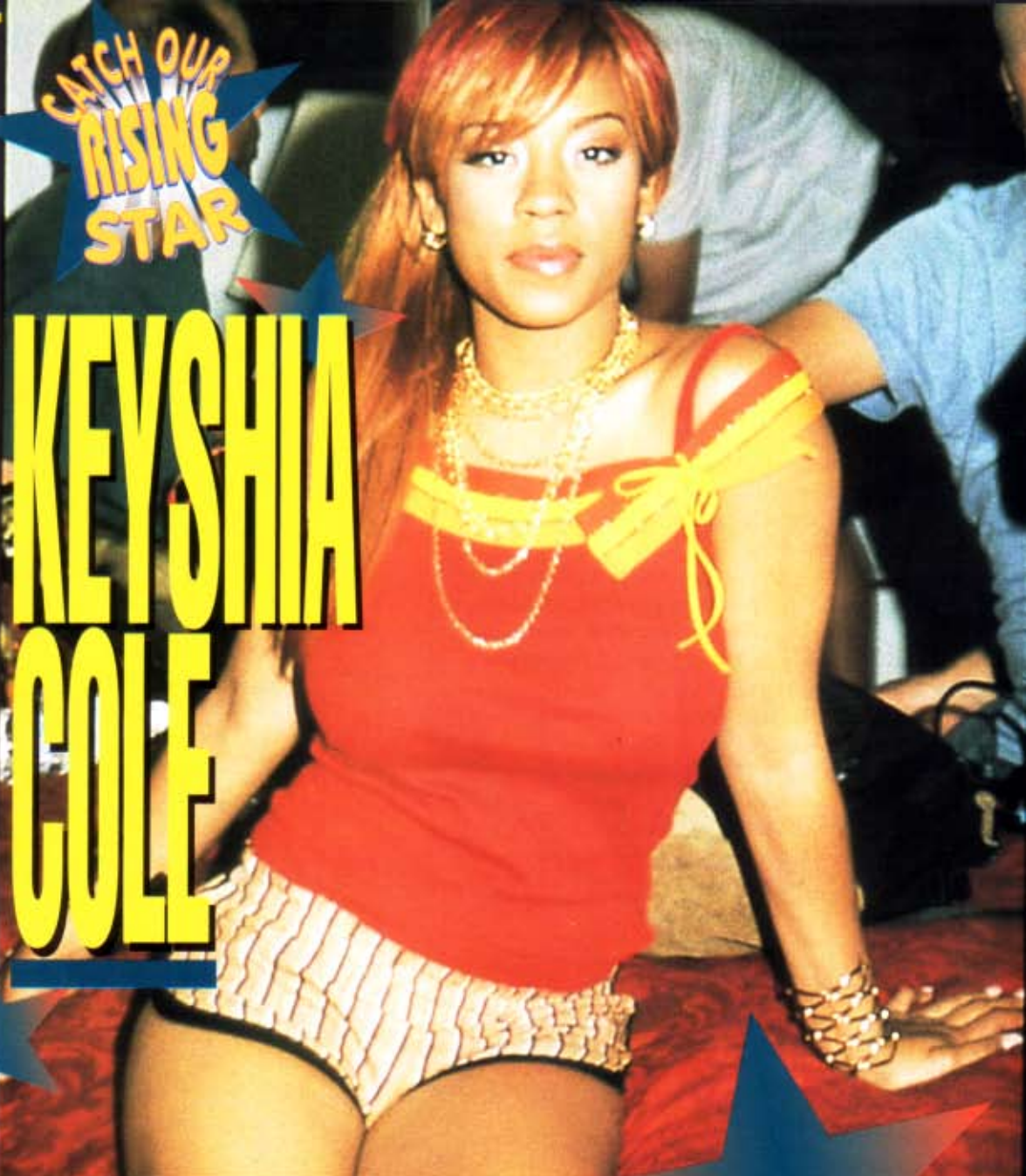


Everybody has a "claim to fame" moment. For some, it might be that time they told an unforgettable joke at a company party or the special way in which they won over the guy/girl of their dreams. A claim to fame may even involve the time you single-handedly stopped an oncoming diesel engine train with nothing more than your bare hands and a plastic shoe horn in order to save a four-year-old's sickly pet gerbil. Personal moments such as these, while not necessarily amazing, are forever treasured as memories that are called upon as the years pass — even if it doesn't lead to a legit form of fame. In the case of 21-year-old songstress, Keyshia Cole, her claim to fame and pivotal moment in life came when she met with and performed for the one and only MC Hammer.

It's true, not many people would care to parade around the fact that they were once in MC Hammer's presence, however, if you want on to sign a record deal and work with the likes of Kanye West, then why not consider your moment with Stanley Kirk Burrell as your "claim to fame?" Keyshia has been involved with the recording industry since she was a young girl, hustling and working any angle in the biz that she could, and as a pre-teen she was able to convince the former parachute pant-wearing superstar that he should "put her on." In doing so, 12-year-old Ms. Cole even got the chance to record with Hammer.

Why Hammer? Well, like the former Oakland Athletics bat/ball boy, Keyshia was born and raised on the other side of the California bay, on the typically rough streets of Oakland. Since she was able to hold a note with her voice, she used music as an outlet to get through life and her life-long goal quickly became that elusive recording contract. Her experiences as a youth helped motivate and propel her into her current situation and she



KEYSHIA COLE

knows that good things come to those who really work hard for it. This work ethic led to her hook-singing sessions with other Bay Area artists such as Messy Marv and Tony Toni Tone's Dwayne Wiggins. "Being young, you have to really be dedicated to doing it for yourself," she says. "There's a lot of trials and tribulations you have to go through to get what you want, especially if you feel like it belongs to you." One specific trial triggered her move from Oakland to the star-studded streets of Los Angeles.

Young love is a powerful thing and when that trust is broken, things are bound to happen. Sometimes bad things — like cracked windshields, rumors that spread like wildfire or some staged "baby mama drama." However, in the case of Keyshia, when she caught her boyfriend cheating, it took mere minutes for this street-bred crooner to hop in her car and speed to Los Angeles under the cover of the night's sky.

Within a few months, a determined Keyshia had made so many connections that she found herself being introduced to A&M Records president Ron Fair, who practically signed her on the spot. Since that moment, there's been nothing but critical praise for this sassy and streetwise R&B singer.

Her debut finds the sexy Ms. Cole belting out her gritty-yet-soulful soprano on songs that — much like her idol, Mary J. Blige — find her tackling stories of love and life on the streets. Her debut single with the currently all-over-the-place Kanye West, "I Changed My Mind" is the perfect set up for her debut CD, *The Way It Is*. It's about young women who are longing for love, but not desperate enough to toss their lives away for it. "That song was about being focused and dedicated to what you want and what you're trying to be," she explains, based on her own personal experience. "It's about things you're trying to accomplish in life and dealing with somebody, a significant other, who comes in between that — especially with their ways."

On the other side of the fence, she tackles the harsh realities of those growing up on the streets. Her song, "Streets Is A M'fah dka" reflects a world riddled with drugs, violence and crime. As she says, "It's just different things we see in the 'hood that we never see in Hollywood."

In the end, maybe it's not her meeting with Hammer that Keyshia would consider her claim to fame. Rather, she hopes that others like her can recognize their goals, follow through and achieve their dreams. Only Keyshia can sum it up best: "I want to be an example for young girls in following your goals and dreams — and making it happen."

— A.Q.C.