

Dress by Rachel Mills
Earrings by Bebe
Bracelet by Poptoxic
Shoes by Zigisoho (at Bakers)

KEKE PALMER:

The Makings of a **PHENOMENAL WOMAN**

Photography by Allen Cooley | Styling by Julian Lark
Written by Nicole Holman

Don't call her "adorable" or "precious." Get rid of your perception of her as the "good little girl." Keke Palmer is no longer a child star. Standing before you is a beautiful woman who just so happens to be the gem of our generation. To call her a triple threat is cliché and quite an understatement. Her talents stretch far beyond our expectations and her infectious personality captivates us. The world has had its eye on Lauren Keyana Palmer for quite sometime, but are we ready to see what she will do next?

Dress by Rachel Mills
Bracelets by Bebe
Shoes by Imitation by Jerrell



Even on a cold and dreary Sunday morning at her one-millionth photo shoot, Keke still manages to illuminate the room with her radiant energy. She slips on a black, lacy dress and 5-inch pumps and takes her spot in front of the camera. Although poised and pretty, she won't start without the right music to inspire her. In seconds, the R&B sounds of "Andre" by Jojo fill the studio. In between snapshots, Keke belts the lyrics then gives a fierce pose while smiling with her eyes. "I just love this song, it makes me feel so...great!" she exclaims. It's evident that music ignites a flame within the star and triggers the release of a vibrant aura. She admits she's not a morning person but with a little motivation from one of her passions she becomes the superstar we know and love. While getting her hair and make up done for the next shoot she says, "This morning I was so tired, but as soon as I started listening to Jojo's song, I like instantly got into a good mood. I was singing and I was enjoying the distraction."

Most fans recall being pleasantly surprised by Keke's singing voice at the 2009 BET Awards when she paid tribute to Michael Jackson. She blew us away with a snippet of, "Who's Loving You" by the Jackson 5 and introduced us to another one of her God-given gifts. It makes us wonder, between acting and singing, which she enjoys the most. "Both of them give me the same feeling so I have to say I love them both equally," says Keke. "It's hard to say because my acting is on such a different level than my music that it's kind of hard to give a fair answer. I'm expected and known for acting."

ON FINDING HER VOICE

Her work in films such as *Akeelah* and the *Bee* and *Joyful Noise*, propelled her to stardom, but her ventures in music are building momentum. Last year Keke released her self-titled mixtape that gave her a buzz in the industry as a new, independent artist. Keke describes her sound as R&B with a pop flare and relatable "everyday girl" lyrics. In the past, she's struggled with expressing herself as an artist, but says she's happier now that she has more creative control. "I always felt so unheard when I was with Atlantic and when I was with Interscope. I always felt like no one really understood me or got who I was as an artist or really believed in it. Now, I feel like I'm finally being heard and the music that I'm making is more reflective of who I am," says the 19-year-old. To aid in her musical vision for the new album that will be released soon, Keke has teamed up with super-producer Bangladesh who she believes is challenging her. "Bangladesh has really pushed me out of the box," Keke explains. "A lot of people have said, 'You remind me of Brandy' and he's pushed me away from that. They always say, 'Through your inspiration you find out who you are,' so he's pushed me beyond that and I've come out with music that I never thought I would really enjoy doing. It's so different, yet it's so me, just not the me that I'm used to."

ON BECOMING "CHILLI"

While recording her new album in Atlanta, Keke is also filming her new made-for-TV movie, *Crazy, Sexy, Cool: The TLC Story*, set for a release in the fall of this year on VH1. In the biopic, Keke portrays Chilli, a member of one of the world's most iconic R&B girl groups of all time, TLC. She shares the spotlight with rapper, Lil Mama as Left-Eye and fellow actress, Drew Sidora as T-Boz. Her eyes light up as she reveals her excitement about the role. "I can't believe I'm doing the movie!" she says. "For Chilli, it's like telling her life, for me it's very surreal. It's really, really surreal. Almost like a dream."

Despite Keke and the rest of the cast being thrilled to act in the film, when word got out about who was chosen to play the legendary trio, the world became very critical. For Keke, it was heartbreaking to hear that TLC fans were not pleased with her new role. "I was honestly extremely shocked because all my life

"When I date you that means I see potential for us to go further. I'm a relationship person. When I get in it, you best believe I'm going in for the long haul."

since I was a little kid people would tell me, 'You know, you remind me of Chilli,'" says the actress. "My whole thing was, I don't have to look just like Chilli just to play the part. You know, Angela Bassett, doesn't look anything like Tina Turner. They're different complexions and same thing with Laurence Fishburne and Ike Turner. And even Selena and Jennifer Lopez; Jennifer Lopez isn't even Mexican. For people to be acting that way I was just so completely shocked and I couldn't believe it and I was hurt that my people weren't happy for me." She went on to express her frustration by saying, "This isn't a movie about who can look the most like them, it's about who can play the role. I think people will be pleasantly surprised. We're all working so hard and it's all so close to our hearts. We all have a true love for the group and true love for the characters that we're playing."

For the seasoned actress, the role presents itself as an opportunity for her to combine her singing, dancing, and acting talents while playing one of her inspirations. Outside of long hours on set and intense dance rehearsals, Keke spends quality time with Chilli to capture the essence of the singer. She says they immediately hit it off within minutes of their first meeting. The two spend hours talking and even have sleepovers at Chilli's home in Atlanta. "In order for me to get the right emotion out or the right intent, she explained a lot of the back-story of what happened and it was really interesting to listen to," says Keke. Chilli and T-Boz are also very involved with the production of the movie making sure every detail is portrayed exactly the way it occurred in reality.

Perhaps the most challenging scene for the entire cast to film was the funeral scene regarding the untimely death of Left Eye. Keke remembers what it was like while filming the heartbreaking moment. She says, "I felt the emotion. I felt the grief of Chilli and I took on the grief of them. When I was doing the scene, I was listening to the song 'Missing You' from the end of Set it Off. I listened to that song thinking about the friendship, thinking about loss, and taking on that grief. When I say I was crying, I was like crying! Like crying, crying! It was very draining. People don't realize, in acting, every character is real to you. You take on that person's emotion and their grief. In that very moment, I felt all the grief of me losing someone."

Conveying such powerful emotions was nothing new for Keke, but acting in intimate love scenes certainly came as a very new experience. In the film, Evan Ross plays the role of Chilli's former boyfriend and producer, Dallas Austin. "I get to do my first love scene in this movie, and I was so happy that he was cute to me," says Keke. "A lot of times in my movies, it's not that I am grossed

out by my love interest, but they just haven't been my type. I'm usually kissing white guys and a lot of times people think that white guys are my type. And it's not that they aren't my type, it's just that I love black men."

ON BEING IN LOVE

Keke Palmer may love black men, but only one black man has her heart—her boyfriend, Rodney King. The two met on the set of her former show, True Jackson, VP and says it was love at first sight when they locked eyes. Her jaw practically dropped to the floor. The couple has been going strong for a little over two years and when asked if she's in love, without hesitation she replies, "Yeah, I love him. I like that I can be myself around him, I just really enjoy the honesty of our relationship. I can depend on him, and he's very loyal." But does she believe he is the one? Keke answers, "I don't like to say things like that because then you might jinx it, but I would like to. Me, I don't get into a relationship unless I'm trying to make something out of it. I'm not into dating. If he and I were to break up then I probably wouldn't date anyone for a long time. I wouldn't really be able to date because for me, when I'm going in, I'm going in. Full on with the emotions. I don't see the point in dating a bunch of people. When I date you that means I see potential for us to go further. I'm a relationship person. When I get in it, you best believe I'm going in for the long haul. That's how my parents were."

Keke's parents met when her mother was only 18 years old and tied the knot when she was 20. Because they are still happily married, Keke says she likes to model her relationship after them. Still, there are differences between the two relationships; one being that Keke lives with her boyfriend in an apartment in Los Angeles. She shares how her mother feels about the two sharing a home. "My mom feels normal about it. When I was younger she used to tell me, 'You know, I don't believe in living with people before marriage, and I didn't live with your dad,'" says the superstar. "The reason for that was because my mom saw her sister get into a situation like that and when her and the man broke up, he took all of her things and left her there with nothing. So my mom with me was like, I'm very independent. My house is my house and my things are my things. So for me it's not a way of being dependent on someone to take care of me. So in that sense she believes it's okay, because I can take care of myself."

ON HER EVOLVING CAREER AND MAKING AN IMPACT

As she matures in her personal life, Keke also matures in her acting career. She is approaching a crossroads where she leaves her teen years

behind and becomes an adult, and seeks more roles that challenge her as an actress. With her role on the last season of 90210, Keke is expected to spice things up a bit. Her acting success has coined her reference to the likes of Angela Bassett, regarding her ability to transform into any character. Keke reveals how she feels about the comparison by saying, "I don't mind it at all. I love Angela. She and Laurence Fishburne helped me so much at the beginning of my career. When people say that, I'm happy."

With such a diverse fan base varying in age and background, Keke feels the pressure when exploring new opportunities to advance her work in film and television. Lately she has chosen to steer clear of roles that may lead her to be typecast as the "good girl and the sweet girl." She is currently in the pre-production stages of a movie entitled, Pimp where she will play the lead as a lesbian prostitute from Brooklyn. Obtaining the role was not an easy task. Keke struggled with convincing the production team that her image is not too commercial for the role. After sending a video to the directors of herself in her hometown of Chicago improvising as the character with actual lesbians at her Aunt's hair salon, Keke victoriously won the directors over and got the role. "I was really excited looking for something different than what I usually do. Not necessarily crazy and dramatic, and so left field, but it just so happens that when I read the script that I really did love it. I thought it was really different and felt that it would push me as an actor. I wanted a challenge and this is a challenge," says Keke.

In addition to her new upcoming role, the young luminary is also in the process of producing and hosting her own teen talk show. Singing, dancing, and acting are her passions, but she believes helping others is her purpose. Through her talk show, Keke wants to bring awareness to issues in youth culture dealing with sex, drugs, and learning to co-exist. She claims she was inspired by Muhammad Ali and Ruby Dee who have used their platforms to not only establish their legacies but change the world. Keke says she asked herself one day, "What can I do to use my platform to the max in a positive way that God wants me to? What can I do to spread the love, the joy, and the understanding that I've found through the people I've met and the experiences I've been able to go through? And that's how I thought of my talk show."

With a new talk show, movie, and album in the works all at once, Keke still makes time for herself to reflect on her accomplishments as well as her personal growth. She says the most rewarding part about her career is the people that she inspires and if she could speak to her five year old self now, she would say, "You know you

A full-page photograph of Keke Palmer. She is wearing a light pink, short-sleeved, knee-length dress with a flared skirt. She is also wearing black thigh-high boots with stiletto heels. Her hair is dark and styled in a sleek, straight manner. She is posing with one arm raised behind her head and the other resting on her hip. The background is a solid, dark brown color.

Dress by MaeVivid Designs by Dontarius Clyburn
Necklace by Bebe
Ring & Earrings by Vanity Showroom
Glasses by Anne Fontaine
Shoes by L.K. Bennett

won't believe this girl, but you're not gonna believe what's gonna come to you soon. I just hope you get ready for it. Stay pure and stay sweet and it will all work out and you don't have to change for anybody, 'cause you did it!"

After her last shoot, the bubbly personality, chats with everyone in the room and takes pictures. With such a humble soul to match her endless talent we can't help but wonder who inspires her and is partly responsible for the makings of this phenomenal woman. "My mom," says Keke. "She's real strong. If I could be anything like her, I'd be real good."

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Styling by Julian Lark
Assistant Styling by Jabriel McIntosh
Hair by Sushnika Terry
Makeup by Malika James