

RICH IN SPIRIT

AN INTERVIEW
WITH

KEKE PALMER

PHOTOGRAPHER
PRODUCER
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER
STYLIST
MAKEUP
HAIR

MIKE RUIZ @MIKERUIZONE
JACKSON CHONG @JACKSONCHONG_
MASHA ZOLOTOVA @MASHA.ZOLOTOVA
ALISON HERNON @718BLONDE
MIMI KAMARA @MIMIKAMARA
ANN JONES @ANN_JONESHAIR

Pink Fringe Dress CHENG
@chenghuaichuang
Necklace SULTRY AFFAIR STYLE
@sultryaffirstyle
Shoes ALDO @aldo_shoes





WORDS by
KIMBERLY HADDAD

Keke Palmer is expressive, courageous, and quirky, but above all, she is a natural-born entertainer with a strong sense of self. Influenced by the sounds and sights of her mother, the 27-year-old musician and actress began exploring her creativity at a young age, yearning to connect with those around her and bask in the energetic force of performance that fired her heart like the footlights of Hollywood.

From dazzling the audiences of her hometown church and starring in various films, including her most recent role in *Hustlers*, to her standout comedy series *Turnt Up with the Taylors* and the release of her latest album *Virgo Tendencies Pt. 1*, Palmer is rich in spirit—a woman redefining the meaning of true artistry.

BASIC: We all have a window for displaying the bright side of our personalities, whether on social media or behind the camera. Describe yourself as honestly as you see yourself.

KEKE PALMER: I think I am a very fun and sensitive person. I am incredibly passionate and very faithful.

BASIC: What was it like growing up with your family in Illinois? Do you have a favorite childhood memory or a defining experience that may have influenced the life you have created for yourself?

KEKE PALMER: I think the first solo I did in church kind of gave me a feeling or a theme of what my life would be revolved around, that in some way I'd have a connection to the arts. I realized that early on. My life growing up in Chicago was very simple. It was mundane, but filled with so much magic and so much love. My family didn't come from much, but we didn't realize we didn't have a lot. We weren't materialistic or rich. We were rich because we were rich in spirit and rich in a lot of the traditions that my dad introduced to our family. Most of my fondest memories come from my childhood in Illinois. My mom was a writer and singer herself, and she loved to perform in church. She would always take me to the studios and I would see just how happy performing made her.

BASIC: I love that you said your family was rich in spirit and tradition. It's such a beautiful thing to hear. I was totally stalking your Instagram

earlier and read the post about the excitement you felt when your father took you and your siblings to Blockbuster. I can relate to that so much and it made my heart warm.

KEKE PALMER: Yes, oh my gosh! And it is so sad to imagine that Blockbuster was a really big thing for people in the past. It was just so fun.

BASIC: I would love to touch upon the choir performance a little more as it seems to be a really memorable moment in your life. Can you describe the experience and what went through your mind while being on stage in front of an audience?

KEKE PALMER: Yes, of course. When it came to me doing a solo I felt like I was on fire. I felt connected, something I was always looking for. I still am, which is why I love entertaining so much. I love the feeling of engagement and being surrounded by art. I couldn't quite articulate that feeling as a kid, but reflecting on it as an adult, whenever I would get a solo or sing in church, I was always like, yes! When we perform we are provoking emotion within ourselves and within others and that energy bouncing back and forth was something I really enjoyed. It always gave me a rush.

BASIC: You gained prominence with your very first role in the film *Barbershop 2: Back in Business* where you played the niece of rapper and actress Queen Latifah. Tell me about your first audition and what it was like collaborating with a literal queen at such a young age.

KEKE PALMER: Working with Queen Latifah at such a young age was really impactful for me in the way that I see the industry. I had a really great experience with her and from that moment on, anytime I saw her, she always encouraged and acknowledged me. That really had a positive impact on me and how I felt embarking on this industry. It taught me how to treat those coming up after me because she treated me with so much respect and encouragement that I only wanted to make others feel the way she made me feel. She was a teacher in that regard. When I speak about my first auditions, I just remember being so excited to have the opportunity to give it my best shot. I really love tasks. I am such a task-driven person and I always have motivation to make lists and go through them bit-by-bit. As a kid, I was the same and when I did my first audition for *The Lion*

King at the Chicago Theatre, I just remember going into the room with my mom, them asking me to do something, and having the chance to do so many different things. I just thought it was a lot of fun. It was the process of the arts that I found enjoyable.

BASIC: You developed the beloved comedy series *Turnt Up with the Taylors*, which launched in July. A parody reality series and one-woman-show, it embodies a very unique concept. Can you talk to us about what inspired the project?

KEKE PALMER: I love comedy and I love to play with my voice and different styles of expression. I came up with this character Chelsea Barbie Taylor and originally, my idea for her was something else, but when I started to put the videos up and saw the audience engaging, I saw an opportunity to do something different. I teamed up with Facebook and a production company called Kids at Play that even more so, amplified the idea I had based around the character. Then I had the idea to play all the other parts and I just thought, you know what, this will be challenging, but it will be a really fun experience. I wanted to take it on and make people laugh, but I also wanted to have a good time with it. Eventually, it became *Turnt Up with the Taylors*.

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—KEKE PALMER

didn’t have a crazy paramount budget, but I wanted to make sure if I was going to take this on I was going to really try my best to make these characters their own.

BASIC: Are any of your characters inspired by the people you know?

KEKE PALMER: You know, they’re actually not. I think Chelsea is kind of inspired by the California girl, the stereotypical millennial. She has this sort of blanket personality that is revolving around this underlying narcissism and I think that is where the whole concept of reality television really comes from. She became this sort of thought piece on what people think about millennials and social media influencers.

BASIC: You recently released *Virgo Tendencies Pt. 1* in August of this year. Can you talk to us about your journey in creating this album? Were there people or experiences that inspired the songs?

KEKE PALMER: The entire project was inspired by different moments and feelings I had while working with A-Lex (Alexander Lloyd) and Tasha Catour. I created the album with them and it wasn’t a quick process by any means. Some of the songs I had for a long time and others came out of quarantine. The project is a mixture of both, but I do think that quarantine pushed me to have the time to really put my thoughts together and be more clear about what I wanted to express with it.

BASIC: Can you remember the first time you wrote a song? Describe it to me.

KEKE PALMER: The first time I wrote a song was with this writer named Toby Gad for my first album *So Uncool*. We also went on to write the *True Jackson, V.P.* theme song together. I was 13 when I started writing and that was our first writing session. It was so important to my mom—especially as a kid—to make sure I was a part of it and felt engaged as an artist. I think I understand that more now, obviously, but as a kid I always felt so pressured to find the right words to say and was always so hard on myself. I remember Toby just always encouraging me and letting me know that everything I was saying was good because it was coming from me. His job as a producer was to find that balance in my thoughts and feelings. You know, I haven’t worked with Toby in years. It’s funny that you brought it up. Now you are making me think about him. I never really revisited that experience until now.

BASIC: During a previous interview you said, “my first language is art”. What do these words mean to you and when did you first discover that this was the path you needed to pursue?

KEKE PALMER: I think what I meant by that was that art was the first way I knew how to really connect to people. Growing up—especially when I was younger—I attended a private school where I was the only black student in my class. It was a really tough experience for me and I remember performing in music class was the first time I had felt acknowledged. It was like a had sort of became a shell in that school, but when I performed, I found my voice again. I think I knew then, that art was my language and I felt that language within me. It was the easiest way for me to connect with people and I used that to open doors into the other areas of art I wanted to explore. I think art is all I’ve ever known. I didn’t really envision acting or being on a talk show, but I did know I wanted to sing and be in the entertainment business. I just didn’t yet know what that would entail.

BASIC: You have such an expressive social media presence and are not afraid to speak out about many challenging subjects, including politics, family trauma, and your attendance at the recent BLM protests. How did you find your voice and inner strength?

KEKE PALMER: I think through a lot of what I’ve experienced at a young age was very intense for

Animal Printed Hat HAT COUTURE
@the_confessional_showroom_nyc
Dress MARC BOUWER
@marcbouwer
Shoes ALDO @aldo_shoes



me and sort of forced me to be strong and use my voice, especially when it came to people's perception of me as an entertainer and the struggles I had in music. I really internalized a lot of that and made those things a part of my identity without realizing it. Through metamorphosis, while growing as a person and growing into a woman, I started to unpack a lot of those things. I started learning about anxiety and stress, how to help myself. I realized a major part of what was causing me so much grief was the fact that I wasn't being true to myself or standing up for myself. I realized that my fear of making other people uncomfortable or my fear of not being likeable was not really important. It wasn't about those things. I wasn't trying to hurt anyone's feelings by speaking up for myself. I just had to learn that using my voice needed to be my first priority because if I didn't, I would end up in a lot of unhappy positions and I wasn't going to give people the opportunity to really be or do what I needed because I wasn't even being honest with myself.

BASIC: With all of that said, do you ever feel that sometimes you may subconsciously censor yourself or your creativity because you don't want to offend anyone?

KEKE PALMER: No, I keep it real. However, I do think there is a time and place for everything and that just because I'm a public speaker doesn't mean I have to speak on everything. There are topics that move me and sometimes I find myself being emotionally charged and just forced to speak up, and when I do I am true to myself in that moment, but I am also true to myself in knowing when something is too much for me. I know when I need to retreat and reflect. I think being a public figure or not, you have to always be careful with how much you expose and how much you don't expose because you don't want to exhaust yourself or put yourself in potentially triggering scenarios. Sometimes doing good is just about being chill rather than reactive.

BASIC: You released a book entitled *I Don't Belong to You: Quiet the Noise and Find Your Voice*, an inspiring narrative that encourages women to own their lives with confidence and freedom. Within the book

Headpiece CROWN AND MAIDEN
@crownandmaiden
Embroidered Mosaic Tile Dress,
Belt CLAUDIO CINA
@claudiocinany

you speak about detaching from moments and/or people that have a negative impact on our existence and the way we see ourselves. How have you wrestled with similar issues, i.e. identity, heartbreak, societal pressures?

KEKE PALMER: I feel the same way—social media, friends, family, whatever it may be—at the end of the day, if something is not good for your life, if you're not able to be or reach your full potential, it's okay to set boundaries. No one can speak to that but you. And you don't have to be mean about it. It's just about saying, hey look, this is all I can give right now or I need my space, and

hope they can understand. We just have to be able to set boundaries and sometimes it's really hard. I don't know why, but it is. It took me such a long time to understand that boundaries even existed and that I could have a friend that I might share everything with, but then have another that I only want to go to the club with, you know? Not everything has to always be on the same vibe or the same level.



WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU SAW THAT YOU WISH YOU COULD UN-SEE?
Two Girls One Cup.

WHAT IS YOUR GO-TO MEME?
Probably the "Blinking Guy" meme.

WHAT ARE MOST PEOPLE SURPRISED TO LEARN ABOUT YOU?
That I'm quirky.

FILL IN THE BLANK: I DON'T KNOW WHO NEEDS TO HEAR THIS BUT...
That lemon water ain't doing nothing.

IF SOMEONE WAS GOING TO MAKE A FILM ABOUT YOUR LIFE, WHO WOULD PLAY YOU AND WHY?
I'd say China Anne McClain because she can do so many things like sing and act and dance. She is such a positive and intelligent woman. Plus she's a Virgo!

TOP THREE THINGS ON YOUR BUCKET LIST?
I want to visit Africa, travel to Japan, and perform at The Tony Awards.

WHAT IS THE FAVORITE LOOK YOU'VE WORN TO A BIG EVENT?
The gold dress I wore to the 2019 VMAs is my favorite. I just loved it.

Silver Crystal Fringe Corset Dress
THE BLONDS @theblondsny

