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# Erykah Badu

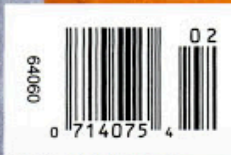
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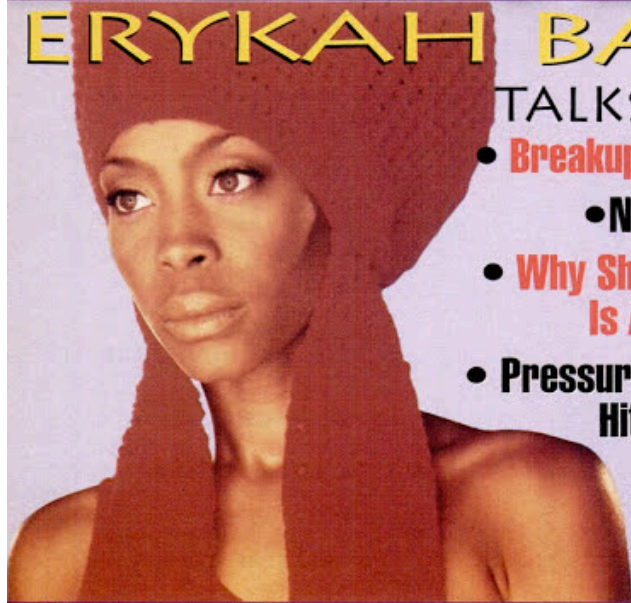
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# ERYKAH BADU

## TALKS ABOUT

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*Erykah Badu is winning rave reviews for her new album, *Mama's Gun* and hit singles, *Bag Lady* and *Didn't Cha Know*.*

**F**amed singer Erykah Badu is a woman who can be considered a "deep" soul sister.

A conversation with her yields the realization that she is as honest and serious as her innovative, thought-provoking and sometimes philosophical, soul music.

During a recent interview, the outspoken songstress talked frankly about everything that matters to her most: her painful breakup with rap star Dre (Andre Benjamin) of the hit group OutKast and how she has learned to fill that void with a new kind of love, why she believes she is a queen and she revealed the pressures of recording her current hit album, *Mama's Gun*, which features the No. 1 hit *Bag Lady*.

Reflecting on her breakup with her beau, who is also the father of her son, she notes: "We were together for three years and we have a 3-year-old son named Seven. We are still together as a family. We are not a functioning couple, but we are a family. So therefore, I am not a single mother. My son has both a father and a mother who are very responsible."

She reveals that the tune, *Green Eyes* on *Mama's Gun* is about her breakup. "It is very personal. It's a three-movement suite, 10 minutes long. I wrote that song in December 1998 and that was shortly after Dre and I decided to separate. It took such a big toll on my emotions that I had to write about it. And Dre thought it was important that I write about it as well.

He said, 'Yeah, you should write about it so other people can feel what we feel and know how that feels so they won't make the same judgment on themselves.' So we thought that it was important as artists that we use our outlet, music, and pray that our freedom of speech and art will aid someone else's growth."

The powerful tune details the stages of the breakup. "The first movement is called 'Denial.' I was denying that I was even upset at all."

She continues, "The second movement is called 'Acceptance?' with a question mark behind it. 'Am I accepting this?' I was kind of starting to accept it. And the third movement is called 'The Relapse.' You go through all these stages of heartache and getting over it. The Brother helped me through it is as much as he could," she laughs. "But that's something we have to do as adults. We can't make anybody else responsible for our feelings. I hope the song shares that bit of wisdom."

She loves OutKast's new album *Stankonia* with the hit *Ms. Jackson*, a tune about his baby's mama's mother.

"I am the mother of his first son, so it may have something to do with me," she admits. "He wanted to give the world something to think about baby's mama's mother and baby's daddy. We are very proud of him, my whole family. My mom just laughs about *Ms. Jackson*. She and Dre are really pretty cool; they talk."

In the tune, she explains that Dre is essentially saying, "I apologize, my intentions were good. I never meant to make your daughter cry.' Nobody wants to do that. He is a very humble, good Brother. He is a really good person."

She has since turned her energy to her

*The elegant songstress, known for her distinctive sound and elaborate headwrap, thrills fans in concert performance with her hit tunes *On and On*, *Tyrone* and *Next Lifetime*. "I want to be a different example of what a Black woman is...I am a queen."*





▲ Badu enjoys precious moments with her son, Seven. His father is rap star Dre (Andre Benjamin) (l) of the hit group OutKast, which also features Big Boi, who is Seven's godfather. Erykah and Dre have broken up, but are still friends. She loves OutKast's new album *Stankonia*. "I think Big Boi and Dre are so creative and diverse," she notes.

music. That, she says, has become her new love.

"I am dating my music right now. I am in love with my music and my son right now—and myself. I am kind of moving on through. I am not in a rush to jump right into a relationship," she admits. "That's not necessary for me to be happy. All I need around me is good people, good friends, good healthy food and my child. That makes me more than happy."

Badu arrived on the music scene in 1997 with her debut album, *Baduizm*. With an elaborate headwrap and the elegance and confidence of an African queen, she ushered in a new look and sound in contemporary music. The Badu sound fuses jazz, R&B, and hip hop.

Her first album yielded the top hit



singles, *On and On*, *Next Lifetime* and *Other Side of the Game* and sold 3 million copies. She followed up with a concert album *Live!* with the hit tune, *Tyrone*.

The 29-year-old singer-songwriter was born Erica Wright in Dallas. She performed onstage at age 4 with her mother, Kolleen Wright, a professional actress. She is the oldest of three and has a sister, Koko (Nayrok), 26, and brother, Eevin, 17. She changed her name to Erykah Badu as a teenager—"kah" for "inner self" and "ba-du" after the scat singing of great jazz vocalists.

She believes she is a queen—a queen who tries to bring meaningful, real music to her fans worldwide. "I am a non-conformist. All of my life I

## COVER STORY



◀ Badu says she has grown as a vocalist, songwriter and producer since her 1997 debut album. "My voice is a lot bigger and I can do a lot more things...my production skills have broadened and my understanding of music has heightened," she says.

is art because I do the Creator's work through my art. You have to pull the soapbox out sometimes because the Creator doesn't give you a platform to stand on to show off your clothes. I try to find positive ways to do that without making people think that I'm judging or that I think I know something, because I don't know anything."

She advises people to "pack light" on her big hit *Bag Lady*. The album features a live, slower version of *Bag Lady*. The radio and video versions are a remix, she explains.

"The song has a lot to do with carrying excess baggage into relationships or into situations or bringing baggage from a relationship situation into the next relationship situation—meaning that you have not forgiven yourself for the last situation. A lot of us carry that baggage as well."

The philosophical songstress notes, "I urge people to pack light. We have a lot of baggage that we have gathered since we were children: the education system and the things that we 'mislearned,' things that really don't have anything to do with us...Romantic relationships where we were actually the ones who needed to change, but we always blamed the partner. And we continue to switch partners over and over again wondering why they still won't act right. Ultimately, it's because we have to let go of our own baggage. There are

have been slightly to the left, a little different."

She points out, "The way I dress: I love adorning myself with my culture. And it is not a Black and White thing for me, but I am very interested in the Black community because there are a lot of professional artists and geniuses who dwell in that community who need to be uplifted in some kind of way."

She continues, "I want to be a different example of what a Black woman is, what a Black person is. I wear my headwrap because a headwrap is a crown, and I am a queen. A headwrap demands a certain amount of respect—it just does, and I am always headwrapped."

She wants to uplift listeners with her music. "The Creator has given me a tremendous gift, and I feel that I have a responsibility since I've been given the platform to use my creativity for the Creator. I guess my religion

many kinds of bags that we carry. I urge people to pack light."

She also explains the meaning of the album's catchy title, *Mama's Gun*. Badu says her music is like a symbolic weapon of empowerment that a caring mother might use. "My words and my music are my weapon of choice. And as you grow, you need something to go out there with in the world and protect you. I urge folks to use my music and my words as they will, as they should, as they see fit."

Turning her attention to the making of *Mama's Gun* she explains, "What I am most proud of in this album is its sequence. It took a lot of thought. You can feel the energy of it."

She explains that she changed the order of the songs after the album's artwork had been completed. "The artwork was done before the album was done. As a matter of fact, there was a deadline on the album, and since I don't go by deadline, I go by

lifeline, it was not completed until it was completed. I do it when I feel it. As an artist you just can't shout on cue," she believes.

She also explains, "The sequence and all the artwork was finished and turned in, and I just changed it. And I said, 'Hey, just put it on the CD and the next run, we'll change it, and I will put a little apology, but people will understand. I never underestimate people's ability to understand. The lyrics were not completed either. I finished two of the songs the day of mastering. So, the artwork was gone already. So it will be in the next batch or on the website—(www.erykahbadu.com)."

She thanks her fans for their strong support, which has made her a Grammy Award-winning, multi-platinum-selling superstar. "I love and appreciate the fans. I do not take them for granted," she states.

—CLARENCE WALDRON

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**JET top 20 SINGLES**



■ JAY-Z



■ OUTKAST

- 1. I JUST WANNA LOVE U**  
Jay-Z (Roc-A-Fella)
- 2. MS. JACKSON**  
OutKast (LaFace)
- 3. I WISH**  
R. Kelly (Jive)
- 4. BAG LADY**  
Erykah Badu (Motown)
- 5. INDEPENDENT WOMEN PART 1**  
Destiny's Child (Columbia)
- 6. MY FIRST LOVE**  
Avant featuring Ketara Wyatt (Magic Johnson)
- 7. BETWEEN ME AND YOU**  
Ja Rule featuring Christina Milian (Murder Inc.)
- 8. CASE OF THE EX**  
Mya (Interscope)
- 9. SHAKE IT FAST**  
Mystikal (Jive)
- 10. LIAR**  
Profyle (Motown)
- 11. E.I.**  
Nelly (Fo' Reel)
- 12. 911**  
Wyclef Jean Featuring Mary J. Blige (Columbia)
- 13. SOULIAS**  
Master P (No Limit)
- 14. ONE WOMAN MAN**  
Dave Hollister (Def Squad)
- 15. BOUNCE WITH ME**  
Lil' Bow Wow (So So Def)
- 16. EMOTIONAL**  
Carl Thomas (LaFace)
- 17. BY YOUR SIDE**  
Sade (Epic)
- 18. JUST BE A MAN ABOUT IT**  
Toni Braxton (LaFace)
- 19. OPEN MY HEART**  
Yolanda Adams (Elektra)
- 20. THAT OTHER WOMAN**  
Changing Faces (Atlantic)