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Erykah Exhales!

OUTSPOKEN
SINGER
SOUNDS OFF ON
MUSIC,
MOTHERHOOD,
MARRIAGE AND
MEN

Erykah Badu

MOTHER OF **DEBARGE** GROUP
RECALLS RISE AND FALL OF
HER FAMOUS FAMILY



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Erykah badu

Tells Why It Took
5 Years For CD
'New
Amerykah'



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COVER STORY

By Clarence Waldron
JET MAGAZINE

Erykah Badu says she believes in "lifelines not deadlines."

She likes taking her time, getting it just right and letting Spirit dictate which way to go.

That's why her new CD, *New Amerykah (Part One: The 4th World War)*, slated for release this week (Feb. 26), is her first full studio recording in five years.

"I'm more like an oven than a microwave," she explains to JET during an interview at her New York home.

"I don't quickly serve something up just because people expect me to. I serve it up when it is well done, cooked and ready. I go by the lifeline, not by the deadline. I believe in lifelines not deadlines. I do it when I feel it."

She explains, "Deadline seems like some kind of finalization of a thing. Lifeline is when it is born and it starts to live. A lifeline gives birth to something and giving birth is a process."

The outspoken soul artist also discusses everything from her music to her two children, her thoughts on marriage and what she is looking for in a man.

Badu, who turns 36 on the day of her CD's release, says foremost in her life are her children, Seven, 10 and Puma, 3. "My first job is being a mother. That comes before anything for me. And that helps me to be as creative as I am."

"They are very patient," she says of

► Erykah Badu spend precious family time with her children, Seven, 10 and Puma, 3.

her children. "They are highly intelligent beings. They are different. Seven is humble and has a quiet character. He doesn't speak unless he has something to say, very much like his father, Andre [3000 of OutKast fame]."

Puma, she says, is "vivacious and creative. She is very much like her mother. She's me all over again, let my mother tell it," she laughs. "We have a good time." Her daughter's father is rapper The D.O.C.

"I want them to know they are spiritual beings first. Human beings second; man or woman, third; Black, White, or whatever, last. "Spirituality is first because when you can see through someone to the Spirit, you have more patience with them, you can identify with them. You become one with them. There's no



Courtesy Erykah Badu

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separation of us as people.”

Badu, who splits her time between homes in Dallas and New York, homeschools her children. “I homeschool them because I am the best person for the job. I am the best person to mold their minds. And I trained for this job all of my life. I am a creative parent. We don’t have any rules. The only rule we have is ‘do what I say, when I say and watch me.’”

Puma means “purity and balance” in the astrological star system. Seven means whole, “the number of completion,” she explains.

She assures her fans that her new CD

► The four-time Grammy Award winner thanks her mother, Kolleen Wright, for recognizing and encouraging her talent. “She taught me I was the best and that I am a winner.”

Courtesy Erykah Badu

◀ Always electrifying, Erykah Badu has been touring worldwide since her last CD. Her latest single and video is *Honey*, which she directed. She reveals she also is a licensed holistic health practitioner and consultant. “That’s what I would do if I were not a singer. I hope to open up a wellness center someday.”

is pure Erykah Badu. “It’s my testimony of where we are as a race, as a people and as a family here in America. This is my perspective. That’s why I put my name in it, *Amerykah*.”

She adds, “Some people will get some messages from *Amerykah*. Some people will get something from the drums, from the beats. It is all there for them; you can take what you need from the music.”

The song *Me* is “a self-liberation song,” she explains. “At the beginning of liberation, you must begin with yourself, the first thing you become is very honest with yourself and you call it like it is. It’s also a testimony of where I’ve been.”

In the tune, she says, “had two babies, different dudes and for both of them, my



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► Erykah Badu celebrates her success with her paternal grandmother, Viola Wilson.

love was true...this year I turn 36, damn it seems it came so quick."

She admits that she would love to be married, but it just hasn't been in the cards for her right now. "Marriage would be a wonderful thing, it's a beautiful thing. But you can't force it because everybody expects that of you. It has to be something that is real, natural and beautiful."

She continues, "I come from a long line of 'queendoms,' strong women who raised their children alone. I saw Black women who are resilient and strong. We are best with our mates, but we can make it without them, too, but we are best with them," she says.

Badu's father, William Wright Jr., died in 2001. "He was a beautiful person," she says.

She is clear about what type of man she is seeking. "I wrote in my journal what an ideal man should be. Someone who is responsible, creative and accepting. Someone who is free. When I say free I mean not being a slave to anything or anybody."

Badu arrived on the scene in 1997 with the multiplatinum selling debut CD *Baduizm*, with the hits *On and On*, *Next Lifetime* and *Other Side of the Game*. She followed up with a concert album *Live!* with the smash *Tyrowe*. With her trademark elaborate turbans, incense-burn-



Courtesy Erykah Badu

ing mystique and commanding stage presence, she became an immediate hit.

Today, she thanks her family for their inspiration and encouragement. She realizes she could never have done it alone. "Family is your tribe, your tradition, your soul's DNA."

She says her mother, Kolleen Wright, a former actress, and maternal grandmother, Thelma Gipson, paternal grandmother, Viola Wilson, and godmother, Gwendolyn Hargrove, taught her how to be a lady—a self-assured, elegant lady onstage and off. "My mother is magical. She taught me I was the best and that I am a winner. And I believed her. And as a result, I never lost anything, ever."

Badu's brother, Eevin, travels with her and serves as her merchandise manager, and sister Koko, (stage name Nay-rok) is one of her backup singers.

Badu's mother told JET: "It's going to sound like bragging but it is fact. She is the most generous, truthful person that I know. If she weren't my daughter, I would definitely want her as my best friend. She is true to herself. She is no joke. She is who she is. She is a strict veg-



Courtesy Thelma Gipson

▲ Erykah Badu says she appreciates the life teachings of her maternal grandmother, Thelma Gipson, and the other mother figures in her life.

an. She is very much down to earth and doesn't take herself too seriously."

Proud grandma Thelma Gipson told JET: "I knew she was going to become famous—even as a little girl 2 or 3 years old, she was always performing. Everything comes natural to her, it is her gift from the Lord."

Grandma Viola Wilson notices that Badu is passing on the same kind of confidence and self-esteem that she and other family members instilled to her daughter, Puma. "Puma told me one day, 'I am wonderful, I am beautiful.' And I said 'you go girl.'"

Godmother Gwendolyn Hargrove

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recalled: "All of us together made sure she went into a positive direction and cultivated the arts. We nurtured that."

Born Erica Wright in Dallas, she changed her name to Erykah Badu as a teenager—"kah," an Egyptian term for "inner self" and "badu" after her favorite scat sound. She graduated from Dallas Arts Magnet High School and majored in theater with a minor in quantum physics at Grambling State University. She sang in the choir at First Baptist Church of Hamilton Park in Dallas. Her first major public performance as a child was as Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* at The Black Academy of Arts and Letters in Dallas.

Curtis King, founder of the academy, recalled: "Even as a little kid around 6 years old, Erykah had this presence that drew you to her. She's just amazing and still comes by the academy today to lend her support."

Turning her attention once again to her pride and joy, her children, Badu looks up at a chalk writing on the wall in her living room. There are motivational messages for her children, words that she wrote in 1997, the year Seven was born. The words seem to sum up everything that Erykah Badu feels today.

"Know your Creator. Know your self. Love them both....Feel your power. ..Master yourself. ..Watch your tongue. Where's your crown? Wear your crown." □