

Mekole Wells comes 'Full Circle'

Charlotte-based musician battles tragedy and comes out on top with a new CD

by Monica Simpson

For most people Sunday nights are usually a time spent preparing for work or school for the next week. Mekole Wells, however, is pacing around backstage preparing for her CD release performance.



Wells collaborated with producer Jerry Hardison on her new CD, 'Full Circle.'

Unlike some people who feel that Sundays are for rest and relaxation, Wells is busy working with her band to finalize music for the highly publicized event. "When I heard the commercial on V101.9 about my CD 'Full Circle' and the show, I could not believe that my dreams were coming true," Wells said.

Wells began singing professionally at the age of 25 when she was signed with Bassment Records. "Craig Bevan and Berry Zeger, my producers at the time, felt that my voice was best for house music," Wells said. She began to work the house music circuit under the stage name "Eleesa."

During her time with Bassment Records she had three top 40-dance hits, which included "Make My Day" and "Where Did Our Love Go."

Wells continued to sing with Bevan and Zeger until she decided that it was time for a change. "House music was given to me to sing and I took it because I wanted to be a part of the business," she said, "but I realized that this music was not feeding my soul." After being thrown on stage with jazz singer Jonathan Butler, who she would later sing background for, Wells knew that jazz music was where she belonged.

After her time with Butler, Wells began to sing with other well-known jazz and R&B artists, such as Greg Washington and Carl Anderson. It seemed as if Wells was on her way to being the next great jazz singer. She was well known, she had songs recorded and she knew major people in the industry. All things seemed to be going according to her script, until tragedy struck.

Wells fell victim to a domestic violence incident that left her with multiple stab wounds to her body and throat. "I was so scared for my life that I had to move from my home in California to North Carolina," she said. "I was only interested in repairing my life, but music was still deeply embedded in my soul."

She was not the only person who felt that music was her calling. Her partner Kim started to introduce her to other vocalists in the Charlotte community. Soon Wells was singing at Siegel Avenue Presbyterian Church and taking part in karaoke night at Hartigan's Irish Pub. It was here that she met local singer Jill Austin. The two women would later do a show at Charlotte's Lesbian & Gay Community Center for a full house.

After receiving a wonderful response from the show, Wells realized that it was time to put all of her energy into making a CD. She met musician Jerry Hardison at a local event where he was playing.

"I knew as soon as I saw him that he was the man to produce my CD," she said. "We had an immediate connection that I knew would produce great things."

While in the process of making her CD, Wells decided to do her first one-woman show.

"I felt it was time to bring a new vibe into Charlotte," she said. Wells' show, "For Lovers Only," at the Charlotte Actor's Studio Theatre on Valentine's Day, was completely sold out.

"I could not believe that people were enjoying my music," Wells said. "I did not think that Charlotte was ready for an out, unapologetic, black lesbian who was telling her story musically."

One thing that makes Wells different than other jazz singers is that she aims to unlock any closed doors in people's minds that will stop them from seeing a bigger picture. "As a performer in the LGBT community, it would be easy to stay in that one box that says gay, but I feel that it is time for us to move into the mainstream musically just as Ellen did with daytime talk shows and The Fab 5 did with entertainment television," she said. "However, we must also support each other within our community," Wells continued. "If we do not support each other how do we expect others to support us?"

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