

Omarion

By Randy J. Klodz

Photography by Eric Ogden

Few R&B stars are able to tackle a "boy band," a solo career, and an acting career while making the girls swoon in just 21 short years. The actor, and former B2K member Omarion Grandberry, called SOAK as he returned to California from his Las Vegas trip to celebrate his mother's birthday.

Omarion talks about the big O, what it's like to have 7-year old fans, and what it feels like to be *Punk'd* by Ashton Kutcher as millions of fans witnessed.

SOAK: *Your debut solo album O already stands as a big success. What's your mindset going into the release of your latest album 21?*

Omarion: Everything that I have put into this album, I took the time out to write and now have a voice. It's difficult sometimes for artists to have a voice, and be involved in the music and the things that he or she wants to do, especially when there's a major record company involved. They have a big part in controlling everything. But this time around, because of the success of *O* and because of my maturity level, I have the opportunity to be expressive and say, 'I don't like this, I don't like that.' Of course you come to a happy medium with your record company, your managers, and your producers. I'm happy.

SOAK: *People fell in love with you as a member of B2K; have you run into any instances now over the years where you have to try hard to shed the young boy band stigma?*

Omarion: It was really difficult for me at one point in time, especially now in my grown-up stage. It's difficult when you're a kid in the industry and you don't have facial hair, like a beard or a goatee, and sometimes people are used to looking at you a certain way, so when you grow up, it's almost like a shock to your audience and to your young fans. Many of my fans are around the same age as me and there are plenty of younger kids that look up to what I do. I want to do music for them, but at the same time, I want people to respect that I am 21, and that I am older now and I can do some different things.

SOAK: *You even do movies. One of my colleagues has nieces that are 11 and 7, and they are big fans of your acting work in You Got Served. What's it like having such a diverse age group of fans?*

Omarion: That's so major to me and it really touches my heart. A lot of younger kids do know me from *You Got Served*, *Fat Albert*, and other projects I have worked on. It really makes me smile, because when *You Got Served* first came out and we heard reviews of what was happening in the theaters; people would literally start dance battles in

the theaters.

SOAK: *What movie projects are you working on currently?*

Omarion: I just did a film with Jennifer Lopez producing that's currently untitled [Editors note: due in 2007, it currently has the working title of *Reggaeton*]. I play a starring role of a young character who is from New York and wants to become a rap star. I also have some great co-stars with me including Giancarlo Esposito, Victor Rasuk, and it's just an all-star cast. I'm able to really show my ability to act this time. I'm doing some crying; I have a love scene. The acting and the music makes my entertainment whole. I feel I can't do one without the other, just like Fred Astaire, Gene Kelly, Sammy Davis Jr., and all of those cats back then, including Frank Sinatra. Each of those guys had the ability to do all of those things and I feel like that's important to have.

SOAK: *They made you cry on camera? Did they have to use false tears?*

Omarion: Oh, no. That was hardcore acting. No false tears for me. I had to reach deep down inside with some things I had gone

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through personally in my life. I was actually surprised, because I now know how it feels to look at somebody and totally take their face off and put my real dad's face over his. In the movie, Giancarlo Esposito plays my father, and in the scene, it's so emotional; mentally, I take his face off and put my real dad's over his. It's ironic because my dad wasn't really there for me in real life, just like the character I'm playing. It was almost like real life. A lot of people don't understand that acting isn't supposed to be acting. Acting is supposed to be a true feeling that comes from within.

SOAK: *With being so young and having a burgeoning music and acting career, you have already become an inspiration for many young people.*

Omarion: It's amazing. To be able to go on stage and sing to the crowd and have them wave their hands in the air—it's a huge responsibility, and more than anything, I feel that God put me in this position to take that on and to give people inspiration, and to give people hope with the understanding that hey, I was normal once too. I'm still normal, I might not be able to walk around the same—I have to sign autographs sometimes—but it's all a part of the job and it's all the part of inspiring someone.

SOAK: *Millions of people by now must have*

seen you on MTV's Punk'd when Bow Wow set you up in that tricky situation with the girl by the pool, and the Italian father asked you who you were, and you replied, 'I'm a famous singer,' and he said, 'the only famous singer is Sinatra.' What was that like?

Omarion: Oh yeah. [laughs] That was really funny. The reason it was funny was because I felt like it was a realistic situation and people got to see my true self. There was no faking. I tried to be respectful and then at the end I got pretty upset. I didn't know what to do, but Bow Wow's a really good friend of mine, and it was pretty fun to get *Punk'd*. [laughs]

SOAK: *Do people confuse you with your buddy Bow Wow?*

Omarion: No, but I have actually gotten confused with Ludacris and Allen Iverson. I don't know how that happened. I'm only 5'6"

SOAK: *Hey, at least they're both talented guys.*

Omarion: With Ludacris, I was really surprised. I guess there's something with guys with braids. Ludacris has different hair now, so I don't think I'll be getting that

anymore.

SOAK: *You also must have been working on your killer-crossover dribble in between takes on the set and during breaks of the recording process.*

Omarion: [laughs] Right. What's different is that Iverson plays basketball and Ludacris raps. And I'm totally an R&B singer. It's all good.

SOAK: *What are your future plans?*

Omarion: We're definitely going to get out on the road. The road is what we do. The fans always come out and support with sold-out arena shows. More than anything, I can't wait for the album to come out. When I was in B2K, and even on my first album, I had a lot of wonderful writers and producers that I was working with, but a lot of the experiences they were writing about weren't mine. In essence, they weren't true. I was just kind of singing. I found that when I was writing a lot of the songs for this album, everything was more passionate; everything was more of me, because it was real situations I was going through. I can now honestly say, 'If you ever want to get to know who I am, listen to my music.'

Check out more of Omarion at his website omariononline.com.

