

—TRANSCRIPT - AISHA KENYETTA

Interviewee: AISHA KENYETTA

Interviewer: MICHAEL RICE, HOLLY RICKET, GABRIEL GRIMSTAD

Interview Date: APRIL 11, 2017

Location: Charleston

Length: 48 min.

GABRIEL GRIMSTAD: Okay, can you tell us your full name and your date of birth?

AK: Yes. My name is Aisha Frazier, and my birthday is October 2nd, 1980.

GG: Okay. And I have a couple questions about like your personal life, especially growing up. I want to know like what was life like for you growing up in a small city in South Carolina, like really small.

AK: A very small city. I grew up in — I graduated with sixty-one people. That's how small my town is. It's Monetta, South Carolina. I am an only child to a mom who is a pastor and a father who is a deacon. So, PK, like I said, only child, but my mom is the oldest of seven. My dad's the baby of seven. So, lots of cousins, lots of family around at all times. My dad's family is the musical family. My dad's church is the one that I grew up in. And so, everything pretty much revolved around the family and what we were going to do after church on Sunday. And everybody either sings or plays an instrument in our family. So, it was music at all times, even if it was playing records or playing cassette tapes, yes, you know, music all the time in our family.

GG: What was that like when you were young? You had a mom who was a pastor and a dad that was a deacon. I mean...

AK: It didn't really cause any issues, I think, until I became a teenager. And then, you know, you run into those — you have those moral decisions to make as a teenager. Do I really want to go with my friends, or am I going to be the good girl and just go home? And so, that's kind of where it got dicey, but I survived with minimal punishments. I got a couple of speeding tickets, but other than that, you know, pretty much survived unscathed.

GG: Okay. And we saw we were looking into you that you went to Erskine College...

AK: I did.

GG: ...and then to Southern Wesleyan?

AK: Yes.

GG: Did you always like — did you have other aspirations besides being a singer?

AK: I've always been interested in a bunch of different things. My BA is in athletic training, and I love sports, love being able to help people, and my ultimate goal was to actually become a funeral-services director. I haven't gotten there yet. Every time I get my classes started, something comes up where I can't finish. But that was my ultimate goal, and I got the athletic training degree to get myself into the medical services and then I would move to the next level and move to the next level.

But singing has always been just I wouldn't say a hobby. It's always been there. So, it was never something I looked at as a career. It's just always been there. So, when I thought of having a career, I didn't think of music as a career, because it was always there.

GG: Right. So, do you see yourself one day actually being able to take those classes?

AK: Yeah, one day, hopefully.

GG: You're still pretty young, so.

AK: Yeah. One day, hopefully, I'll be able to—you know, I've been able to apprentice at funeral homes, and so I've gotten a lot of the practical work in. Still something that I want to do. I just haven't gotten the classes under my belt to be certified and have that piece of paper to say I can do it.

GG: So, what's life like balancing your career, like your work life and your personal life? Being a singer, you know, you're probably constantly on the go.

AK: Yes.

GG: Is it difficult?

AK: Very. I have a seven-month-old and a twenty-month-old. And so, and my husband is currently deployed. I have a day job. I work for Bank of America, fifteen years now, and it's difficult. Every day is planned to the hour. I have something to do every hour of every day, and I've never been very organized. I am uber-organized now.
(laughs)

HR: Yeah, I bet so! Two little ones.

GG: I feel like you probably have to be.

AK: Yes, yes. My mother-in-law is amazing. My village is amazing. So, that's really the only way I can do what I do. That, and coffee.

GG: So, you mentioned that you want to one day be a funeral-services director. Is that what you imagine your life after, you know, a singing career being?

AK: Yeah.

GG: Is there a life after the singing career? Do you want to always do that?

AK: I think it's just going to be something that's always there. You know, being able to sing is something that I, you know — being able to perform, I guess I should say, is just that's what I really enjoy. Being on stage, being able to connect to people, being able to make people happy or to even to show appreciation, you know, whether it's to sing for somebody's wedding ceremony or even to sing if somebody requests you to sing at a family member's funeral. I mean, for people to entrust you with their special moments is a big deal, whether you're getting paid to do it or not. So, if I can carry a tune at ninety-three years old, then I plan to still be able to do it.

GG: Right. That's like a skill set that doesn't really go away.

AK: Exactly.

HOLLY RICKET: So, I want to go back to the beginning, and there's something that we read, talked about you were in the choir. And he'll talk and ask you more questions about that. But how did you get started in the choir, like at church? Was this the church that your mom is a pastor at?

AK: Yes.

HR: Okay.

AK: She wasn't the pastor then. It's because it's, like I said, it's my dad's church, actually. But we just, you know, it's a family church. Everybody is connected somehow by blood and just everybody is a singer and the choir would sing on Sundays and I'd want to be with my cousin on the choir. And so, I would sit with them and just started singing with them. And somebody gave me a little plastic play microphone and I would carry it

around all the time and sing.

HR: So, you were in the choir even when you were little.

AK: Even when I was little.

HR: And you were in choir until...

AK: Until I left to go to Erskine, so until '98.

HR: So, when did you transition out of gospel music, or is that still what you sing?

AK: I still, yeah. I still, I'm Worship Leader at Seacoast North Charleston.

HR: Okay. I go there sometimes. It's a good church.

AK: Yeah. So, I still — I've never transitioned out of gospel. My mom is happy to hear that.

HR: Yes!

AK: You know, I don't think it's something that you can get away from, just because when you're singing gospel, you're not just performing. You know, you're worshiping. You're creating an experience for others to worship. And so, it becomes more than just a performance. So, I don't think I'll ever stop singing gospel.

HR: But what other kind of music do you also sing? I know I read somewhere that you've done covers for bands like Guns N' Roses.

AK: I'm a huge GNR fan!

HR: So, how did you get into that area, and were your family supportive of that?

AK: Yes. I... in our household, there was nothing that was considered the music we don't listen to. I mean, we listened to everything. My parents have always been avid music lovers, and, you know, we had the records that we would play on Saturday

morning while we were cleaning the house. And everything. My dad had Black Sabbath records and, you know, we listened.

We listened to everything, and my parents always made sure that I knew that I don't have to just listen to what's considered music for black people, you know. I could listen to whatever I wanted to listen to, and I gravitated to... 80s hair bands and classic rock. That's kind of where — and funk. So, which that made my daddy happy, because he's a huge Parliament-Funkadelic fan. And so, that's kind of where I landed. Chaka Khan is my — she's my one. She's my idol. If she were to walk in this room right now, you'd have to give me smelling salts. And so, the funk and 80s rock, classic rock, that's what I love. So, give me some Bad Company, GNR, and Chaka Khan, and I'm good.

HR: So, you went from gospel music and you still do it and then you started doing covers. So, when did you transition, or have you, to your own music, writing your own music?

AK: I am writing a lot. I've been a little bit hesitant to show what I've written, and one of my friends is working with me on that, because always in the beginning, I would only write if I felt negative emotions. I never really wrote because I was happy to be here. It was always, you know, I'm furious and I'd write things down. And so, now I'm getting to the point where I can put things on paper that aren't emotionally charged. I can put things down. You know, I woke up this morning. It was pretty outside, and it made me think of something to write down. I have not put that on record anywhere.

HR: Have you ever sung any of your own music?

AK: Yes, I have.

HR: Where?

AK: Not out in public.

HR: Oh! Do you think you'll get there?

AK: I have for friends. Maybe at some point. It's very... it exposes you. It really — it exposes you in a way that's really... even if it's not necessarily something that you are revealing, it's like you're putting yourself out there, you know, for other people to hear and other people to see. And so, for me, I think it's just going to be, at what point am I okay with that exposure? And I'm not there yet.

HR: Yeah. So, then, how did you get introduced to the band AmpSquared?

AK: AmpSquared, yeah.

HR: How did that come about?

AK: So, AmpSquared is me and my friend Rodrick Simmons. Rodrick is actually the music director at Seacoast North Charleston. And Rodrick and I used to sing with Secrets together a while back. And when I left Secrets, Rodrick left Secrets, and we decided to collaborate. And what we really wanted to do was just amp up, you know, the cover scene. You know, everybody does covers, and they sound just like the record, or they, you know. But what we wanted to do is just funk everything, I mean, just even... everything that you think you're going to hear, turn it on its ear. And he was ready for that.

We wanted a full band with horns and musical stylings and just, you know, really taking it up a notch. And so, we decided to work together. And now we're neighbors in real life. And so, we get to really, you know, we are a for-real garage band right now, because we're — .

HR: Are you looking for any of this to ever get published?

AK: Yes.

HR: Or is it already in some way, like published? Is it on the radio?

AK: We have some things that are. We have some Christmas singles out, but we haven't done anything beyond that. Now, Rodrick has. Rodrick works and he writes for gospel artists all over and he's toured with D'Angelo. He's toured with Joss Stone, people like that. And so, now he's basically, I think I'm his pet project, pretty much, but, you know, at some point, you know, I'll have some things out there. But, again, it becomes how much of yourself are you ready to put out there?

HR: Right. So, do you do like gigs around Charleston?

AK: I do.

HR: And how do you market yourself for those?

AK: I really am more of a freelance performer. I work with just about every band around. I do a lot with Emerald Empire, which is a collective of musicians here. We do a lot of weddings. We do corporate events, things like that. And then, I work with Super Deluxe. I work with Plane Jane. I work with pretty much whoever is out there that would like to sing with me. And I stay busy.

HR: But then another question I was really interested in, your husband. So, I read somewhere that you guys were recently married...

AK: 2014.

HR: ...with the two kids. So, does your husband share that musical interest with you, or does he support what you do?

AK: He loves it. He won't sing. He can sing, but he won't sing. And he, you know, he supports me, and if it's — even if it's staying at home with the boys so I can do a

last—minute show, you know, he's supporting. Or if we get that one night where my mother-in-law decided to take them, you know, he'll come with me to my show or he'll come pick me up or drop me off and things like that. So, he's very supportive.

HR: That's awesome.

MICHAEL RICE: So, we know that you transitioned kind of from out of gospel into more of the R&B and 80s music. But I want to ask you, of all of the genres that you have sung, what is your favorite, if you have one?

AK: 80s. 80s, rock. 80s rock, 80s pop. Universally, everybody likes it. So, from a performance standpoint, if you sing Whitney Houston "I Wanna Dance with Somebody" or if you sing Bon Jovi's "Livin' on a Prayer," everybody in the room is going to sing along with you. And to me, that's where I'm having the most fun, when I can be out and in the crowd and enjoying the crowd and, you know, holding my microphone out for somebody to say, "Whoa!" You know. So, from a performance standpoint, I would say just 80s pop, 80s rock. From a personal standpoint, my favorite to sing is the funk. Give me the funk.

MR: So, when you're doing cover art, when you're a cover artist, a lot of times, you have to sing these extremely difficult songs, like you mentioned Whitney Houston. Someone who sings one of her songs, they have to be really prepared for it. But every now and again, you may get someone who you think can kind of hold a torch to Whitney. Have you ever gotten that reaction from a crowd where they say, "Wait a minute. Who's Whitney?"

AK: Yes. There are certain — there are certain songs that... you've got to be very bold to try. There are certain Whitney songs that I think are safe. You know, "Dance with

Somebody" is still not easy to sing but one of her safer songs to sing. You know, everybody is not going to try "I Will Always Love You," you know. I do "Don't Stop Believing." There are a lot of artists and Charleston that won't do it. I'm either crazy, or — but I can do it. That's probably the one that when I start singing it, people are like, "Is she really going to do this? Is she going to do it?" And they kind of look and wait and then when you hit the note, they're like, "She did it." (laughs)

MR: Have you ever really participated in like talent shows? A lot of people get their fame from talent shows. Have you ever been a part of those?

AK: When I was younger, I would, you know, be in talent shows. Now, not so much, just because I sing all the time, you know. Even karaoke. When I go to karaoke, I will purposely pick something I've never sung before, because, I mean, I can sing "Uptown Funk" in my sleep. I can sing "At Last" in my sleep. There are certain songs that... that really and truly, if you're a performer and you go to karaoke, it's not fair, for the others. And it's not about performing. It's about having fun. So, you know, I'm not going to karaoke to try to show you how well I can sing. So, I always try to keep that in mind when I do stuff like that.

I don't — very rarely will I do a talent show, unless it was just strictly this is Aisha and she's a singer. She's going to sing you a song. Now, if it's a competition, I won't do it.

MR: So, you mentioned you are kind of transitioning into making your own music, writing your own music. You also mentioned that Chaka Khan was one of your idols. So, do you kind of see yourself in her, and are you modeling your music off of hers?

AK: I definitely. I can definitely see the parallels in how I write, though I even, even the way I sing, from a covers standpoint, she's always — I'm very percussion-focused. I'm more of, I will always tell people, I am not a finesse singer. I'm a power singer. So, you know, if there's a note that I need to hit, I can hit it. But I'm not going to give you thirty-two notes in five seconds. That's not me. And that's not Chaka. But when I sing, my diction is rhythmic. My voice is an extension of the percussion instruments. It's not — I'm not the violin. I'm the bass. You know.

MR: So, as a singer, a lot of times, when you're a very well singer, you get everyone asking you, saying if you decide to go to church on a random Sunday, someone will say, "Oh, well, come up here and sing this selection." I see that. I've seen that a lot. Have you ever reached that point where you're just like, I don't want to sing this week; just give me a break?

AK: There have been times where I didn't go places, because I knew that if I got there, they would ask me to sing. And I'm not proud of that. (laughs) But, you know, sometimes you do want to just sit in the audience. However, I know that I've been given a gift, and for the most part, I try to, you know, honor that in any way I can. Every time I step foot in church, I always have one in my pocket, because you might have to sing. So, instead of going, oh, my God, oh, my God, oh, my God, what am I going to sing, I have one in my pocket when I pull up in the parking lot.

MR: That's great.

HR: That's smart. You're always ready.

MR: So, I believe we've all heard your voice. We've done our research. And you mentioned that you want to have a career in funeral services. So, what will it take for you

to kind of branch off and go straight in your career in music, because I think we all can agree that it's worth it.

AK: You know, I don't know. Everybody asks me that question. You know, "What is it going to take for you to say 'I'm going to be a full-time performer'?" And, you know, I don't know what it is. I feel like if it happens, then it happens. I'm probably not going to do anything to purposefully make it happen. I'm content with I'm blessed to be able to work as much as I work, and at the moment, that's enough for me. That's enough for me. You know, at some point, I'll put some music out there. Do I need to be a, quote/unquote, "successful performer"? I feel like I am. I'm successful. I'm successful, based on what I wanted to do as a singer.

Would I like to have a platinum single or a platinum album? That would be awesome. But then, on the flip side of that, can I take my babies on tour? You know. And Mommy is much more important than performer for me at the moment. So, and I'm kind of out of that window of cutesy pop singer. You know, I'm past that age. So, (laughs) I have to... you know, I think about, from a marketing standpoint, you know, how they market singers, how they market performers, especially women. I'm thirty-six. You know, I'm kind of outside of that, you know. (laughs)

MR: It's never too late. It's never too late.

GABRIEL GRIMSTAD: Okay, yeah, going back on your music tastes, like what you like, I'm a huge fan of 80s rock. So, I want to know, like what's your favorite band?

AK: Guns N' Roses.

GG: Guns N' Roses. That's it, huh?

AK: Guns N' Roses is my favorite 80s rock band. But then, of course, I love

Poison and I love Toto and I, you know... Gosh, I don't — I mean, I could go on.

GG: Yeah. It's a long list, I'm sure.

AK: Yes. Bon Jovi.

GG: Like Bad Company, you said.

AK: Bad Company.

GG: Great music.

AK: I just, there's so much energy in it, you know. It's hair-flipping music, even if you don't have hair. You know, you want to just, you know. So, it's just it's an instant party the minute you put on something in the 80s, in that 80s realm.

GG: Right. So, going back on some of the earlier music that you wrote, you said it was kind of really personal and everything. Why do you feel like you didn't put it out there? Did you just feel like you weren't ready to, you weren't ready to do it?

AK: Yeah, just I wasn't ready to present myself in that light, just because, you know, I've gone through some things and my first husband was in Iraq twice, came home PTSD, lots of issues, and I wrote a lot during that time. And so, I wrote it to get it out. And now, when I look back and read it or I look back and hear the things that I've recorded, I mean, literally just on a tape recorder, it's something — like it literally makes my heart ache to hear. And I don't know if I could put that out to the world to feel or to hear, you know, how I felt at that time.

And I think it's just which — I've been told that that's what you want to put out, is that heart-wrenching stuff, because it's real and you can feel.

HR: And other people can relate to it, especially other people in situations you've been in.

AK: Right. And so, it just boils down to me saying, okay, let's put it out there. And it's just, you know, it's you feel, you know, like you're the only person naked in the room, basically.

GG: Yeah, I know that a lot of my favorite musicians, they have like transitions in their musical career where you can clearly see like different emotions in their musical styling. It's like some of their earlier stuff will be like dark and really deep and then it starts to get like more upbeat as they go along and they're at like different phases. Do you feel like — .

AK: Oh, yes.

GG: Do you feel like your music has done the same thing, the stuff that you write?

AK: Oh, yes. Just even just flipping, everything is in the same book. I've got one big binder, and I just add pages to it. And everything, it's actually backwards, so the first page is the most recent stuff, and then as you flip through, it gets darker, because the original things were dark. And then as, you know, you move through and you survive a difficult relationship—I'll just put it that way—you know, and then you find love again and then, you know, you go through losses and then you adopt a baby and then you find out you're going to have a baby and then, you know, all these things. And so, now everything is about being a mom. Everything is about Mommy and, you know, loving, being a parent and, you know, looking at these little faces, whereas before, it was, you know, eee, eee, eee. So.

GG: Well, that's got to be pretty neat, though. I mean, it's like heart-wrenching, some of your older music, but at the same time, you have like a very detailed account of

like your life.

AK: Yes.

GG: And it, you know, whether you want to go back or not, it's something that I feel like a lot of people, you know.

AK: It's the ultimate diary. It really is. It's going to be an amazing gift to someone someday. I don't know that I would want my children to read it all, but maybe when they are thirty-six, they could handle it. But I definitely wouldn't want my children to read everything in that book at sixteen or seventeen years old.

HR: So, I have a question. Do you have like a worst experience onstage or like something that went wrong onstage ever? I'm just curious.

AK: I've had two bad experiences. We did a wedding at—I probably shouldn't name the venue. But it was so—they were so concerned about the decibels. There was a person walking around with the meter to check the decibels of the sound. We were outside. And it's really hard to sing "Crazy in Love" softly. So, after every song, you know, and they would come over and "You're too loud. You're too loud." And I mean, we really, everything was pianissimo. I mean, there was no way you could raise your voice. I mean, so, that was difficult.

And then, I did a wedding one time and I got there and I completely lost my voice. I couldn't sing. I couldn't. I could barely talk. Later, well, the next day, I found out I had bronchitis and something else. I can't remember. So, for two-and-a-half hours, I was—I had to talk my way through every song, which by the end, I sounded like I was barking by the end of the night. But had to do it, and the people were like, "Oh, you were great." And I'm crying and, "This is the worst night ever."

We've had malfunctions where the speakers didn't work or a speaker blew at a show one time. We've had drunk people fall into the drums or fall into you or pull you down or pour drinks or upchuck on you. I mean, people get touchy-feely with the band. They, you know, they think you're their best friend, and, I mean, you want them to think that you're here for just them. But sometimes, the boundaries get crossed, and those are difficult nights.

HR: So, then, do you have like a most memorable experience, going on the other side of the spectrum?

AK: Mm... I mean, they're all. There are nights where the show was so much fun and you're so high going home, I ride home in silence, because nothing on the radio, nothing on my iTunes can compare to how I felt and how I feel driving home and I'm replaying it in my head. And you get home and you shower and you lay down in the bed and you're still just like... like, oh, and when we did that, that was so hot! I have those nights probably twice a week.

HR: Oh, that's awesome.

AK: So, you know, it's — I couldn't put one on top. I couldn't put one on top.

HR: That's still a pretty good feeling to have. So, backtracking, when did you have your first solo? If you went from being in a gospel choir, when was that first experience of a solo?

AK: My first solo was at church. It was. (laughs) And it wasn't supposed to be mine. It was the girl who was supposed to be singing the song forgot the words, and I was maybe five or six. And she forgot the words. She started crying. And I picked it up and I just started singing. And so, I guess you would consider that my first. And so, she's

standing there, (crying sound) and I'm singing the song. And from that point on, I started singing. Even in the choir, we did. We had a mass choir, and, I mean, as big as my area is, a mass choir, you know, isn't huge. But, you know, we had a choir of thirty singers, and I could do, you know, I would sing lead a lot. And so, I would say probably from that five-year-old point to going to now.

HR: Wow. And in all this time of musical background, did you ever learn to play an instrument?

AK: I play piano.

HR: Okay.

AK: Yeah. I play piano.

HR: What made you pick the piano up?

AK: It was the one that I could already do it. I started playing at church by ear, and then my mom said, "If you're going to play it, you're going to play it for real." And so, she put me in lessons. So, that's where I learned how to read music. And I played at our home church until I graduated high school, and then when I went to Erskine, I played for a church in Greenwood until I graduated college. So, that was my extra money. And I played. And then after that, I was like I want to sing. I don't want to play anymore.

HR: So, you don't play the piano anymore?

AK: I can. I just don't. (laughs) I'll play if I'm at home, if I'm writing, or if I'm learning a song, I'll play it to myself to learn it. And every now and then, I've had to play at church if Roger couldn't make it or a special occasion and they wanted a bigger band, I'll play. I play as needed. So, but I always say I'd rather sing than play. And, you know, it's served its purpose.

MR: When you were a child, you mentioned how you got started, how you wanted to be on a gospel choir with your older cousins. Do you kind of see in the future your children having that same kind of dream to want to be on a choir or onstage with their mom?

AK: I think so. Tyree, who is my big boy, Tyree is the one we've adopted and he's twenty months old and he's drawn to the instruments. Most kids all, they all go to the drums. Tyree likes guitars and pianos. So, when he plays my keyboard at home and he'll play it and dance around and Joe is seven months old and, you know, Joe performed with me until I was eight months pregnant. (laughs) So, Joe is onstage for every high note and for, you know, every song I danced around to. And you can tell he's the singer.

He, when I do Motown out at The Pour House, always sits — that's one of the few venues that's kid-friendly on a Sunday afternoon. And so, you know, my mother-in-law or my husband will bring them out, and they can see me onstage. And Tyree is amazed at the guitar player. He doesn't care about what Mommy is doing. But Joseph is always watching me. And anytime there's—I find it telling that if you want Joseph to sit still, which at seven months is, you know, almost impossible, put Whitney Houston videos on. He will sit and he will watch. He won't make a peep.

MR: That should quiet anybody up.

AK: (laughs) Yes. So, I'm thinking I'm pretty sure Joe is a singer.

MR: So, you mentioned you were actually pregnant while you were onstage. Was that difficult for you to be able to perform?

AK: I was fine up until about, I would say, about the fifth month. As it got hot and doing weddings outside, it started to be a little bit more difficult. And then as my

belly got bigger, I lost some of my stamina for, you know, to hold a long note or even to hit a high note, because my diaphragm got scrunched together.

So, and we did a Sly & the Family Stone tribute show at The Pour House and I put it on the calendar as my last performance. And about two weeks before that, I thought to myself, mm, I thought I was going to be able to make it, but I don't think I can make it. But ended up doing that, and I even did the national anthem at the River Dogs at nine months pregnant. That was—I prayed a lot right before I walked out there, because I was, you know, I handled my pregnancy well, you know, so I wasn't waddling too bad, but just, you know, "rocket's red glare" is crucial. And — .

HR: Yes, it is!

AK: And you know, "rocket's red glare," and I was just like, "Come on, baby, stay low, stay low, baby, stay low." And that was, you know, that was the hardest part, was just getting the air in to push out. So, that was the hardest part about performing while pregnant and just getting tired. I got tired super-fast. So, there was always a stool or a chair close by that I could sit on always.

MR: Has your voice changed at all over the years?

AK: Yeah.

MR: It seems like you've been singing a lot.

AK: Yeah. I didn't realize that it had changed, because, you know, I hear it all the time. So, I will say, but when I go home and sing at home, especially when I sing at church at home, my daddy will say, you know, "You know, you can sing." And I'm like, "Well, I couldn't sing before?" And he says, "Well, yeah, but it's different now." And I think confidence is one thing that makes a big difference. And also, you know your body.

You know your voice. You know what you can do. You know what you can't do.

And I am a firm believer in staying in your lane as a singer. Everybody can't sing everything. There are songs out there that I'd love to do. Beyoncé's "Love On Top," it's not in my lane, so I don't do it. Beyoncé's "Crazy in Love," in my lane, I can do it. I'm not going to try to do a song that's not in my lane, because it's going to end up bad. It's not going to end well, you know.

You know your voice and you know what you can do. If you need to take it down a key, take it down a key. If you need to take it up a key, take it up a key. You know what the top of your range is, and when you strain past that, that's when you lose your voice or you have a sore throat or you're hoarse the next day. But if you're in a range that's comfortable for you, you can, you know, you can do whatever. And so, you learn how to work within your range.

And that's, I think that's what I've... what has changed about my voice is that I know what I can do. And so, I keep myself in what I can do instead of trying to do what she can do, because she may be a great singer. We don't—we're not going to sound alike. And I can't be Chaka Khan, you know, because she's Chaka Khan. I can be Aisha, and Chaka Khan can be my idol. She can be my role model. But I'm not Chaka Khan. And so, I can't. If I try to sing just like her, then I'm not being authentic to myself, even if I'm singing her song. I still have to sing it like Aisha.

HR: So, having this range, performing at weddings, do they request specific music from you when you're—and is that anytime like out of your range?

AK: There are — most weddings, there's always maybe at least one song that I may have to learn for usually first dances. They may want something. But the good thing

is that I can—I pretty much sing every genre. And the only song—there is a song that someone asked for me to sing, and it wasn't necessarily that I couldn't sing it. I just didn't like the song. And it was a mother-son song, and it was cheesy. It was a cheesy song. But for the most part, there's I can learn it. I will learn up to three songs for a wedding. But, you know, I shouldn't have to learn a whole set list for your wedding.

So, I say, "These are the songs that I can do, you know, and then let me know what genres you want at your ceremony." Or what don't you want to hear is the first thing I ask. "What don't you want to hear?" Some people may say, "No country," or they may say, "No Electric Slide." And I'm completely here for that, you know? No line dances or, you know, they may say—I had a wedding one time where they said they didn't want any Michael Jackson.

INT: That's not fair!

AK: And I thought to myself, "Well, that's my whole set list!" So, you know, it just depends on what they want. I've done weddings where all they want is old-school Motown or all they want is 80s rock or all they want is 90s R&B. So, you know, being a wedding singer, you have to be willing to sing, and you sing the same songs every week, because everybody wants the same thing.

So, you know, like I said, "Uptown Funk," you know, you sing it every week. "Respect," you sing it every week. "At Last," "Don't Stop Believing." There are certain songs that you are going to sing at every single wedding. And then you have those one-offs, and they want Bell Biv DeVoe and, you know, I'm ready, you know, ready.

GG: How long does it take for you to get ready for something like that?

AK: Not too long. There are very few songs that I'm not at least familiar with.

And just performing as often as we do and doing as many weddings and things as we do, your set list grows, because as you learn a song for this wedding, it goes into your set list, because somebody else might want to hear it later. So, I mean, if I've got to learn one or two songs, it may take me a week, and then we'll run it before the ceremony or before the dances and then do it.

HR: So, how often do you guys get together and practice or prepare?

AK: We don't.

HR: So, if you have an event coming up on, say, this Saturday, when would you prepare for it?

AK: I would prepare myself this week.

HR: But as a group?

AK: As a group, we would get there early enough to run it before the guests are there. Very rarely do we actually get together and rehearse. But we all play together all the time, so we know each other's nuances, you know. So, you can—it really is a familiarity when you're singing with people that you perform with all the time. Everybody—you know when I'm going to vamp out. You know when I'm going to go back to—and everybody's got their own hand signals and, you know, you know what that means when you're playing with different people. And that helps.

From a preparedness standpoint, you don't have to rehearse, because they know you're going to be there and you're going to be ready to sing it. In situations like that, you don't veer from the original. So, if it's something that you've got to learn to perform, you sing it just like the original so that there are no errors. They learn it like the original, and you learn it like the original, so when you get together, there's no issues.

INT: Interesting.

GG: So, it's a lot like a family, like you were saying. You all really do know each other very well.

AK: Yes.

GG: Okay. That probably makes everything a lot easier, I would think.

AK: It does. It does.

INT: Okay, anything else?

MR: It may not be too professional of me, but I wouldn't mind to hear a little bit in person, if you wouldn't mind.

AK: Okay. I didn't come here with one in my pocket.

GG: Caught you off guard.

AK: You did! Well, like I said, she's my idol. So, Chaka Khan.

[Sings] "Through the fire, to the limit, to the wall, for a chance to be with you, I'd gladly risk it all. Through the fire, through whatever, come what may, for a chance at loving you, I'd take it all the way, right down to the wire, even through the fire."

MR: Oh, yeah.

INT: That's good! That is really good.

INT: I just sing in the shower. So...

INT: That was amazing.

AK: That's early-morning voice.

GG: That puts me to shame. All right, well, thank you so much for being here with us today. It was great to have you.

End of recording.

Edited by ML 8/15/18