

# Keke Palmer – The DOPE MAG Interview





An enchantress is more than just charming – she is magnetic. The natural force a fierce young woman named Keke Palmer effortlessly exudes is a powerful one. Her's is a presence you wish to absorb, be engulfed in, while letting her magic take you over. Palmer first captivated us with her explosive breakout performance as an ambitious young inner-city genius in *Akeelah and the Bee*, and has continued to hypnotize audiences ever since. From being a savvy teen detective in *True Jackson, VP* to a crazy-sexy-cool singer as Crystal “Chilli” Jones in the TLC biopic, Palmer shines in every single role in which she appears... but this star's power doesn't end on screen.

At any given time, the 21-year-old bombshell can be found working with a number of charities and youth group organizations. Recently, Palmer partnered with nonprofit organization [Saving Our Daughters](#) on a new initiative called Saving Our Cinderella's to mentor girls who are passionate about following their dreams in the performance arts. We love her, not just because she's beautiful or because her style is impeccably fun, but because she's Keke – the compassionate princess of young-Hollywood whose sugar with just the right amount of hardworking sass has made her one of the industry's most sought after stars.

Keke Palmer embodies the qualities that matures entertainers from stars to legends, having already garnered well deserved recognition not only from loving fans but also from peers in the very industry in which she so tirelessly works. Among her many accolades, Palmer is a multiple NAACP Image Award winner and a Screen Actors Guild nominee. The youngest actor to ever be nominated by the Guild in a Lead Actor

category. She's never let her young age close doors formerly only opened by seasoned veterans, and when her talk show *Just Keke* aired in 2014, she became the youngest talk show host in TV history.

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# KEKE PALMER

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Palmer has added another impressive twist, an accomplishment, to her storyline. Last year, she became the first black woman to play Cinderella on Broadway – a feat that turned her into a bonafide heroine for millions of girls. Maybe it was the whimsical elegance that Rodgers & Hammerstein’s version of Cinderella has always entailed mixed with the seamless fusion of Palmer’s acting and singing, but undeniably, her shining performance in this role has the industry buzzing and has broken many barriers, leading thousands of little girls of color to understand that they are princesses, too. They have proof. They have Palmer.

With midwestern charm and a Chicago hustle, Palmer continues to fearlessly seek new challenges in her career. Just months into the New Year, her 2015 has already reached impeccable heights. Palmer has hit the big screen this spring in “Brotherly Love”, a movie centered around love, family, and conflict with her on-screen brothers Cory Hardrict and Eric D. Hill Jr., and love interest, Quincy Brown. Additionally, she’s been pretty busy filming her upcoming TV show, “Scream Queens”, a horror-comedy that premiering this fall on Fox.

So in the span of a year, Keke Palmer broke two records and filmed both a movie and new TV show with all-star casts. What’s DOPER than that? In the midst of cross-country travel to promote Brotherly Love, the leading lady sat down with DOPE MAG to talk about being a #GIRLBOSS, handling epic success, and living a real life fairy tale.

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**(Arionne Alyssa: AA) So your new movie, Brotherly Love, is coming out on**

**April 24th and it seems as if we may have some Romeo/Juliet kind of drama going on in there. What was it like filming some of those intense moments?**

**(Keke Palmer: Keke)** Very cool. Most of the films I've done never had a real love story. They've had them, but they haven't been quite that mature, so it was interesting. It was fun because I've always wanted to act that out and I've finally reached the age where I can do something new and different.



**(AA) Now, I'm really excited for *Scream Queens*, too. From the trailer that was just released, it looks like your character is super sassy. Are you playing the bad girl?**

**(Keke)** I'm actually *not* playing the bad girl; not at all. My character is actually like a young, fun version of like a Michelle Obama type. She's a very focused young woman.

**(AA) Is she very similar to you?**

**(Keke)** Yeah, I would say so! I think this is probably the first character that's similar to me because it's not like she's a stiff type of person – she has a sense of humor. I can't

*really* tell you without saying too much about the show though.

**(AA) Last year you played the first African-American Cinderella and it really resonated with a lot of people. How did it feel to achieve such a milestone?**

**(Keke)** It was mind-blowing. Not just being the first black Cinderella, but being on Broadway in general. I'd only done film and TV. I'd never even done a school play, let alone a Broadway show, so I felt like, "Wow! I really did it." And it was a moment for me, saying to myself, "Girl, you can do whatever you put your mind to, you really can." Don't let anything stop you and make you feel like you can't. Just go for it and what's the worst that can happen? You fail, learn from it, and try again the next time. So it was an experience for me to see that I had it in me.





**(AA) You did such a great job that now you're on everybody's mind. After NBC announced they'd be producing a remake of The Wiz, a lot of people started talking about how you'd be perfect for the role as Dorothy. Would you be open to doing another musical role soon?**

**(Keke)** Oh absolutely! I definitely would love to! Doing TV shows and stuff like that makes it hard scheduling-wise, but if I could do it all at once, I would. I definitely see a musical in my future.

**(AA) We all are princesses, no matter how old we get. In what ways has your own life been a fairytale?**

**(Keke)** Oh, my whole life (Laughs!). My whole entire life! My parents drove four days and three nights to California to help me pursue my dream and I actually made some ground with it. I got the opportunity that allowed me to get creative and to explore being

an actress and musician so I would say that my whole life has been very much a fairytale. I'm very blessed.

**(AA) You've worked with Saving Our Daughters for years and now Saving Our Cinderella's, your new partnership with the organization, seems amazing; very needed. As women, what do you think young girls need most from us?**

**(Keke)** Time. You have to spend time with them and talk to them enough to understand what their problems are and to be able to relate to them so that they can see a different outcome with themselves. I think that's the main thing that's missing. A lot of people of my generation aren't getting much mentoring, aren't getting much time or encouragement. Your teachers may not even be helping you and you might not have anyone to talk to. The best thing that people can do for my generation and for the children is to spend time with them, get to know them.





**(AA) Since you started working so young, you’ve matured from girl to woman in the industry and I can imagine how people close to you might still want to box you in. Have there been times where you’ve needed to sort of let people know that you’re an adult and as a savvy business woman you can make your own career decisions?**

**(Keke)** No, not really because I just do it. But, there have been times where I couldn’t let others speak for me. Whether it be a manager, an agent, or my mom who normally vocalizes that stuff. I’ve had to say, “Let me handle this” only for the simple fact that they’re not me. That goes for anybody, whether they’re younger or older. You’re not going to have everybody you work with answer questions that only you can answer.

That's just stepping into your own so I guess it is a maturity thing.

**(AA) So, this has been a huge season for Black actresses in Hollywood. It seems as if more roles are finally becoming available. As an actress, how has this shift affected how you look at your career, if it has at all?**

**(Keke)** I don't think it's affected how I look at my career as a whole. I think that everything has a season. Sometimes people are into comedy, sometimes it's music, everything is always changing and I do think that the imagery of a strong Black woman is something that people have been loving lately, especially with the success of Empire, with the success of Scandal, and How to Get Away With Murder. So, it's definitely an exciting time, but every relatable category has it's time. I think it's great and if that somehow trickles down to me in some way, then great, but if it doesn't, oh well. At the end of the day, I'm confident my opportunities will always be consistent. Everything has its season though. It will go and it'll come back again.

**(AA) In addition to being super busy acting, you've been singing a lot as well. Where are you right now musically?**

**(Keke)** Just trying to finish my album, just getting in there and really figuring out what sound I want to have, what I'm going to talk about. All those things that I want for my first album to present as a message overall.





**(AA) You're from Robbins and as a fellow Chicago girl, I always say that being from the area makes you resilient and tough in a way that people really seem to notice. How has your background contributed to how you've handled the industry and your career?**

**(Keke)** I'd really have to agree with you that there's something about a Chicago sister that's very strong – like you said, it's a resilience. It's almost like they have a femininity about them, but at the same time, they have this little masculine undertone (Laughs!). My grandmother was like that. My mother is like that. All of my female family members are like that, and I think it helped me in my career because even in my lowest moments of self-esteem, I've always had that sense of self-worth. If I'm down, I know that it's all up to me to change it. Chicago women have this vibe that at the end of the day, it's up to me. It's like an overwhelming independence. It's like, I may be crying right now, but I'm going to get up in a few hours. You know what I'm saying?

**(AA) (Laughs!) Girl, you know I really do!**

**(Keke)** And I don't know where it comes from, to be honest. My grandmother used to tell me about how everyone would come up to the north. She left her husband, moved up north to Chicago with her two kids, and made a life for herself. A lot of people did that, coming from places like Memphis and cities in Mississippi to Chicago to have a less harsh life. I think that's where a lot of that resilience and toughness may come from.

**(AA) That's a great observation. I'm reading a book now about the Great Migration to Chicago around that time and it does seem that everyone's grandma had a similar story. We all sort of came from that movement.**

**(Keke)** Yeah, we trace back to that time and it's like, "Wow! I guess that *is* why."

**(AA) I love how you've been so fearless with your style lately, from darling-but-sassy cuts to drop-dead-gorgeous red carpet gowns, like the amazing white Stella McCartney dress you rocked last month. How do you use your style to express your personality?**

**(Keke)** Thank you! I do as much as I can when I'm not working a job. Whenever you play a character, there's a specific look they want so for *Scream Queens*, I have to go back to my more typical True Jackson, VP look that people were used to for so many

years. I like that look as well, but whenever I get a chance to step outside of a character and get to try something, I just go for it. When I wanted to get my piercings, I had the window of opportunity and I just went for it; same thing with my haircut. Anything I've done that's been out of the *norm* has been because I had the opportunity to do it. Most people at the young adult stage have a million changes, but they aren't as abrupt because they can't do them at the time that they want to do them. When I have a change, it's abrupt and everyone is like, "Oh, that's out of nowhere," when I would've done it years ago if I weren't doing this job or that job. A lot of my stuff is put on hold and I let it out when I'm able to.

**(AA) With growth and victories comes haters...always. Like your cover reads: Success is a Contact Sport. How do you handle the haters?**

**(Keke)** I've learned to try to come from a place of compassion instead of from a place of hate and not think so much about what hurt my feelings. Instead, I think, "This isn't a reflection of me; it's a reflection of them." So instead of focusing on myself and my own emotions, maybe I should look outside of myself and pray for this person, wish them well, and be kind to them. That kind of stops you from making yourself suffer more than you need to. We're going to go through enough suffering without our own help, it's just life in general, so the less suffering that you impose on yourself, the better off you'll be. That's what I just learned and I just try my best not to take everything so personal. I replace those emotions with something that's more compassionate and understanding.

**(AA) I'm sure that so many people think they know you, but they really don't have any idea of who you may be in real life. What do you think is one thing that people think they know about you, but don't?**

**(Keke)** I think there are *a lot* of things that people assume about me. People assume because I'm very positive that I don't make any mistakes or that I'm not a normal young adult, meaning: I don't go through the same experiences that they go through. I may have a little bit of wisdom, but wisdom can be acquired by what you've heard or what you've seen, it's not experience, I haven't experience a lot. I think they assume that I'm

much more supreme than I actually am, but I'm just a human, I'm faulted. I'm just somebody that's trying their best. I don't want to say that they give me more credit, but they put me on a pedestal, and I'm always going to fall from that. As long as you have me in an unrealistic place, I'm always going to fall from there.





**(AA) Does that pressure of perfection lean into your career and career decisions?**

**(Keke)** Totally! Not in a negative way, but in a way that pushes me to put out my best stuff. I'm a Virgo so I'm naturally a perfectionist. It's just normal to me, but because of what my profession is, I experience a large amount of criticism. Everyone experiences it, but the amount of people that are aware of you is the amount of criticism that you'll get. Even though those things will pile up, I just convert them into more realistic expectations. I can't concern myself with everyone's opinion, but as a whole, I want to continue to put out good work. Instead of worrying about what people think, I focus on putting out what makes me feel good, what I can be proud of.

**(AA) From Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean In" to Beyoncé using lines from "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's "TED Talk", there's been a lot of discussion around women supporting other women. Although the term means something different to different people, would you define yourself as a feminist?**

**(Keke)** You know, I don't know. I think I have a lot of feminist qualities, but I'm very much for my peers in general, not just the girls. I relate more to the girls because I am a girl. My main relatable instinct will be to what I am, but naturally, I'm a very empathetic person so I always try to put myself into other people's shoes. Whatever I do, I want it to

be for my generation as a whole. I want them all to be touched and affected by it; to feel as if there is someone out there who's speaking on their behalf until they can do it for themselves.

**(AA) Sophia Amoruso's book, #GirlBoss, really took off with girls and women of all ages diving into her memoir of how she made her own way. Why do you think more and more women are becoming girl bosses, starting to take their careers into their own hands to find success on their own terms?**

**(Keke)** Well, for one: times have changed. Everywhere you look, there's less judgment, less fear, and more of a curiosity and a zest to learn about a lot of things that maybe you weren't willing to learn about before. And two: I think people are seeing a lot of different examples. We have the internet where there are so many different ideas of occupations that you never thought were possible to have, because of the new millennium, technology, and social media, it's speaking to a lot of people in a lot of different ways and they're able to figure out what it is they really like and can customize their own path. I think we have a lot of great examples of that, like Sophia. She did something that was totally different—she knew that she liked clothes, figured out how to do that online, and now, when I drive down Melrose, I see an actual Nasty Gal store. I'm impressed by that.

**(AA) List three things you want most out of life? Three things you vow never to live without.**

**(Keke)** Happiness, unconditional love, and fulfillment of my true potential.

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