



Exclusive interview with recording artist Rissi Palmer. The rising star talks to TheUrbanFlavor about, being Black in country music, competition with pop artist Beyoncé'...and why she's not a gimmick. Also, find out what gadget is at the top of her Christmas list.

TUF: First, we would like to thank you for taking time to interview with TheUrbanFlavor.

True country fans know and love Rissi Palmer, and your music is in heavy rotation across the tube and airwaves. For people who's never listened to country radio, and don't know what CMT means, can you tell them who is Rissi Palmer?

RISSI: My music is a reflection of my influences and also who I am as a person. This album is very personal to me. First of all, it's self-titled. I self-titled it because I felt like once the listener walked away from listening to it; they would have a really good grasp on who Rissi Palmer was. I co-wrote 9 of the 12 songs on this album and it runs the gamut from contemporary country to traditional country. It's gospel, rock, and soul influences, and I'm a reflection of all those things.

I grew up in a house where we listened to all kinds of music. Both my parents are black, and they appreciate great music more than anything. My music is a reflection of my growing up. I also have the benefit of having a southern upbringing mixed with mid-western, because I grew up in St. Louis, MO. My parents are from down south, so I had both things growing up, both influences and types of culture in my house. You don't necessarily have to be from the country to appreciate that culture.

TUF: When did you notice your interest for country music, and how did you get started?

RISSI: I was raised on country, soul, gospel and pop music. I guess I always knew that I liked it. I gravitated more towards that kind of music. I think because I had an interest very early on in songwriting, and in the way songs are put together. I just found that county music, [how it's written] is really special.

I think it started out mostly as singing, and then my interests as I got older went into writing. I had to figure out how to write these songs. I was like... this is such a great song; let me figure out the formula they used to write this. That's when I got more into the writing and wanted to tell my story. I wanted to tell it in words that I used, and in terms that are familiar to me. That was really it, just wanting to express myself as an artist.

TUF: As an African-American woman, was it hard for you to enter into country music?

RISSI: Yes and No. I think being black in this format is a good thing and a bad thing. A good thing, in that it causes people to stop and pay attention. A bad way in that, I think a lot of times my realness and my authenticity is called into question. For some reason, I don't know why, but people think Black Country singer means gimmick. And, that's not what this was for me. There are easier routes into music, if I was trying to find an easy way.

But, do I think that it's been harder for me? No, I don't. I think a lot of the things that I've gone through, and a lot of the trials I've had to endure are because I'm a new artist, and a female artist on an independent label. I don't think that I've been put through the ringer any more than anybody else because I'm black. I didn't want anything given to me, and I'm very adamant about that. I don't want to be the affirmative action "Black Country" singer. I want to be accepted on the same terms as any other new female act out there.

TUF: Do you consider yourself a Country Pop Artist, Country Music Artist, or is there a difference?

RISSI: I'm definitely not a traditionalist in terms of my music. I think my music is, once again...it's a reflection of my influences, and anybody that grew up in the 80's was definitely influenced by pop music. I think my music is appealing to a wide audience. I don't think it's just appealing to a country audience. I think if you're not into country music, but you're into music, [and good music], you can find something that you like in what I do.

TUF: Speaking of pop music, do you feel there's competition between you and pop artists?

RISSI: No, I don't necessarily feel like I'm competing with Beyonce' or anything. I think I'm different enough that it stands on its own. I guess the only competition I feel is trying to make sure my music is just as good, if not better as other people, and keeping my live performance and my vocal talent on par with what's going on out there. I have to challenge myself everyday to be better; to be a better singer, writer and artist, so I'm constantly saying I could've done that better. I'm my worst critic. I try not to think about other artists, because I'm always trying to evolve. I'm just focusing on being the best Rissi Palmer and best artist I can be. I don't let that influence what I'm doing.

TUF: How would you describe the style and sound of your music?

RISSI: It's a mixture of all the things I grew up listening to, especially "Country Girl". "Country Girl" is really kind of funky. It's different from a lot of things that are even on country radio right now. There's a lot of contemporary in that song, traditional instruments, and a lot of rock in it too. It's just kind of bluesy, sassy and really different from the things I normally write. That's what makes it cool and different... I think. It's a very polarizing song, you either like it or you hate it. Not only that, the message of the song is very polarizing, because you're either going to agree that country is a state of mind or it's not.

I think a lot of women have been able to relate. Especially, given my situation; people can relate to being a transplant from the south and another part of the United States, but still carrying on traditions and culture from the south.

The rest of the album is pretty mainstream country stuff. I wrote with a lot of major acts here in town. I think we came up with a really cool mix of things. There's a good mixture of music on this album. I think there's something for everybody on it.

TUF: Since your debut single "Country Girl" was released in mid 2007, how have things changed in your life since then?

RISSI: I guess the biggest change in my life, aside from having an album and a song out is that I get recognized a lot. And that's weird, because I'm use to living a relatively anonymous life. It's been funny; like I went out the other night to go hear some bands play. I was standing in the audience and a few people came up wanting to take pictures of me. It's just weird because sometimes I forget that I have a video and song out. I get recognized in the airport now,

and it's like wow...okay. My schedule is definitely more hectic than it use to be. I guess I just have a little bit more popularity now.

TUF: In a sense, you are breaking the country color barrier being that you are the first black woman to land a single on the country music charts in nearly 20 years. What does that mean to you, and why is important in today's times?

RISSI: I remember when I heard that number, I was really surprised. I didn't realize it had been 20 years. We didn't set out to try to break any records. I wanted to make an album that was good and competitive with what's going on right now, that people would like. I wasn't trying to make this a novelty or gimmick; I was just trying to be the best country singer I could be, regardless of color.

I do recognize that I am sort of a unique thing in this genre, and I'm okay with that. But, I look forward to the day when it's not a big deal. That's what I'm hoping we achieve with any success I have. For the next woman and next man who come along after me, [that it's not] such a big deal for them. I also hope I'm able to be an example to young black people; that you don't necessarily have to fit into a box society has made for you. You can be whatever and whoever you want to be.

TUF: What feedback, if any, are you receiving from your peers and fans in the country community?

RISSI: I think every artist is very sensitive about their music, their art, and the way it's perceived. For the most part, I've gotten very positive feedback. It's been nice to be judged and given an opportunity to be on par with the people that I grew up listening to, loving, watching and learning from. You put yourself out there and hope people like it. There's always a chance that someone's not going to like it.

TUF: What's your take on the rave response you're receiving outside the country community, are you surprised by that?

RISSI: I was hoping that I wouldn't alienate black people by what I'm doing. I'm a very proud black woman, very proud of who I am, and where I come from. This is just the way I've chosen to express myself, and I hope that people will get it. I'm not surprised, it's just fun exceeding my expectations. I'm very happy to see that in the black community, especially.

The acceptance in mainstream has far outweighed any expectations that I had, because I wasn't expecting mainstream media to jump on it. I'm just really pleased that people are understanding of it. For any artist, that feels amazing... it feels great!

TUF: With your rising success, how do you think it will affect other young African-American girls, who aspire to be country music artists?

RISSI: When I was growing up, there wasn't anybody that looked like me. For a long time, I wasn't sure if it was something that I could do. I was like, why aren't there any black country singers? I did my research, and found there are a lot of Black Country singers -very talented, incredible black artists who haven't been given the mainstream attention, but they're out there. I hope people see that it is definitely something you can do, as long as you work hard and earn your spot.

TUF: On a lighter note, how will you celebrate the Christmas Holidays this year?

RISSI: I'm going home. I'm sleeping, for like a week because I have a gig right after Christmas. I'm going home to Ohio to hang with my family [my mom, dad, and brother] just rest and get ready for my next year. Because, next year is going to be a really busy, crazy year for me.

TUF: What's next for you, any tours or appearances where folks can come see you live?

RISSI: We're going to start touring in January. I'm promoting a new single in January and continuing to promote the album. I'm looking forward to a lot of new things. I'm also going to start work on my new album in 2008.

So, just gearing up for that, and thanking God for all the incredible blessings I received this year.

The new artist tour starts in January and goes into March. We'll be doing a couple of major cities and some smaller cities. It'll be me and a few other new artists. We're still solidifying the lineup, so I can't say right now who's going to be on it. I'll also be continuing my radio tour. I would suggest that people go and check my website, <http://www.rissipalmer.com> or myspace, <http://www.myspace.com/rissipalmer> for tour dates.

TUF: Before we wrap-up, is there a final word or thought you would like to leave with TheUrbanFlavor readers?

RISSI: First of all, a huge thank you, to you for doing this interview. I really appreciate it.

You may not necessarily be a fan of country music, but just give the music a chance. Country Music is more than just cowboys and horses, and I think there's something for everybody, including young black people.

