

## Q&amp;A



Robert Eator

# ASHANTI

## The R&B chart-topper faces down the labels and goes her own way

SHE STARS ON TV'S *ARMY WIVES*, HAS her own fragrance, and contributed to Artists Stand Up to Cancer's "Just Stand Up!" single, but busy Ashanti still found time to write and record her fifth album, *Braveheart*. The first release on her own label, Written Entertainment, pitted Ashanti the artist against Ashanti the businesswoman. "As much as I'd love to be in the studio five days a week," she says, "I now have to sign that invoice at the end." With guest turns including Dr. Dre, Meek Mill, Busta Rhymes and R. Kelly, Ashanti has found a way to make the numbers and the music work.

### When did you start work on *Braveheart*?

I went to L.A. to hang out for a bit, and just started recording randomly, bumping into people: "Hey, let's go to the studio!" But it wasn't until 2011 that I started to focus and said, "OK, I have to put an album together."

### What is your songwriting process?

If I'm going with a producer, they're going to play the beat, and I'll say, "Oh, I love it," or "That's not for me." If it's something I really love I'll probably start writing it right then and record it that night. I'll write the hook,

and then the first verse, and record it to see if I like how it sounds. Sometimes if you write something on paper it's great, but when you hear it back, it's not. I like to write it, hear it, and then decide whether to move on or not.

### How did you select your collaborators?

Everything happened organically. For example, Busta Rhymes and I were working in the same studio at Platinum Sound in New York—and he heard my song from across the studio, and he was like, "Oh, my God! I need to get on this record!" He told me, "Ashanti, this will drastically change our relationship if I'm *not* on this record." He killed it—I'm really happy with that.

### What's behind the album title?

The title is self-explanatory as far as being in the industry—you have to be confident at what you're doing. Being an artist, my records deal with relationships. Those are some of my biggest records. The other metaphor, having my own record label versus being on a major, is how I saw the Scots versus the Brits in the movie *Braveheart*. The Brits had armor, horses and swords.

They were geared up, like the majors. The Scots are like the indies—barefoot, wearing rags and with homemade weapons. But the passion and the confidence they had, that was undeniable. I feel like that's the position I'm in. Even with us being an indie, there's no denying the passion and the hunger to go out and win.

### What motivated you to start an indie?

The last album I released, *The Declaration*, was in 2008—and between 2009 and 2011 I had seven offers from majors. I sat in everyone's office with the biggest CEOs of each company, and I just couldn't take the 360 deal. It was a hard decision to make, just fear of the unknown and being by yourself, because I'd always been with a major label. Understanding how the industry has changed and how they were offering the 360, I just didn't want to partake in it. I opted to go the indie route. There's a lot of responsibility. You have to be visual, have a record, and most of all you have to have a budget. This is something I wanted to do, and we're really excited about it. We're making it pop.

—Amanda Farah

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