

WHO'S NEXT

DARNA

HOMETOWN: Sacramento, Calif.
INFLUENCES: Yolanda Adams, Kirk Franklin, Destiny's Child
ALBUM: Album due out 2014
WEBSITE: darnaamusic.com

AS ONE OF NINE SIBLINGS, DARNAA WAS DETERMINED to stand up and be heard. "I grew up singing a lot to princesses in cartoons like *The Little Mermaid*," she says. "In our neighborhood there was a rock, and I'd get on the rock and pretend I was her." Inspired by Lauryn Hill's performance in *Sister Act 2*, she polished her vocal chops in the church choir, but soon set her sights on center stage. "Originally I wanted to be in a girl group with my sisters," she says, "but eventually I decided to go solo."

Darnaa first attracted national attention with a remake of R.E.M.'s "Everybody Hurts," her tribute to those affected by the 9/11 attacks. An advocate for children's and women's rights, she feels a responsibility to speak out against violence and injustice. On her debut single, "Runaway"—which received more than 1 million YouTube views—she addressed her own struggles.

"My life hasn't always been what you would consider normal—far from it actually," she says. "But I used my music and writing as a way to cope, and now I want to share it with others." By presenting music with a message, she hopes to empower her audience. "Once you get out of a bad situation, the next move is to seek help," she says. "I think it's a good thing when you speak out about what's right."

Now living in New York City, Darnaa has landed opening-act spots for the Wanted, Ke\$ha and R. Kelly. She plans to showcase her new uptempo single, "Cowgirl," on an upcoming national tour. Regardless of subject matter, Darnaa believes authenticity is key. "I try to tell real stories about things that are close to me and experiences I've had," she says. "It's all about the truth and keeping it real."