



RISING STARS

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# Keke Palmer: The New Oprah?

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## Why You Should Care

Keke Palmer is a rising star in the entertainment industry, known for her work in film and music. She has recently joined a new group, and her style changes have caught the attention of fans and critics alike.

Lots of women, for reasons science has yet to explain, tend to mark pulse points in their lives with major hairstyle changes. Actor-singer Keke Palmer joined this enigmatic group a few weeks ago, when she ditched her

signature long locks for a cropped, close-to-the-head do.

If Palmer meant to send a signal announcing a big emotional moment, she's got our attention. After a steady upward climb as a child actor, Palmer is facing the entertainment equivalent of crossing the Rubicon: making the often treacherous transition from child star to adult star. Once a standout performer on Nickelodeon, Palmer is now the youngest talk-show host on television — and she's about to become the first black Cinderella on Broadway.

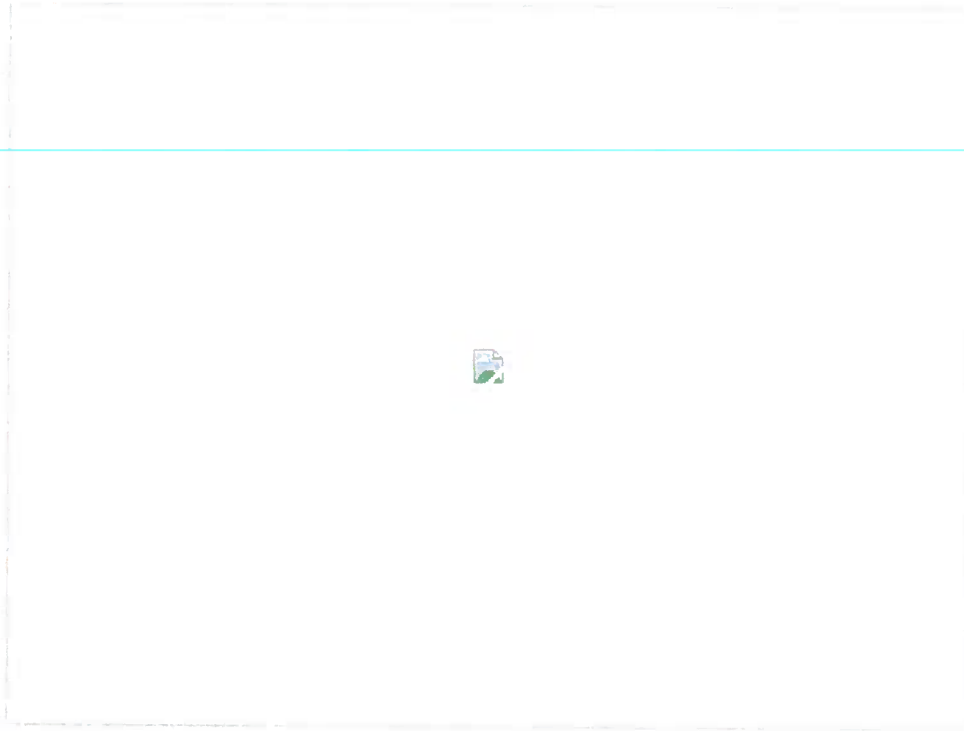
*“The biggest challenge that any child star faces is: Are they going to remember me? Are they going to accept me?”*

At 21, Palmer has reached the point when child stars' careers get shaky. Will she continue to climb, or will her fairy tale turn into fishwrap, or worse, a TMZ update?

Palmer treads cautiously, but she's also testing boundaries. “It's hard to go from kid actor,” she said. “I have to let people know I'm not a kid anymore.”

In September, Palmer stepped into the role of Broadway's first black Cinderella, starring in the Rodgers & Hammerstein classic through January 3. It was her second breakthrough in a year. Earlier this summer, at age 20, Palmer debuted as the youngest national talk-show host when BET launched *Just Keke*, a daily show produced by the company behind *Ellen*. The show ran for four weeks and generated lots of

encouraging Internet activity. Palmer said there's no decision yet on whether the show will be picked up in 2015.



Actors Laurence Fishburne and Keke Palmer in a scene from *Akeelah and the Bee*

**SOURCE** [ZUMApres](#)

Born Lauren Keyana Palmer, Keke drew praise as an 11-year-old who held her own alongside Angela Bassett and Laurence Fishburne in *Akeelah and the Bee*, a film released in 2006. TV audiences know her as the star of the Nickelodeon comedy *True Jackson, VP*, which aired from 2008 to 2011.

As a black, [female](#) star of one of the twin giants of kiddie TV — Nickelodeon and Disney — she was already something of a rarity. And Palmer also had the distinction of being among the highest paid child actors, pulling in \$20,000 per [episode](#) — more than

“Cute” can quickly become a liability for former child stars — just ask Macaulay Culkin, Gary Coleman and Lindsay Lohan, for starters. But any transition has to be timed carefully, said Ellerbee. “It can’t be one minute you’re Hannah Montana every week in our living room and then, boom! You’re having sex with yourself on stage.”

Palmer was only 11 years old and living in Robbins, Illinois, when she landed her first big role as Queen Latifah’s niece in *Barbershop 2*.

Her mother and father, Sharon and Larry, met acting in student productions in college. Both moved on to other professions, but they encouraged their daughter to pursue her passion for acting and music. After her first break in *Barbershop 2*, the family moved to L. A. so Keke could continue “trying to make all my dreams come true,” she said, and soon she’d snapped up roles on *ER*, *Law & Order* and *Akeelah and the Bee*.

Her musical dreams have proven more elusive. She dropped an album in 2007 that didn’t cause much of a ripple and plans to head back to the studio next year after her Cinderella run ends.

Her parents, she said, have been supportive — but firm. “They didn’t want me to be a bratty kid,” said Palmer. “That’s who everyone thinks of when they think of child actors.” That and the train wrecks their careers can become.

If Palmer can steer clear of that trap, we won’t be talking about “child actor” anymore. Just actor.