

Easter Sunday with Kem

Written by Alaina Lewis



R&B artist Kem will bring a little intimacy back to Minneapolis when he performs at Epic on Easter Sunday, April 12 . Kem's performance will include tracks off *Kem III: Intimacy*, his highly anticipated follow-up to his Gold albums

Kemistry

and

Kem: Album II

Kem III: Intimacy, is a musical testimony of love, life, and the promises that lay within the atmosphere of coming together in love's proximity. Still embodying the same sound that gave us "Love Calls" and "I Can't Stop Loving You," Kem's latest album doesn't depart from the unique appeal we're used to, but it shows a considerable level of growth in his journey as an artist and a producer.

Having overcome poverty and addiction prior to pursuing his musical aspirations, Kem's history as a successful artist doesn't blur his prior stumbles; rather it highlights the possibility of change and growth when you become spiritually inclined and redefine your journey. Through his music, he hopes to inspire change and from his journey he inspires us to seek change through faith and hope.

Insight News had an opportunity to speak with Kem and learn what Minneapolis can expect at his stage show and what he offers on his forthcoming album *Kem III: Intimacy*.

Are you excited about your performance in Minneapolis?

Absolutely! We've been there a couple of times, and I know at the least it's been a couple of years, but we have been there before and are ready to come back.

So, tell me about the highly anticipated *Kem III: Intimacy*?

It's probably the most important record of my career. We are diligently at home working on it. In fact, I will be working on a single today. It's a single we're looking at releasing in the spring and the album will follow shortly there after. There are a lot of acoustic instruments on this record, a lot of acoustic piano. I've recorded a song with real strings, real symphony strings for this album. It's shaping up to be something that we're very excited about. It's talking about relationships, intimacy and romantic relationships and spiritual intimacy. There's a song slated for the album called, "Love is Love" which is talking about maternal intimacy. I'm being very thorough with it. Writing, recording, and producing this record has been very cathartic for me. It's going to be a really good look. I think people are going to be engaged in the new music. We will definitely be performing some of it at the show there in Minneapolis.

Intimacy is such a personal subject. Did you pull any of the inspiration in creating this album from your personal life?

Absolutely. In the subtitle, Intimacy, it doesn't necessarily proclaim my efficiency at it. [Laughs] What it does talk about and what I'm reaching for in my personal life and trying to communicate to the rest of the world through this music, is what intimacy really is. It's not just the immediate thing that comes to mind, which is sensual intimacy. It's about being able to communicate with others, and being able to communicate with yourself and being able to do both without any judgments and with some acceptance. To be able participate in a relationship in a more genuine, more real and an engaged way. Intimacy is not only holding somebody by a fireplace listening to a Kem record, it can also be [two people] cussing each other out at 3 o'clock in the morning. [Laughs]. There's a large scope of it. Even when you're cussing each other out at 3 o'clock in the morning you still love each other and neither of you is leaving the relationship. You're still engaged in the relationship. That's an important aspect of it that has become prominent in my life. That's what we're trying to explore on this record.

Is this new album a departure from your original sound, or does it still follow the same tone of your first two hit albums, *Kemistry*, and *Kem: Album II*?

I can't escape, nor would I ever try to, escape the essence of my musical self. To those who loved, "Matter of Time," "Love Calls," "I Can't Stop Loving You," and "Find Your Way," there's definitely that on the new record.

I would just say that it's elevated. It's a different take on those things.

It's a different musical stand on those things. The arrangements are just a little more intricate. We're probably being more thorough on this record. I think with any record an artist makes it should show growth and evolution --sort of speak. I think compared to the previous two records, this record will showcase that effectively.

Now Kem, your life has taken quite a journey since you first sought God and a new direction, what has been a personal highlight for you on this incredible trip to the top of your ability?

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Being able to get better at being comfortable with who I am. You know? I think anytime you're working to do whatever it is that you love to do, or work that involves your own creation and you are theoretically creating your own projects and doing what you believe God called you to do, it allows you to be yourself. I haven't always been able to do that or been comfortable doing that. I've learned to trust whatever it is that I do regardless of what the results are. Believing in myself and believing in what I'm doing has been a very personal highlight. External highlights include having Chaka Khan sit in on my set on a cruise where we were both performing. She came to the set and sat in on "Find Your Way." To be able to break bread or share the stage with Stevie Wonder, Raphael Saadiq and to be able to move in these circles and have these other people who I admire participate in what I do on any level has been a great honor.

The travel has been quite incredible, too. We've been to South Africa to Hamburg, Germany, Paris, London, Sweden, Italy, all over the U.S. and the Virgin Islands and it has been incredible. To be able to do that and take other people with me is really an incredible thing.

There's speculation about your heritage and where you are originally from. A lot of people have said you are from Nigeria. Can you clear that up for the readers today?

[Laughs] I was born in Nashville, TN. We migrated to the Detroit area after my parents graduated from Tennessee State. I've been in the Detroit area since I was five. I love my Nigerian brothers and sisters, but I'm actually entirely from the United States.

With all that passion and soul coming through your voice when you embark upon each song, it's hard to believe you're single. When you wrote the song, "Love Calls," tell me how you arrived at the wording and was it a personal testimony about a moment in your life?

The songs kind of write themselves. Sometimes it's bits and pieces of my experience and sometimes it's bits and pieces of other peoples experience.

No song is totally biographical --not totally. But there are bits and pieces of me and my experience's in each song. "Love Calls" took a long time to write. I wrote the music first. I had sequenced the music probably in 1996 or 1997. It just sat. "Love Calls," wasn't going to even be on the record really because I couldn't write it. I had written the music, came up with the hook, and I just couldn't figure out what to do next. It was probably a two-year process in writing that song. I'd put it down, go back to it, put it down and then go back to it again. Eventually when it was done, of all the songs that we had I thought that "Love Calls" was the most radio friendly. It was the most commercial song over all the others on the *Kemistry* CD that would be suitable for radio.

I don't write specifically for radio, but when you're in the business, the business head says you want something to be on the radio. All of my songs aren't written to be on the radio. [Laughs] Just because a song is not suitable for radio doesn't mean it's not supposed to be on your record. So, "Love Calls" was the most radio friendly. It put me in the mind of an old Michael Jackson tune, "The Lady of My Life." That's what it reminds me of.

People are able to identify with it, and it's still enjoying some rotations on stations across the

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country. We perform it at every show and people love it as if it just came out yesterday. It's been good to me and I hope it keeps flying in that tradition.

You are involved in a lot of national and community activism groups and for people who don't know, you came from quite a darker place to be where you are today. How do you use your music and your words to inspire others?

There's a portion of every show where we engage the audience with a few words about overcoming things and relying on your faith and keeping your eyes on the prize. We really kind of "go to church" in the middle of the set; we turn our eyes towards spiritual things. I look at what I do as a ministry. You'll here things of spirituality throughout my music and it's placed there on purpose because it's been invaluable in my life. I feel that it's my responsibility to carry that message and share that message of hope wherever I go. People need that. We need that more than just being entertained. We need to know that whatever it is that we're experiencing in our lives, if we're paying attention and if we're willing to do our part, it will pass. Not only will it pass, we'll come out the on other side and be stronger and better than before and we'll have an experience and a testimony to share with somebody else to help them achieve the same.

How did you get the opportunity to sign on to Tom Joyner's *Fantastic Voyage* this summer?

Tom has been a supporter of the music. Tom is a real music lover. Although I can't speak for him, I think one of the things he appreciates about what we do is that we make music in the traditional range. We're really just a bunch of cats with instruments in the studio, no gimmicks, no samples, just in the tradition of the music that I know he enjoys. He's been a great supporter, a true fan, and a champion of the music we've been creating since the beginning. I support The Tom Joyner Foundation and it's efforts with the Black Historical Colleges and Universities.

We do a lot of the morning shows even though we have to get up at the pre-crack of dawn. [Laughs]. We have to get down there and be ready to sing and perform early in the morning. Over the last few years it's been a real honor for us to do that. I have nothing but love for Tom and for his family.

They've been like family to me. I know that will never change.

What's your favorite song to perform?

Right now I'm really feeling the new music. There's a single I'm working on that's slated to be a new single called, "Share My Life." We've been doing that recently in the show and it goes over very well. I like singing the new music that hasn't been released that people haven't heard and then watching them respond to it. That's my favorite part of the show right now.

What should the people of Minneapolis expect to experience at the Kem Concert, coming up on April 12?

If they love *Kemistry*, *Kem: Album II*, "I Can't Stop Love You," "Love Calls," and all those wonderful songs, then they're going to get that because we're coming with the sound that

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they've come to love so much. The same musicians in the studio are the same ones on stage. On the worst day we sound just like the record. [Laughs]. We look at every show as being the show of our lives. We're committed to our craft and we just come with it. We're going to do some of the new music. I'm going to try to be extremely sharp, and we are going to have a good time.