

Pop Talk: Cheetah Girls ready to change their spots yet again

by Brad Burke

Life for the Cheetah Girls has been rife with change.

What started as a TV movie transformed into a multimedia franchise. Weeks filming on location turned into months touring major music venues. A quartet of actors became a trio of pop singers.

And now the Cheetah Girls - Adrienne Bailon, Kiely Williams and Sabrina Bryan, better known to fans as Chanel, Aquanetta and Dorinda - are ready to change their spots yet again.

THE CHEETAH GIRLS - The Cheetah Girls perform opening night in Peoria, Ill. From left are Adrienne Bailon, Kiely Williams and Sabrina Bryan. CNS Photo by Ben Hager. They want to grow up.

Though barely over the age of 20, the girls are showbiz veterans. They've starred in two Cheetah Girls movies, recorded CDs and spent the past four months on a nationwide tour.

The girls are eager for the tour to end - not so they can rest, but so they can jump back into the studio. It's the Cheetah Girls' forthcoming album that will prove just how much the group members have matured in the past few years, according to Bryan.

"This is going to be such a wider range of topics and issues that we want to talk about and things that we want to address," Bryan, 23, said in a recent phone interview.

"We want to talk about love and things that are going on in the world," she continued. "And growing up and everything we've learned, in terms of the Cheetah Girls and our experiences and our dreams coming true and how amazing it is. And being away from home for the first time. Just, like, everything teenagers go through."

If the girls are growing up, they're also growing closer. Bryan said the trio is tighter than ever after this tour, which began back in September.

Sure, the trio is tight. But what about that elusive fourth Cheetah Girl?

The group initially was conceived as a foursome fronted by Disney Channel mainstay Raven-Symone. The quartet headlined the 2003 TV movie "The Cheetah Girls," then reunited for a sequel last year.

After that, though, Raven flew the coop, choosing instead to focus on her solo career. Bryan insists there were - and are - no hard feelings.

"We really dealt with that issue in our last movie, that we can still be friends and not have the same goals," she said. "Raven supports us and we support her with her solo career and her music. I think that the fans can see that."

"They can see that it's not some big fight and now we're not friends anymore or anything like that. It's just that she was involved in the movies and isn't involved in the singing group, and that's where it starts and that's where it ends."

Still, that didn't mean the remaining Cheetah Girls weren't somewhat nervous about how fans would react to

the pared-down lineup.

"Of course, that was our fear, like, 'Oh my gosh, are they going to love us still? Are they not going to know what to think about it?'" Bryan said. "And they just really accepted us. ... Girls love to sing and dance and hear about girl empowerment. And I think that we still had the same message and everything."

In fact, the fans remain so enthusiastic about the Cheetahs that they've even surprised the tour's crew, Bryan said.

"When we first started, they just couldn't believe it, because these are guys who've worked with Motley Crue and the Rolling Stones and, like, crazy heavy metal bands," she said. "... It's really cool that our crew has been on so many huge tours and are, like, 'You guys have the loudest audience we've ever witnessed!'"

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