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DVD REVIEW: KEYSHIA COLE / MARY J BLIGE - SISTAS OF R&B
HIP-HOP SOUL

This collection is actually a double disc box-set including two unauthorized biographical films, 'Keyshia Cole: A Ghetto Rose' and 'Mary J Blige: The Queen Of Hip-Hop Soul.'

The first disc is a 2008 documentary look at the life and career of Oakland singer Keyshia Cole. Taking her from her platinum debut album, 'The Way It Is,' this DVD begins by showing how she managed to finally break the top-40 with her third single release. With input from fans via interview, Keyshia is compared to her fellow box-set star, Mary J Blige. This disc also deals with Keyshia's reality TV show and her second album, 'Just Like You.' However, it is perhaps the details Keyshia's personal life that prove most interesting. The DVD reveals how Keyshia, as an adopted child, came up in Oakland and how her older brother knew the late Tupac Shakur. It also brings mention of how Keyshia left home at 16 and had local drug dealers paying her money to sing to them. Of course, this DVD also speaks on how her mother's drug problems touched Keyshia's life. While this information is interesting, it primarily comes via a blow-by-blow account of episodes of her reality TV show, so if you've seen that you probably know most of what is revealed anyway! Since Keyshia's career, certainly at the time this DVD was shot, doesn't offer much material there is quite a lot of repeating and padding including, for example, an over-long and unnecessary overview of Oakland, a look at the past of the A&M record label and information on other artists and industry professionals who have tenuous ties to Keyshia. Indeed, given the fact that it spends so much time dealing with facts surrounding rather than to do with Keyshia Cole, this disc is probably only suitable for Keyshia's die-hard fans who want to collect everything related to her.

The Mary J Blige disc features an unauthorized biography, originally released in 2004, which takes viewers up to the release of her 'Love And Life' album. The video, as narrated by K-Fox, takes Mary from her roots growing up in Yonkers, New York, to the karaoke-booth version of Aretha Franklin's 'Rapture' that got her signed when it caught the attention of Andre Harrell at Uptown Records. From there, Mary's musical journey is shown as she joined forces with a young Sean 'Puffy' Combs and released her debut album 'What's The 411.' While this DVD doesn't include any of Mary's music there is some interview footage with fans and also those who knew and worked with Mary over the years. With insights into Mary's struggles and tribulations over the years, this DVD shows why she has become an inspiration for so many people over the years. Looking at each of her albums up to and including 'Love and Life' as well as a number of guest spots, it is clear why Mary J Blige has become the yard-stick by which so many female R&B artists judge themselves. The DVD deals with Mary's awards, music, acting and charity work as well as her well-publicized troubles with relationships, drugs, alcohol, and more. A solid look at Mary J Blige's life (at least up until when the DVD was shot) this disc is a good look for her fans.

While newer, the Keyshia Cole disc is certainly the weaker of the two and perhaps may lead many fans to decide to seek the previously released Mary J Blige documentary on its own. However, if you are a big-time fan of Keyshia Cole you may want to grab this collection and get the Mary J Blige disc as a bonus...