

"smart and witty"
Kim Coles

Actress.

Producer.

Playwright.

Author.

Sibylla Nash

While growing up in Brooklyn, Kim Coles harbored dreams of becoming Whoopi Goldberg, Lucille Ball and Carol Burnett rolled into one. The talented comedian knew she was headed for Hollywood even in junior high school.

"I've always loved performing for my friends," says Coles. "When 'Roots' first came on, I went to school every day and did a medley of what had happened the night before. This is when I realized I wanted to perform."

As one of the stars in the ensemble cast of Fox's "Living Single," Coles has realized her dream of becoming an actress. And now with the success of her current series under her belt, and previously with "In Living Color," Coles has branched into other avenues. Despite Hollywood's often slow pace to recognize her talent, she is realizing another dream of becoming a one-woman entertainment conglomerate. "I just figured out a few years ago that sitcom life might not last forever," Coles says. "They never do, so I'd better be prepared for what comes afterward."

A West Hollywood resident, Coles co-wrote and produced an autobiographical play, "Homework," which opened to rave reviews in Los Angeles and New York earlier this year. The play is a composition of Coles' personality, in which she portrays multiple characters, including three best girlfriends as they journey from grade school to college. But despite being described by reviewers as "smart and witty," the play hasn't earned Coles new work. It was eventually optioned to be produced by a film company.

"I thought doing a showcase where I do eight characters would get me movie deals" she says. She speaks of her white counterparts — Joan Cusack, Kathy Najimy, Rosie O'Donnell — and their opportunity to play the buddy roles in some films. "If the producers opened their eyes wide enough, it's something a woman of color could do," she says. One thing she won't do is the urban stereotype, she adds. "It's about getting producers to look beyond color and type and to give someone an opportunity. I'm not going to do the booty-shaking-urban-jive-talking-all-I-want-to-do-is-have-sex-with-you roles. Those roles belittle us."

Coles stresses that there needs to be a balance of images and regrets the lack of "regular black folks" being portrayed in television and film. "Living Single' projects a positive image. We're upbeat, upwardly mobile, have all the urbanism and we're colorful, but we're not coons," Coles says. "Coon-dom is where I have a problem."

To balance out the images and to do her own thing, Coles continues to create work. She recently formed a partnership with an animation production company to produce "Kimmie's World," a cartoon about an 11-year-old African-American girl who Coles describes as "having a wonderful and active imagination." It's largely based on a young Coles at that age and her experiences as a Brooklyn youth. "Growing up in New York, which is such a colorful city that's rich with different sounds, smells and cultures, I just soaked it all up." In the tradition of Bill Cosby's "Fat Albert" series, Coles plans on doing all of the cartoon's voices herself. Because of the time-consuming nature of animation, don't look for it to hit the screen until 1999.

Amid her busy schedule she also found the time write a book, "I'm Free, But it'll Cost You," a hilarious look at single life and the 90s dating scene. The once-divorced Coles was headed down the aisle for the second time when she called it off, and so, the book was born. It was an intensive six months of writing on Sundays for Coles. "No more flea markets, no more sleeping late or hanging out," she says. "I would get up and work on the book. I would bring my laptop to work." Now, whatever free time she has away from the show is spent on book tours. Although on track with her upward climb in the Hollywood jungles, Coles hasn't forsaken her humanity. She volunteers with local organizations such as Project Angel Food, as well as sickle cell and AIDS charities. Last fall, Coles was one of the hosts for the Macy's Passport Fashion Show, an AIDS benefit. She enjoys touching the lives of others, especially children. "I want a Girl Scout troop so bad! My life as a Girl Scout was so wonderful. I had a great experience." **TP**