

# CULTURE

arts, entertainment, books

## Dream Girl

Being eliminated from *American Idol* may have been the best thing to ever happen to Jennifer Hudson

BY REGINA R. ROBERTSON

The first time *American Idol* alum Jennifer Hudson heard "And I'm Telling You I'm Not Going" from *Dreamgirls*, Will Smith was lip-synching the tune on *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. A preteen at the time, Hudson was mesmerized. "All I kept thinking was, *Who is that singing?*" she now says about the song Jennifer Holliday made famous.

On December 22, when the stage-to-screen adaptation of the Broadway hit *Dreamgirls* arrives in theaters, it will be another Jennifer's turn to make the song her own. Hudson, now 25, won the much-sought-after role of Effie White—the vulnerable singer cast aside by her group mates and her man—after enduring three grueling auditions and months waiting for "the call." But the Chicago native insists she claimed the part long ago. "I always knew that Effie was sitting right here!" she says, pointing to herself. "I was just waiting for everyone else to realize it."

Most folks remember Hudson for the harsh criticism she received during the third season of *Idol*. "They said everything about me was too much—my clothes, my hair, my voice, my personality," she remembers. "Of course I cried after being eliminated, but I guess it just wasn't my time."

Now, with a starring role in the most anticipated film of the year (word is Hudson steals the show and puts her foot all up in *that* song) and an album in the works, it seems this girl's time has finally come.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARIEN DAVIS

HAIR: FREDERICK/PHILIPPELLESTINE; MAKEUP: INGA BASIN; STYLIST: ERIC HOLLIS; DRESS: ABBY Z; EARRINGS: TEJANI; SHOES: BETSEY JOHNSON

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