

PHARRELL



HIP-HOP
Biographies

Table of Contents

Timeline	4
Seeing Sounds	6
The Neptunes Get Their Feet Wet	12
Songs for the New Millennium	18
Where Rock Meets Hip-Hop	28
Pharrell Rising	32
Live Long and Prosper	40
Vocabulary	46
Photo Credits	48

Timeline

1973: Pharrell is born on April 5th in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

1985: Pharrell meets Chad Hugo. They form a lasting relationship and will go on to make music as N.E.R.D. and the Neptunes.

1998: Pharrell catches the attention of the music world when he produces Noreaga's song "Superthug."

2001: The Neptunes gain global success with Britney Spears's "I'm a Slave 4 U." N.E.R.D. releases their debut album *In Search Of...*

2002: The Neptunes win Producer of the Year at both the Source Awards and the Billboard Music Awards.

2004: N.E.R.D. releases *Fly or Die*.

2005: Together with Japanese artist Nigo, Pharrell debuts two clothing lines called Billionaire Boys Club and Icecream. Pharrell is voted the World's Best Dressed Man by *Esquire* magazine.

2006: Pharrell releases his first solo album, *In My Mind*.

2008: Rocket Ayer Williams, Pharrell's son, is born. Pharrell designs sunglasses and jewelry for Louis Vuitton.

Seeing Sounds

Many people know Pharrell Williams as a rapper and fashion **icon**. Few people realize that Pharrell has changed the way popular music sounds with his **innovative** music production.

Pharrell was a creative and curious child. He loved hip-hop, but his life wasn't shaped by the streets. So he made hip-hop that fit his own experience. He followed his passion for music, for skateboarding, and for space exploration.

Pharrell Williams was born on April 5, 1973, in Virginia Beach, Virginia. His mother, Carolyn, was a teacher, and his father, Pharaoh, was a handyman. Pharrell's parents worked long hours and did not make a lot of money. Pharrell said that his family ate "a lot of pork and beans" to make the food budget stretch between paychecks.

Pharrell has two younger brothers named Cato and Psolomon. There are gaps of 10 years between each child. Later, his parents divorced and his father remarried. From his father's second marriage, Pharrell has two younger half-brothers, Pharoah and David.


As a child, Pharrell spent a lot of time on his own. The TV became his best friend. One of his favorite things to watch was the Jackson 5 video for "Shake Your Body (Down to the Ground)." Pharrell dreamed about music.

Pharrell also remembers listening to music in the backseat of his parents' car. His parents would listen to a lot of classic soul music like the Isley Brothers, the Spinners, and Earth, Wind & Fire. Pharrell would stare at the stars while listening to the **jazzy** rhythms of the music. He saw colors and shapes that changed and moved as the music played. Pharrell actually saw the sounds because his brain is wired differently. This happens with creative people sometimes.

Pharrell loved music from an early age and associated colors with musical notes.

Pharrell was inspired by
A Tribe Called Quest.





Pharrell was not allowed to go outside and play while his parents were at work. So school was the time when he could have fun with his friends. Pharrell wanted to talk about his favorite music and TV shows with his friends during class. He was not a great student, scoring Cs and Ds on his report cards. He would daydream about music instead of paying attention in class.

Pharrell's grandmother was the first to spot his musical ability. Pharrell would take all the pots out of the cabinets and bang on them like drums. His grandmother suggested that he take music classes and play on a real drum set. He had several music teachers and attended a music program for gifted and talented children. There, Pharrell played drums in the band.

In music class, Pharrell learned to read and write music. In an interview years later, Pharrell thanked his band teachers. If they had not seen his talent, Pharrell would not be the star he is today.

Pharrell was in love with hip-hop. When he went home, he listened to artists like Public Enemy and Pete Rock. But the song that changed his life was "Bonita Applebum" by A Tribe Called Quest. That song blew Pharrell's mind.

"Bonita Applebum" was different from other songs. Most songs have a pattern of *verses* and a repeating chorus that is connected by a bridge. The rap group had used a *sample* and looped it. It made the whole song sound like a *bridge*. This created the strange effect Pharrell was hearing. Even as a young man, Pharrell found the technical side of music production fascinating.



Pharrell and Timbaland met in school. Both went on to become famous music producers.

Pharrell did not grow up in the inner city like many popular rappers. He grew up in a **diverse** community. In Virginia Beach, Pharrell was exposed to a wide range of music like hip-hop, punk, and classic rock. He did some break dancing to the old-school music of Afrika Bambaataa and Run-D.M.C. But Pharrell also listened to classic punk bands like the Misfits. And his nickname was “Skateboard P. Pharrell.” He never quite fit into one group.

In seventh grade, Pharrell met Chad Hugo. Chad played the saxophone and also liked a wide range of music. During breaks between classes, the two students would rap while Pharrell played the drums. Pharrell also played drums in his high school’s marching band.

Pharrell and Chad played music together for years. After school, they spent their time making music. They experimented with samples on a Casio keyboard. They made beats on a drum machine. They called themselves the D.P.S., a name they took from the movie *Dead Poets Society*. This movie was about a special teacher who encouraged boys to find inspiration in poetry. This was not the kind of image a typical rapper would choose!

Pharrell also played in a hip-hop group called Surrounded by Idiots (SBI) with Timbaland and Magoo. Magoo and Pharrell rapped while Timbaland worked as the **producer**. Like Pharrell, Timbaland went on to become one of the most respected hip-hop producers in the industry.

SBI broke up before recording anything, but their brief time together was an important moment in hip-hop history. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship between Pharrell and Timbaland, who have worked together many times over the years. It was a meeting of two great musical minds.

Vocabulary

accessories	(noun)	items that are worn in addition to clothes, such as belts, sunglasses, shoes, pocketbooks, etc.
airwaves	(noun)	the sound put out by radio stations
Billboard	(noun)	a music magazine and website
bittersweet	(adjective)	happy and sad at the same time
bridge	(noun)	the part of a song that connects the verse to the chorus
cameo	(noun)	a brief appearance by a celebrity
collaboration	(noun)	two or more people working on the same project
compilation	(noun)	a collection
composer	(noun)	a person who writes music
controversial	(adjective)	likely to start public disagreement
cutting-edge	(adjective)	new and different
debut	(adjective)	first
diverse	(adjective)	coming from many different backgrounds
documentary	(noun)	a nonfiction movie
falsetto	(adjective)	singing that is much higher than your normal voice
hook	(noun)	a catchy tune or beat that helps makes a song easy to remember
icon	(noun)	a famous person
innovative	(adjective)	inventive
instrumental	(noun)	music without words
jazzy	(adjective)	fun and lively
limited edition	(noun)	something produced in small numbers
lukewarm	(adjective)	not good but not terrible
mentor	(noun)	someone who acts as a guide or a teacher
minimal	(adjective)	very clean and simple
naysayer	(noun)	people who criticize and doubt you

HIP-HOP

Biographies

Beyoncé
Chris Brown
Sean Combs
Drake
Dr. Dre
50 Cent
Jay Z
Nicki Minaj
Pharrell
Pitbull
Rihanna
Usher
Lil Wayne
Kanye West



BEYONCÉ

HIP-HOP
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Table of Contents

Timeline	4
A Natural-Born Performer	6
A Destiny Fulfilled	12
Trouble in Paradise	18
Beyoncé the Survivor	22
Independent Woman: Beyoncé Flies Solo	26
Beyoncé Takes Control of Business	32
Who Runs the World?	38
Vocabulary	46
Photo Credits	48

Timeline

1981: Beyoncé is born on September 4th, in Houston, Texas.

1988: Beyoncé wins her first talent show.

1990: Beyoncé joins Girls Tyne.

1996: The girls sign with Columbia Records and rename themselves “Destiny’s Child.”

1998: Destiny’s Child releases their first album, and “No, No, No” is a hit single.

1999: Destiny’s Child releases their second album, *The Writing’s on the Wall*. Matthew Knowles gets into a legal feud with LeToya Luckett and LaTavia Roberson.

2000: LeToya and LaTavia are fired and replaced. Destiny’s Child becomes a trio with Beyoncé, Kelly Rowland, and Michelle Williams.

2001: Destiny’s Child releases *Survivor*, their third album.

2001 – 2003: Beyoncé stars in *Carmen: A Hip-Hopera*, *Austin Powers in Goldmember*, and *The Fighting Temptations*.

2003: Beyoncé releases her first solo album, *Dangerously in Love*, and begins dating Jay Z.

2004: Destiny’s Child releases their fourth and final album, *Destiny Fulfilled*.

A Natural-Born Performer

Beyoncé has been a star for nearly two *decades*. She is known as a singer, dancer, and trendsetter. Beyoncé has sung for presidents and performed around the world. She has shattered records for the number of awards she has won. But at heart, she is a Southern girl. She calls Texas home. In Houston, where Beyoncé grew up, she was a shy little girl. Her parents did everything possible to see her big dreams come true.

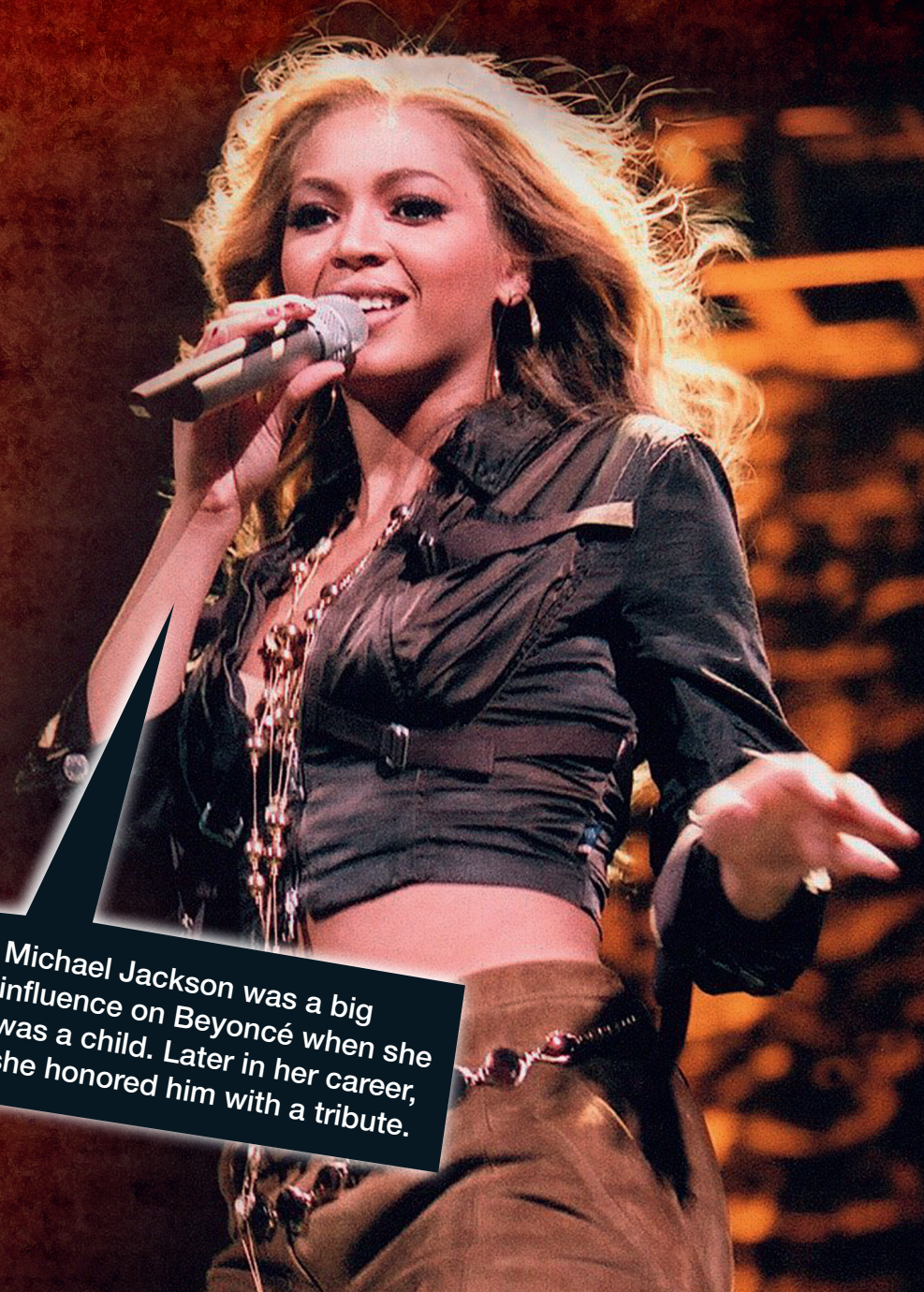
Beyoncé is not a stage name. She was born Beyoncé Giselle Knowles on September 4, 1981. She was the first child of Tina and Matthew Knowles. They chose the name Beyoncé in honor of Tina's mother, Agnèz Deréon Beyincé.

Tina was a salon stylist. Matthew had a successful career at Xerox. He sold medical equipment. Beyoncé saw her parents triumph in business. Tina and Matthew made a very comfortable life for themselves. They went to church on Sundays. They lived in Houston's Third Ward, an upscale neighborhood. They drove nice cars. The family would often sing around the piano.

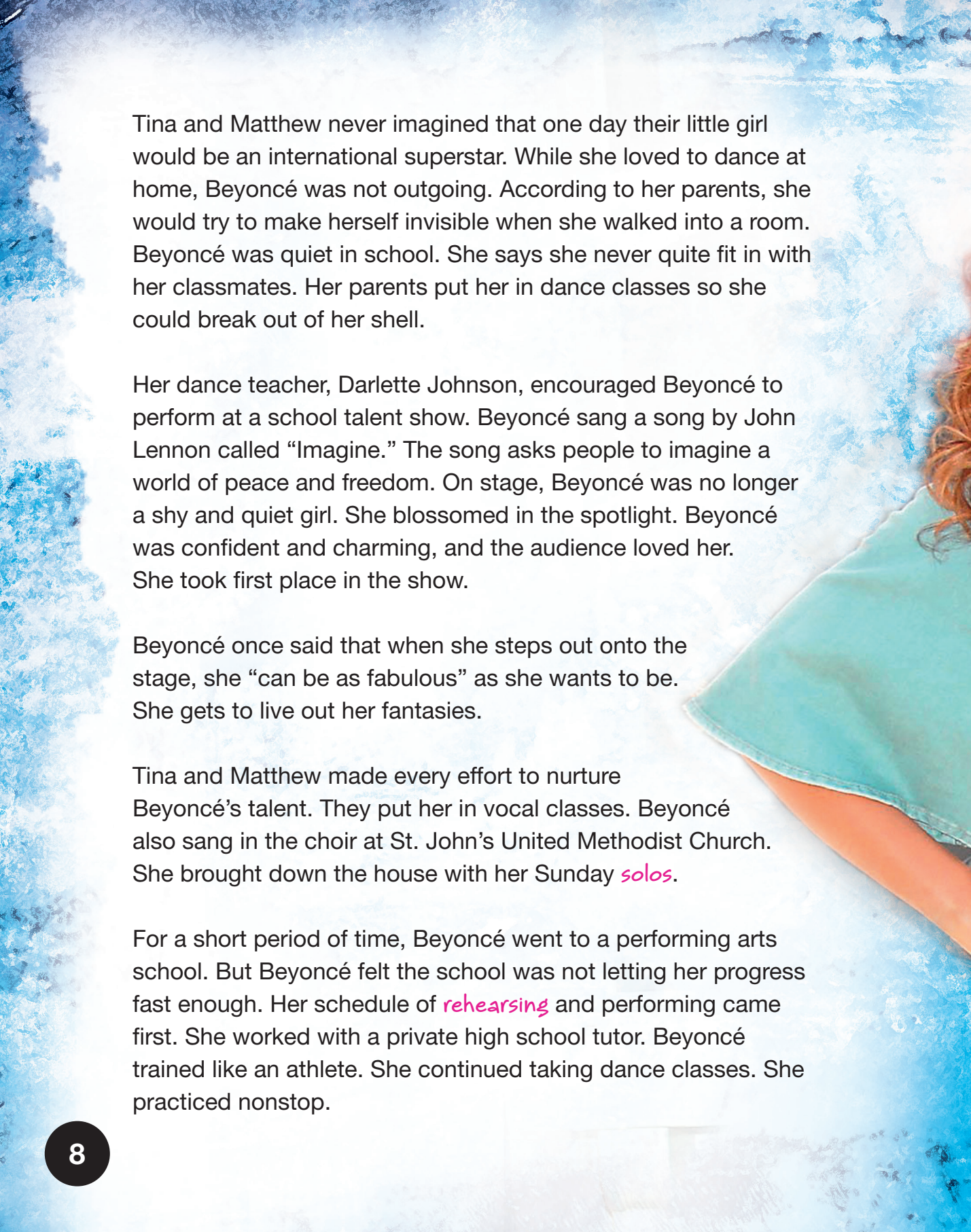
Tina and Matthew first fell in love because of music. When they were dating, they learned they had both sung in high school talent shows. Although they were not professional musicians, Tina and Matthew both loved music and gave Beyoncé important skills for her career. Beyoncé went to her first concert when she was just five years old.

She saw the *legend* Michael Jackson perform live. She says that was the moment she decided she wanted to be an entertainer.

When she was four years old, Beyoncé welcomed a little sister. Growing up, Solange was the more outgoing sister. Beyoncé was shy around other kids. She was very quiet. But that wouldn't hold her back.



Michael Jackson was a big influence on Beyoncé when she was a child. Later in her career, she honored him with a tribute.



Tina and Matthew never imagined that one day their little girl would be an international superstar. While she loved to dance at home, Beyoncé was not outgoing. According to her parents, she would try to make herself invisible when she walked into a room. Beyoncé was quiet in school. She says she never quite fit in with her classmates. Her parents put her in dance classes so she could break out of her shell.

Her dance teacher, Darlette Johnson, encouraged Beyoncé to perform at a school talent show. Beyoncé sang a song by John Lennon called “Imagine.” The song asks people to imagine a world of peace and freedom. On stage, Beyoncé was no longer a shy and quiet girl. She blossomed in the spotlight. Beyoncé was confident and charming, and the audience loved her. She took first place in the show.

Beyoncé once said that when she steps out onto the stage, she “can be as fabulous” as she wants to be. She gets to live out her fantasies.

Tina and Matthew made every effort to nurture Beyoncé’s talent. They put her in vocal classes. Beyoncé also sang in the choir at St. John’s United Methodist Church. She brought down the house with her Sunday *solos*.

For a short period of time, Beyoncé went to a performing arts school. But Beyoncé felt the school was not letting her progress fast enough. Her schedule of *rehearsing* and performing came first. She worked with a private high school tutor. Beyoncé trained like an athlete. She continued taking dance classes. She practiced nonstop.



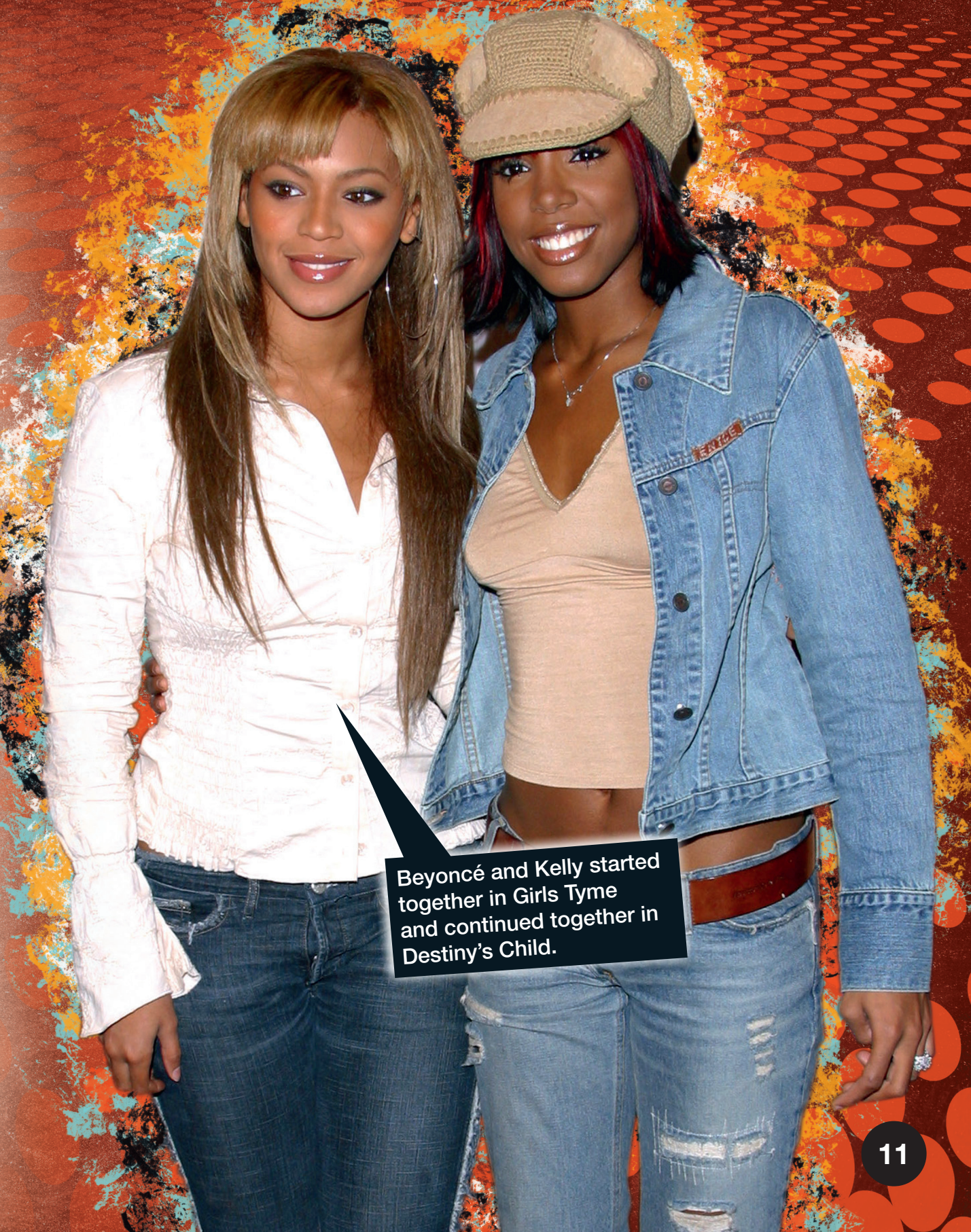
Beyoncé had the support of her whole family, including her younger sister, Solange.

Beyoncé and her friends used Tina's salon as their private stage. They would sing for ladies who were there to get their hair done. The ladies weren't there for a concert. But the girls demanded attention.

When she was nine years old, Beyoncé and her friends formed the group Girls Tyme. They were an all-girls group who sang **R&B** songs with hip-hop flavor. The girls in Girls Tyme were in the second and third grades. Beyoncé's best friend, Kelly Rowland, was in the group. Kelly even moved into the Knowleses' house for a while. They had extra space, and Kelly's mom had a live-in nanny job out of town. So Beyoncé and Kelly were like sisters.

Beyoncé's friend LaTavia Roberson was also in the group. Beyoncé was the lead singer. The other girls sang backup and rapped. The group studied videos of the greats to perfect their style. They watched videos of Michael Jackson, the Supremes, and En Vogue. They made videos of themselves to play back and critique. With hard work, their dance moves and harmonies were tight.

In 1992, Beyoncé thought Girls Tyme had gotten their big break. They were going to perform on *Star Search*, a popular talent show on television. Wearing bright neon-colored jackets and jean shorts, the girls danced and sang with all their might. Beyoncé even had a solo where she rocked the crowd. But Girls Tyme lost. The girls were **devastated**. Beyoncé says that was the first time she had failed at something she really wanted to win. The next day, Matthew took the girls to Disneyland. He wanted to cheer them up.



Beyoncé and Kelly started together in Girls Tyme and continued together in Destiny's Child.

Vocabulary

anthem	(noun)	a song that people feel speaks for them as a group
autobiographical	(adjective)	a work that someone creates about his or her own life
chemistry	(noun)	a physical attraction between two people
cosmetology	(noun)	the study of salon styling for hair, makeup, and nails
debut	(verb)	to appear for the first time
decade	(noun)	a ten-year period of time
devastated	(adjective)	very upset
diabetes	(noun)	a disease that causes too much sugar to stay in the blood
diva	(noun)	a person who expects to get special treatment
documentary	(noun)	a movie that presents facts about a subject
empower	(verb)	to make someone feel powerful and able
exposure	(noun)	attention from the public
fierce	(adjective)	powerful and strong
fusion	(noun)	two or more things joined into one
gospel	(noun)	a type of music that is sung in church
gumbo	(noun)	a mixture
Hurricane Katrina	(noun)	a terrible storm that flooded New Orleans in 2005
inauguration	(noun)	a formal occasion when a president officially takes the job
insecurity	(noun)	a lack of confidence or self-doubt
legend	(noun)	a person who has achieved a level of fame that lasts for long time
lip-synch	(verb)	to move your lips in a way that looks like you're singing

HIP-HOP

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Pitbull
Rihanna
Usher
Lil Wayne
Kanye West