

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 marks a turning point in my career, where I moved from being an unknown artist to a worldwide sensation. The journey began with the concept for the “...Baby One More Time” video, where the label originally envisioned me as a futuristic astronaut, resembling a Power Ranger. However, I didn't feel that image resonated with me or my audience, so I suggested a different concept. I envisioned the scene as a group of friends sitting at school, bored out of their minds, only to break into dance once the bell rang. The idea of bringing the school setting to life felt more relatable, something that my audience could connect with. The choreography, led by my amazing dancers, brought the concept to life smoothly, and the energy of the rehearsal was palpable. Working with the dancers, especially those from New York City, gave the performance a rawness that was key to its success. New York dancers, with their heart and spirit, brought a unique vibe that helped the music come alive. The rehearsals at Broadway Dance Center, a place I had trained at as a child, brought back so many memories and made me feel comfortable as I showed off my capabilities.

As the video came together, I had more creative input, and I felt heard by the director, Nigel Dick. I insisted on incorporating cute boys and school uniforms to make the transitions into casual clothes even more exciting. Casting Miss Fe as my teacher added a fun touch—her nerdy glasses and frumpy clothes made everything feel lighthearted. Filming that video was by far the most enjoyable part of creating my first album, and it marked a moment when I truly felt the passion for music. I was unknown at the time, and with that anonymity came a certain freedom. There was no pressure to impress, no reputation to protect. I could perform with a genuine sense of joy, knowing that if I made a mistake, it wouldn't matter—no one knew me yet. In those moments, I could look out at the crowd and feel like I was a blank canvas, ready to be

shaped by the experiences to come.

The success of “...Baby One More Time” came rapidly after its release. After performing in small malls for weeks, no one really knew who I was yet. My demeanor was genuine, though, and it wasn’t an act—I was just a sixteen-year-old girl trying to share her music. By the time the video was out and the single hit the radio, recognition started to pour in. The release of the song on October 23, 1998, followed by the video, was a turning point. Within a month, the song was everywhere, and by January 1999, the album was topping the charts. I debuted at number one on the Billboard 200, a record I was proud of, becoming the first woman to debut with both a number-one single and album at the same time. I could feel the world opening up, and the excitement was overwhelming. I no longer had to perform in malls to promote myself. My career had shifted into a new gear, and I was now a global sensation.

The speed of my rise was dizzying. I toured with NSYNC, including Justin Timberlake, a close friend from our Mickey Mouse Club days. Alongside my dancers, my managers Larry Rudolph and Johnny Wright, and my security guard Big Rob, I was constantly surrounded by people who supported me. Life on tour buses, performing in different cities every night, became my new normal. With the success of my album, I became a regular on MTV's *Total Request Live*, and Rolling Stone took notice. They sent David LaChapelle to Louisiana to shoot a cover story for me. The magazine's April issue featured me in a controversial shot: me in my underwear, holding a Teletubby. While the photos raised eyebrows, they symbolized my entrance into the spotlight and sparked conversations. Though my mother had concerns about how young I looked, I was confident in the direction I was heading. I knew I wanted to work with LaChapelle again, and this was just the beginning of many more creative endeavors to come.