

# She Got the Funk

ATLANTA'S **JANELLE MONÁE** WAS RAISED ON OUTKAST, SIGNED BY DIDDY, AND BLESSED WITH THE LOOKS OF A GIRLIE GRACE JONES. NOW SHE HAS A MAJOR-LABEL DEBUT THAT'S THE MOST FUNKADELIC THING TO HIT THE AIRWAVES SINCE THE MOTHERSHIP LANDED

📷 | MARK ABRAHAMS



### FIRST THINGS FIRST:

Have you ever seen anything quite like this girl?

We didn't think so. And we're almost positive you haven't heard anything like her, either.

Her debut EP, *Metropolis: The Chase*, is an explosion of retrofuturistic funk, a bombastic one-woman sci-fi rock opera. (Imagine Lauryn Hill singing over "Bombs over Baghdad.") It's absolutely nothing you'd expect from a 23-year-old P. Diddy protégée, but it makes perfect sense coming from a high school theater geek who had a preteen group called the

Weirdoz and continued her independent study by devouring live footage of James Brown, Buddy Holly, Mick Jagger, and Judy Garland. "Watching them," she says, "I just learned how to let my own inner whatever-it-is come out." And out it comes, all right, in powerful waves of freaky, empowering pop. You can thank Diddy, who had the good sense to sign Monáe to his Bad Boy Entertainment label and the wisdom to let her do her thing,

"I wanted to work with someone who'd get excited," Monáe says, "then leave me alone creatively."

The sound, of course, is only part of the Janelle Monáe Experience—the Afro fauxhawk, the flashing showbiz eyes, the flying jazz hands, the *ambition*: She's based her debut project on Fritz Lang's 1927 film, *Metropolis*. "We take this very seriously," she says of herself and the tuxedoed musicians who make up her collective, Wondaland Arts Society. "This is our art, and it's up to us to alter history." Then she adds, "I think cinematically. This isn't some bootleg indie film. This is *Star Wars*." —WILL WELCH