



JD McCrary Makes Hollywood Records History as Youngest Person to Sign With the Label

The 11-year-old is the voice of "Young Simba" in "The Lion King."



It was just about a year ago when, at the 2018 Grammy Awards, JD McCrary — 10 at the time — joined Childish Gambino on stage at Madison Square Garden. After he impressed the A-list crowd with his part in their 2017 collaboration, "Terrified", the internet clamored for details. Just who was the powerhouse vocalist whose tone bears a striking similarity to a young Stevie? Also like the legendary Mr. Wonder, who signed with Motown at age 11, McCrary has made history as the youngest person to land a recording contract at Disney's Hollywood label. He turns 12 in July.

You could say McCrary made an appearance at last week's Oscars, too, with the debut of the trailer for the Disney remake of "The Lion King," due out in July. McCrary provides the voice of "Young Simba" in the animated feature, and perhaps not so coincidentally, Gambino (aka Donald Glover) voices "Adult Simba." And while the two are both portraying the same character in different stages of the circle of life, McCrary says Glover offered him some big brother wisdom for his next chapter as an artist. "He gave me a lot of advice about knowing myself and my music and what I want to do," McCrary tells *Variety*. "He said to stay true to what you want to do with a song."

McCrary's first single, "Keep in Touch," debuted in January on Radio Disney. Featuring McCrary's versatile range, the song is about "staying in touch with your family, your friends and your loved ones," he says. "You can do that with any device. You can do that all over the world and all it really takes is a call," he adds.



McCrary started singing early, belting Michael Jackson's "Bad" while barely out of his toddler years. His career has been on the rise ever since he first appeared on NBC's "Little Big Shots," hosted by Steve Harvey, at the tender age of 8. Was he nervous? Not really. Says McCrary: "I just felt natural and it was cool having my family watch me. It was on my mom's birthday that we recorded it, which was really nice."

The singer, who is managed by Sherry Kayne at the Green Room and represented by ICM, was soon after scouted by Hollywood, landing the role of Kenny on Tyler Perry's OWN series "The Paynes." He'll next play the role of Isaac in the upcoming Universal film, "Little," opposite "This is Us" star Justin Hartley, Marsai Martin and Issa Rae. "That was really fun to shoot," says McCrary of the movie. "I had an amazing time."

The sixth-grader has plenty more to look forward to. Another single is in the works, as well as work on a future release. As for collaborators, McCrary took advantage of a prime networking opportunity at last year's Grammys — "I got to meet Pink, who my mom loves and is a super fan, and Alessia Cara and Khalid," he says — but he does have one star on his wish list. "I would love to collaborate with Beyonce," he says. "Just putting that into the universe. And Logic. I would love to sing with those two."