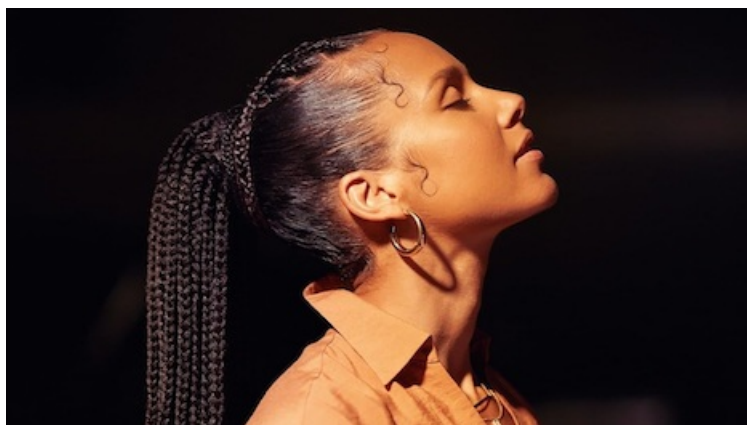


AUTOMOTIVE

## Mercedes-Benz shares Alicia Keys' success in intimate S-Class effort

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*Singer-songwriter Alicia Keys reflects on her childhood and motherhood in the new S-Class campaign. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

By ELLEN KELLEHER

German automaker **Mercedes-Benz** has tapped Grammy Award winner Alicia Keys to reflect on her journey to career and personal fulfillment in an honest campaign featuring its upscale S-Class sedan.

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Titled "Pieces," the campaign film sheds a light on Ms. Key's outlook on creativity, formed through her experience growing up poor in New York's Hell's Kitchen neighborhood. Rather than prominently featuring the S-Class, the vignette adds a humanistic touch to the automaker's rarified brand by allowing the singer-songwriter to share her experiences in her own words.

"Alicia Keys is a ferociously talented artist whose appeal transcends race, class, age and musical tastes," said David Undercoffler, editor in chief of **Autolist**, San Francisco. "This makes her a highly marketable star for any company to use in an ad campaign so it makes sense that Mercedes would be drawn to her."

### Humanizing influence

The film opens with some non-sequential frames before an S-Class is seen on a winding oceanside road, accompanied with a calming piano melody. Ms. Keys is then revealed, declaring that "no one can tell you what the truth is" in a voiceover.

Visually, the campaigns plays with different styles, including soft-focus shots reminiscent of home videos, black-and-white footage and scenes with higher production value.

*The S-Class is secondary to Alicia Keys' narrative in the film.*

"The only way you can access the truth is when you have that visceral sensation inside of you that you know without a shadow of a doubt that that's the truth," Ms. Keys says. "Then it is the truth because it's your truth and I think that might be all we have."

As Ms. Keys plays the standup piano in a dramatically-lit room, the classically-trained pianist explains that she has always been afraid of losing everything because she came from nothing. She grew up with a single mother in a neighborhood that had yet to be gentrified.

The footage shifts to black-and-white shots of New York during her childhood, with ambulances racing and kids playing basketball. Ms. Keys pulls no punches in describing the harsh realities of her childhood environment.

"Yet, it was colorful, exciting," she says, as a bright flower appears for a few frames, interrupting the black-and-white scene. "It just sounded like music."



*Alicia Keys grew up in Hell's Kitchen, Manhattan. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

Ms. Keys then shifts to sharing how she found her escape by spending hours practicing classical music in her small apartment. Eventually, her talent translated to fame leading to a time when she found it difficult to draw boundaries and create space for herself.

"I lost myself for a long time," she says. "You know I knew a piece of myself, but I definitely didn't know my full self."

Accepting imperfection and uncertainty is another theme Ms. Keys explores, explaining that creativity flows upon the acceptance of vulnerabilities.

Finally, Ms. Keys contemplates the "childlike wonder" and sense of imagination she sees in her sons, Egypt and Genesis. She describes how five-year old Genesis only needs a stick and a leaf to create a storyline while a surreal shot shows her pink grand piano floating in midair.

"Oh yeah, I can make up a whole world in my head," Ms. Keys says. Her piano makes its way from the air to a pool of water and she starts to play her song, "Love Looks Better."

"All I ever wanted was a dollar and a chance," she sings, the scene shifting from her solo performance to intimate footage of her boys and husband Swiss Beatz, the rapper and record producer.

"It's those tiny things, those forgettable things that are actually the most important," Ms. Keys says.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Alicia Keys (@aliciakeys)

### *Ms. Keys drives her two sons in her Mercedes-Benz S-Class*

As the recording artist lists the small moments that matter the most to her and her family, the S-class comes into view. In another relatable and down-to-earth moment, Ms. Keys is seen driving with her young children.

"Care for What Matters" is the parting Mercedes advertising line that closes the film before its iconic insignia is displayed.

"The central theme of the ad is to focus on what matters, and Alicia describes life's simple pleasures as what is most important to her," said Julie Blackley, communications manager at [iSeeCars](#), Woburn, MA. "What's fascinating about the ad is that it briefly shows a vehicle in the beginning, and then there is no image or mention of Mercedes until the end.

"It lets Alicia Keys' music and powerful narration be the focal point," she said.

### Personality-driven S-Class

As the new video attests, Mercedes-Benz has debuted its redesigned S-Class with a series of humanizing promotions that broaden the appeal of the brand as it looks to fend off other luxury automakers.

Already the world's best-selling luxury sedan, the new S-Class is a look at the future of Mercedes-Benz. To support the world premiere of the new S-Class, Mercedes-Benz is sharing in-depth video looks at the luxury sedan across its social media channels, including some which were livestreamed.

The personal video with Ms. Keys follows another campaign that followed race car driver Lewis Hamilton and billionaire businessman and engineer Jensen Huang as they each took the new S-Class for a test drive ([see story](#)). The automaker also tapped tennis legend Roger Federer for a similar effort with its flagship vehicle.

"In the Keys ad, the vehicle itself is almost irrelevant; just connecting Keys to the Mercedes brand is a marketing win in and of itself," Autolist's Mr. Undercoffler said. "That the automaker is using its new S-Class halo sedan in the ad allows halo vehicles to do what they do best: set the tone for the rest of the brand, regardless of whether viewers are drawn to or interested in buying the vehicle itself."

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