

Song of HERSELF

Beyoncé is married, yet sings single-girl anthems; shy, but outrageous onstage. Now, she's found harmony in the contradictions. **By Brooke Hauser**

Oppor-
tunities are good that if you live in a place with electricity, you have seen Beyoncé on TV, in the movies, on your iPhone—and maybe even in the flesh. In the past year alone, she has traveled to 110 cities for her international *I Am...* tour. Beyoncé seems to be everywhere. But in fact, there's one place she's not—and it sets her apart from nearly every other celebrity of her stature. And that place is the tabloids. There's a reason. "I feel that I was born to entertain, but I want my music and my talent to speak for themselves," says the singer, wearing sweats and a hoodie and stretching out on a bed in her double-decker tour bus. "I don't want my personal life, my mistakes, or my marriage or whatever to interfere when I'm on the stage. It's when I feel the most confident, the most in control."

For her last album, *I Am...Sasha Fierce*, the famously inscrutable star revealed her brassy, stage-stomping alter ego in the broad spotlight that Beyoncé herself often dodges. But lately, she has been transferring that feeling of control she gets while performing into her offstage life. "Sasha Fierce is my alter ego, this other side of me that's almost animalistic and strong and fearless, and I have used this person to take over when I'm too scared or too shy," says the singer, who has been performing since she was seven. "The thing that's interesting is I don't need Sasha Fierce anymore, because I've grown, and I'm now able to merge the two. I want people to see me. I want people to see who I am."

In other words, you won't see her talking about her husband, Jay-Z, in *OK!* magazine, but Beyoncé is finally

ready to show exactly what goes into being the hardest-working woman in show business. Only 28, the singer and songwriter received more 2009 Grammy nominations than any other performer—and has already won ten of the awards, not to mention a fan base that includes a prince (Charles) and a president (Barack). Her turns as a '60s singer in *Dreamgirls* and as a strung-out Etta James in *Cadillac Records* have earned her praise from critics; the latter portrayal even got a rave from Meryl Streep. "Meryl just said how much she loved the performance, and how raw it was," Beyoncé says, still incredulous. "I mean, anything from Meryl Streep is like..." She trails off. "I was surprised that she even saw the film."

There isn't much that Beyoncé hasn't conquered. The woman even

coined a word that's now in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. "Bootylicious: Esp. of a woman, often with reference to the buttocks: sexually attractive, sexy; shapely." "I still can't believe it! It's hilarious," Beyoncé says, before analyzing her contribution to the English language, just as she does most facets of her career: "I actually wish it was another word that I created. I wish it didn't have 'booty' in it."

This month, she will uncork a perfume, *Beyoncé Heat*, from Coty, an earthy blend of Red Vanilla Orchid and honey. Here, too, Beyoncé exercised her growing control. "I've done endorsements for two other fragrances, and I was part of the process slightly. Now, this time, it's finally my fragrance, and it's something that will be around that I can pass on to my kids." That theme is important

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL THOMPSON



**"I always say, 'I don't want to lose my curves.' I like firm curves."
Beaded silk tulle dress by Roberto Cavalli. Makeup colors: Wear Infinité Eye Shadow in Antique Brown and Colour Riche Lipcolour in Fairest Nude by L'Oréal Paris. Hair: Kimberly Kimble. Makeup: Francesca Tolot. Manicure: Lisa Logan. Details, see Credits page.**

to her because of her own maternal memories: “I grew up with my mother walking past, and you could smell the faint scent of her fragrance—it always gave me this sense of comfort. I just thought it was so beautiful that she would walk by and leave her scent.” Of course, that’s not to say that this fragrance is the least bit mumsy; that name didn’t come from nowhere. “The name Heat, it sounds simple—it sounds hot and sexy, like Texas. It sounds seductive.” Still, she says, “I wanted to make sure that it wasn’t too overbearing, because I’m very private, and I didn’t want it to be something that everybody could smell. You have to allow someone into your space.”

Beyond the bottle, the essence of Beyoncé has been hard to tap. But that seems to be changing. The star recently directed and produced a concert video that gives a rare behind-the-scenes glimpse of the work that went into her first-ever Las Vegas show. Chronicling her rise to the top through a number of Broadway-inspired routines, the result is an artful documentary entitled *I Am...Yours*. But the terms are decidedly hers.

“People just know the songs on the radio, the videos, the award shows, and they have no idea all the sacrifices and hard work that went into getting to where I am right now,” she says. “I wanted to really explain my story.”

The Knowles family, the singer has pointed out, is not the Jacksons, and this is not a rags-to-riches tale. Beyoncé was born in Houston, the first daughter in a family with the means to hire housekeepers, drive a Jaguar, and pay for private school. Her mother, Tina Knowles (née Beyoncé, a Creole surname), owned a popular hair salon, where Beyoncé and her younger sister, Solange, grew up in the presence of whirring hair dryers and heated gossip. Their father, Mathew, was a sales executive at Xerox before he moved on in order to manage Destiny’s Child.

By nine, Beyoncé was hitting the talent-show circuit with the unfortunately named group Gyrls Tyme. She was

10 when they began recording songs, 12 when they signed their first deal, and 15 when Mathew decided that his daughter’s future looked a lot brighter than Xerox’s. In 1998, under his guidance, the newly named Destiny’s Child released its self-titled debut album.

The rest is Billboard Top 100 history. Destiny’s Child eventually went on to become one of the best-selling female pop groups of all time with estrogen-fueled hits like “Say My Name,” “Independent Women, Part

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I,” and “Survivor.” But long before the tour buses and private jets, the group was rehearsing their act on the deck outside the Knowles’s home and styling themselves for shows. It seems natural that the girls would ask Tina for hair advice, right? Not exactly:

“I remember when I started doing my hair myself—I cut bangs, and I started curling my hair and pressing it, literally, with an iron.” Wait, come again? Beyoncé laughs hard. “The girls from Destiny’s Child, we would put our hair on the ironing board, and iron it, which is so crazy! My mom was like, ‘We have to get you out of your own hair, because you are destroying it!’”

More than a decade later, Beyoncé rarely has a hair out of place. She is a perfectionist, whether she is applying mascara or giving an interview. When her publicist interrupts us to warn that we have only seconds left to talk, Beyoncé seems genuinely concerned. “Oh, God, that was quick,” she says. “I can give you ten more minutes.” In the end, I will have received four warnings to wrap it up, and the singer will have extended our interview as many times, proving her own observation that “the more talented a person is, the cooler they are.”

Sasha Frere-Jones, the pop-music critic for *The New Yorker*, once dubbed her “pop’s A student,” a title that is apt, if not complete. Beyoncé’s musical influences include Afro-beat pioneer Fela Kuti and Barbra Streisand. In honor of Ella Fitzgerald, she recently learned how to scat, and it wouldn’t be out of the realm of possibility if she suddenly took up Tuvan throat singing. Underneath her glamorous persona is a Puritan work ethic. She regularly analyzes video of her concerts in hopes

of making the next performance even tighter. As far as handling fame, she is the industry’s valedictorian, leading the way for younger singers, including Rihanna, as well as her own sister, Solange. Beyoncé is Sasha and Malia’s role model, for goodness’ sake.

Is it ever hard having to be...perfect? A seasoned interview subject, Beyoncé even has the perfect answer. Well, almost.

“Trust me, I’m not at all,” she says, expertly deflecting the question. “But it is hard living up to people thinking that you’re perfect.” A pause. “I shouldn’t say that, because that sounds crazy. But it’s hard when you’re on television, and you always have the beautiful gown on, and you’re always politically correct.”

As for her body, with the exception of her famous weight loss for *Dreamgirls*, she maintains a figure that’s strong, not skinny. “I always say, ‘I don’t want to lose my curves,’” she says. “I like firm curves. You can never do enough squats, you can never do enough sit-ups. But as far as losing too much weight or building too much muscle...I like for women to look feminine.” On the road, she sticks to a diet of grilled fish, vegetables, and salad. She allows herself one “cheat day” a week, when she can eat whatever she wants.



1990

YEARBOOK PICTURE, AGE NINE
ALLURE: “Did your mom do your hair?” B: “I’m sure she did. My mom loved Thierry Mugler, and I had a couple of those sweaters and little jumpsuits—which is so funny, now that I’ve ended up working with him 20 years later with the tour.”

WITH PRINCE CHARLES AT FASHION ROCKS IN LONDON “This is hilarious because it was rumored that I was dating either him or his son. Maybe both! He came to one of my shows. He was dancing along with my performance, and they got pictures.... This was the next day, and we were laughing about it.”



2003

WITH TINA TURNER AT THE GRAMMY AWARDS IN LOS ANGELES “This was kind of like seeing my ideal future. Like, if I could be 70 and touring around the world and still have that spirit that she has, this young spirit. I mean, she was out-dancing me in her heels! It was a great learning experience for me, and it definitely gave me hope that you can be around for as long as you want to be and still be so positive and so hot and sexy. She’s the ultimate. What a great performer.”



2008

WITH HUSBAND JAY-Z AT A KNICKS GAME IN NEW YORK CITY “I like basketball—I mean, I prefer it to most other sports. But I love going to the games, more so than watching it on television.”

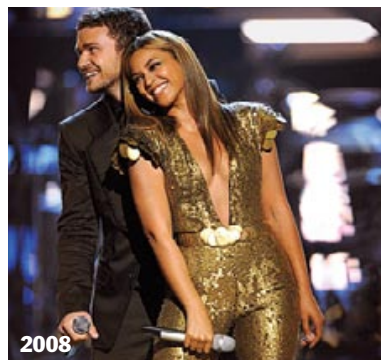


2008



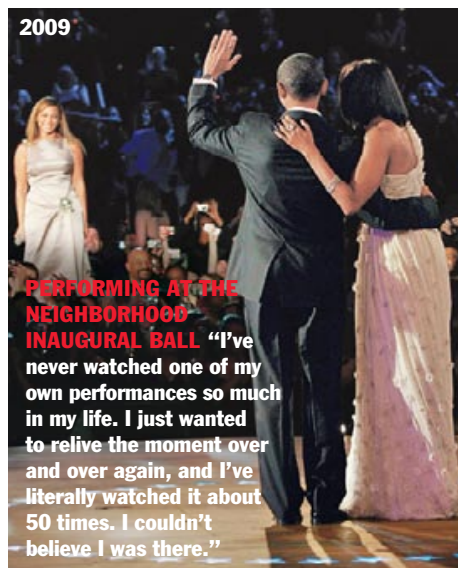
2008

IN CADILLAC RECORDS WITH ADRIEN BRODY “This is my proudest moment as far as my work on film. It was the most naked I’ve ever been, because it was something I’ve never experienced in my life. It was really a lot for me to get to that point. When I watch it, I’m so proud of myself. I really am.”



2008

WITH JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE AT FASHION ROCKS IN NEW YORK CITY “We had just worked together on my album and had a mutual respect for each other. [The jumpsuit] was really heavy. It weighed maybe 60 pounds; I could barely walk in it. They got it out of the Met. It was in the Costume Institute or something, and I was just praying that it would fit, because I saw it and I was like, ‘I have to wear that jumpsuit!’ Thank God I was able to get into it.”



2009

PERFORMING AT THE NEIGHBORHOOD INAUGURAL BALL “I’ve never watched one of my own performances so much in my life. I just wanted to relive the moment over and over again, and I’ve literally watched it about 50 times. I couldn’t believe I was there.”



2007

THE SPORTS ILLUSTRATED SWIMSUIT ISSUE “We were launching our swimsuit line, and my mother designed all of these swimsuits, so that was really great: I was able to be the first singer on *Sports Illustrated* and launch the clothing line. The ocean cleanses me. It’s my favorite place in the world when I’m stressed.”



2008

ON SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE WITH JUSTIN TIMBERLAKE, BOBBY MOYNIHAN, AND ANDY SAMBERG “Oh, God. Justin [Timberlake] actually walked into my dressing room in a robe, and... that. He had his little kitten heels, he opened up his robe, put his little leg out, juts out his hip, and said, ‘So, you gonna do it?’ I was like, ‘Um, yeah! How could I say no with you in that outfit?’ It was a shock—I didn’t even know they wanted me to do a skit. When I said, ‘Let me see the skit,’ Justin showed up in this leotard!”

ON STAGE AT PHILIPS ARENA, ATLANTA “I had Michael Jackson songs in my show, a small tribute, before he passed away. ‘Halo’ just reminded me of him. So, this was at the end of the show, and I remember his father was in the audience a couple weeks after he passed, and it was really, really chilling for him to see that. Michael Jackson’s my hero.”



2009

At this point in her life, she is interested in showing more of her flaws. It's a tough move for a perfectionist, but a wise one for an artist who doesn't want every glitch to be corrected. Those glitches, in the end, add up to personality—they're what make all of us, including Beyoncé, human. "Some days you just don't feel like being a celebrity," she says. "You know, today is one of those days."

"Don't get me wrong," she continues. "I love fashion. I'm not a sweats type of girl. I don't enjoy wearing tennis shoes. I don't even feel comfortable in them. I enjoy dressing up, and I did grow up with my mother basically doing makeovers on every woman. I admire glamour and women who take care of themselves. But some days, you just don't want to have to be perfect."

Portraying the former heroin addict

someday. "I definitely want to have a child," she says. "But I know from my nephew it's a lot. I hope that those things will just happen naturally. I still haven't had time to relax."

The older she gets, the more Beyoncé sees the value in carving out time for herself. After the tour, she wants to catch some Broadway shows and maybe learn how to cook. Sometimes, it's as simple as taking off her shoes and walking in the grass. After years of traveling around the world, she is only now realizing the importance of stopping to smell the souvlaki. Whenever she is in a new country, she goes out to a traditional restaurant and tries to soak up as much of the culture as she can in a sitting. In Egypt, she snorkeled in the Red Sea and took a speedboat, far away from the prying lenses of the paparazzi. She rides her bike, and pedestrians often don't recognize her until after she has whizzed past. She

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Etta James in *Cadillac Records* remains one of the accomplishments Beyoncé is proudest of. To prepare for the part, she visited recovering addicts at Phoenix House, a drug- and alcohol-treatment facility based in New York, to which she later donated her salary for the film. "It was so much more fulfilling than anything I've ever done," the star says of the role. "It was a big step. I mean, my label wasn't happy about the idea of me being addicted to heroin, laid out on the floor. This is coming from someone who's never said a curse word. It was very liberating for me. I felt so...free. Like, Wow, if I can show this in a movie, I can show myself."

Little by little, subjects that were once off-limits are beginning to emerge. Beyoncé is still protective of her personal life, but she speaks candidly about her plans for a family

gets a kick out of hiding in plain sight. The next time you play spades online, you just might be competing against the singer. "I play with everybody, and they curse me out so bad when I make mistakes, and kick me out of the room. I love it," she says. "It's really fun because no one knows it's me."

It is a little after 5 P.M. on one of the last days of Beyoncé's *I Am...* tour. This morning, when she woke up in Liverpool, England, she treated herself to a hotel facial. In the next few hours, she will start hair and makeup, meet and greet the 100-plus people who will be backstage, and say a little prayer with members of her entourage. That's before she goes onstage for an athletic two-hour show featuring a set list of more than 25 songs, countless leotard changes, strenuous booty shaking and hair whipping, and a high-wire act.

So, where exactly is Beyoncé performing tonight? "To be honest," the singer says, her voice scratchy and deep, "I don't even know."

Once she arrives at the arena, Beyoncé will begin her transformation from sweats to stage. "I do my own makeup every night," she says. (Italian makeup artist Francesca Tolot picks the products.) "In my everyday life, I stick with concealer, blush, gloss, and mascara. But on the stage, I like to experiment with lashes and different colors."

Beyoncé is a girl's girl. But her songs have made her a hip-thrashing emblem of female empowerment. "I know that my niche is anthems, and I think that's what I'm good at as far as songwriting," she says. "Probably the best songs I write are about relationships, and flipping the roles between women and men, and things that women go through. Growing up in a female group, and in a hair salon, I have always been passionate about women. I just think we need each other, and the things that inspire me to write songs are things that I think women need to hear. I'm happy to be a voice, one of the many. I'm happy to be, in some way, a role model."

In Egypt, on one of the last stops on her tour, Islamic groups protested Beyoncé's show, calling it an "insolent sex party" and a "nudity concert" that endangered the nation's "social peace and stability," according to the Associated Press. Beyoncé didn't get news of the controversy until after it had happened. During the show, she says, "it made me feel really proud to see the ladies putting their arms up, saying, 'To the left, to the left,' and jamming, I mean, some of them fully covered, on people's shoulders, just gettin' it," she says. "I'm a voice for those women, and it makes me feel like my job and my music are doing what they're supposed to do, and it's a lot bigger than just the radio. It gives me chills just thinking about it: women so empowered, singing every word, their fists up, their hands up, feeling strong." For the singer on the stage, it was proof of how far she has come.

Beyoncé laughs, and then she grows quiet. "That's what I'm about." ♦



**"I love fashion. I don't
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Sequined leather booties
by Cesare Paciotti.**