

Arts & ENTERTAINMENT

Queen of *Hip-Hop Soul*

Mary J. Blige stays in tune with younger audiences

(AP) — Mary J. Blige, the “queen of hip-hop soul,” says she’s kept her lofty title because she stays in tune with what younger audiences want to hear.

“I always get inspired back from the Rihannas and the Beyonces,” the 38-year-old says. “You just have to be open enough to learn from another generation... That’s being a smart person and that’s why I’m able to be just right there — not doing what they do, but what I do.”

Blige’s latest CD, “Stronger with Each Tear,” has a fresh sound that maintains her R&B groove. It is her ninth studio release.

In recent interview, Blige — who has won nine Grammy Awards since her debut in 1992 — talked about R&B music, recording a jazz album — and being a crybaby.

The Associated Press: Would you say that you’re a sensitive person?

Blige: I would say that I’m a very sensitive person.

AP: Are you crying about the same things that you cried about earlier in your career?

Blige: I think I cry about different things now. I cry because I want to be better than this. I want to continue to grow so, you know,

I have to give myself a break. I’m my worst critic. I’m the hardest person on me. I’ve been like that forever, but I’ve learned to give myself a break so even now when I slip... I don’t want to hurt anyone. And I cry when I hurt people unintentionally.

AP: How do you react when one of your songs is played on the radio?

Blige: If I hear one of my old songs like “Not Gon’ Cry” or “My Life” — the “My Life” album just always makes me stop and just cry, like bawl. So call me a crybaby, whatever, I’m a woman, too, so sometimes it’s just that time.



Mary J. Blige

AP: Is it hard to perform those emotional songs when, at this point, you’re in a different place?

Blige: For me performing “Not Gon’ Cry” and “I’m Goin Down” and “My Life” — it’s like therapy again. I just love the way it makes me feel at the moment and get it out of my system, you know. Those are hurtful places and sometimes you got to revisit for the sake of other people.

AP: How would you compare today’s R&B music with the ‘90s music?

Blige: Can I say ‘80s too? There is no comparison because the music in the ‘90s and the ‘80s was like, music. You had Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis who were on the radio. Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones everywhere, all over the place. Anita Baker, just so many amazing people... I’m not saying the music isn’t beautiful now. It’s just such a... it’s limited.

AP: How do you think your fashion style has evolved?

Blige: I mean I’ve had some disasters, some trials, some errors, some disastrous hair moments and clothing

moments, but that’s due to the insecurity in me and not knowing what works for me and trying to do what works for everybody else. But once you fall into what works for you, which is what I did, you can’t go wrong unless you just want to go wrong.

AP: What advice do you have for insecure women who dress in a way they probably shouldn’t dress?

Blige: I guess the insecure younger woman, just do what works for you because everything doesn’t work for everyone. You know exactly what works for you. You can wear something tight and you’re to be bubbling all over the place. So I mean, use your common sense and be confident in that.

AP: You’ve collaborated with everyone from Sting to U2 to Aretha Franklin. Is there anyone else you’d like to work with?

Blige: I haven’t had a chance to collaborate with Anita Baker yet. So when I do my jazz album, Anita, I’m coming for you.

AP: When are you planning to release the jazz CD?

Blige: I have no idea when I’m going to do the jazz album, but it can’t be long. It won’t be long.

Songwriter Performs Sundays



Steve Ulrich, a songwriter of international reputation who now lives in northeast Portland, has inaugurated a series of Sunday Brunch performances at Daddy Mojo’s Café, 1501 N.E. Freemont St.

From 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., each Sunday, Ulrich, with friends, performs a variety of styles, including blues, country, rock-a-billy, R&B, folk and gospel.

Ulrich is a singer with a great range and soulfulness accented by fine guitar and harmonica work. He has four CDs out on the independent label Subatomic Particles for Peace. For more information, visit steveulrich.com.

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