

## Mary J. Blige Has Something to Tell You ... about Fighting AIDS, Creating a Hot New Album, and Doing the Hard Work of Living with Joy

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### Article excerpt

MARY J. BLIGE HAS A FANTASTIC BODY, fit surprising curvy. Today it's poured into a pair of form-fitting jeans, a chic orange turtleneck, and dark leather boots. Huge dark sunglasses set off her trademark blond bob wig. She's curled up in a chair in a small room at the Beverly Hills Hotel after our lunch downstairs, her legs dangling over the arm. She stares out the window as her husband-manager Kendu Isaacs puts a CD-R of songs from her new album, *Growing Pains*, in the room's outdated CD player. As the beat-driven music starts to play, Mary drops her head slightly forward and nods hard to the beat. Her entire upper torso jooks in classic B-girl style. She sings along to the words, going into her own zone. This is career-high music for Mary--some of her best singing, strongest songwriting, and most inspired production ever. But it's likely to further alienate many of the fans that vibe to *Miserable Mary*, *Addicted Mary*, *Depressed Mary*, and *Suicidal Mary*. The new material is a continuation of the process begun on her Grammy award-winning 2005 album, *The Breakthrough*--Mary's chronicling of her new and hard-won states of mind and being. She's happy. When told that the album, which was then a month and a half from being released, would likely inspire grumblings of dissatisfaction among some of her old fans, Mary swings her legs around, sits up straight, and says in that globally famous no-bullshit voice, "Thank you. That's honest, what you just gave back. I like that."

Actually, throughout our conversation, honesty is what Mary J. Blige gives me. It's well-known that celebrities come to this magazine to send a little love to their big gay following, but often enough, that's just business. This is different. This is deeper. "The majority of my fans are gay," Mary says matter-of-factly. "The majority of them are, and I have to really make sure that they know I'm paying attention to the fact that they support me, and I support them."

[ILLUSTRATION OMITTED]

Asked at what point she realized that the children had made her their own, she immediately replies, "I realized that years ago. Like, probably during ... was it *Share My World* or *Mary*? It was probably during the *Mary* album that I realized I had so many gay fans, because one of my managers at the time was gay and him and all his friends were die-hard *Mary* fans. And then there's a lot of gay women that love *Mary J. Blige*--a slew of gay women. And that's never been something to bother me. Never. Because we're all people at the end of the day." She pauses for a second, then continues.

"When I was growing up," she says thoughtfully, "my neighborhood was full of everyone--black, white, Latino, gay, straight. A lot of people that I knew were gay, but they were great people. They were good people. It's not like they were alien. They were just people. That [acceptance] was just something that was always in me. I've never been a judgmental person because I have been through so much hell myself ..."

And you yourself have been judged, I say to her.

"Exactly. I've been judged so much that I'd be a fool, or I'd be dead wrong to myself, to have something negative to say about anyone that's doing anything that's their choice, you know what I mean?"

In the fight against AIDS, Blige has done more than support from the sidelines. She has jumped in on our side. Longtime fans know of her involvement with AIDS organizations and awareness programs like *Minority AIDS Project* and her being a spokeswoman for *MAC cosmetics' Viva Glam III and IV* campaigns. The death of her friend and songwriter *Kenny Greene* (who was responsible for many of *MJB's* early hits, most notably "*Love No Limit*" and "*My Love*") was her personal impetus for involvement in the cause. But it was noticing the silence around the disease that finally prompted Blige to take action.

"I was motivated," she says, "by the fact that it came and was so huge, and then all of a sudden it disappeared, and it was the thing that everybody swept under the rug ..."