

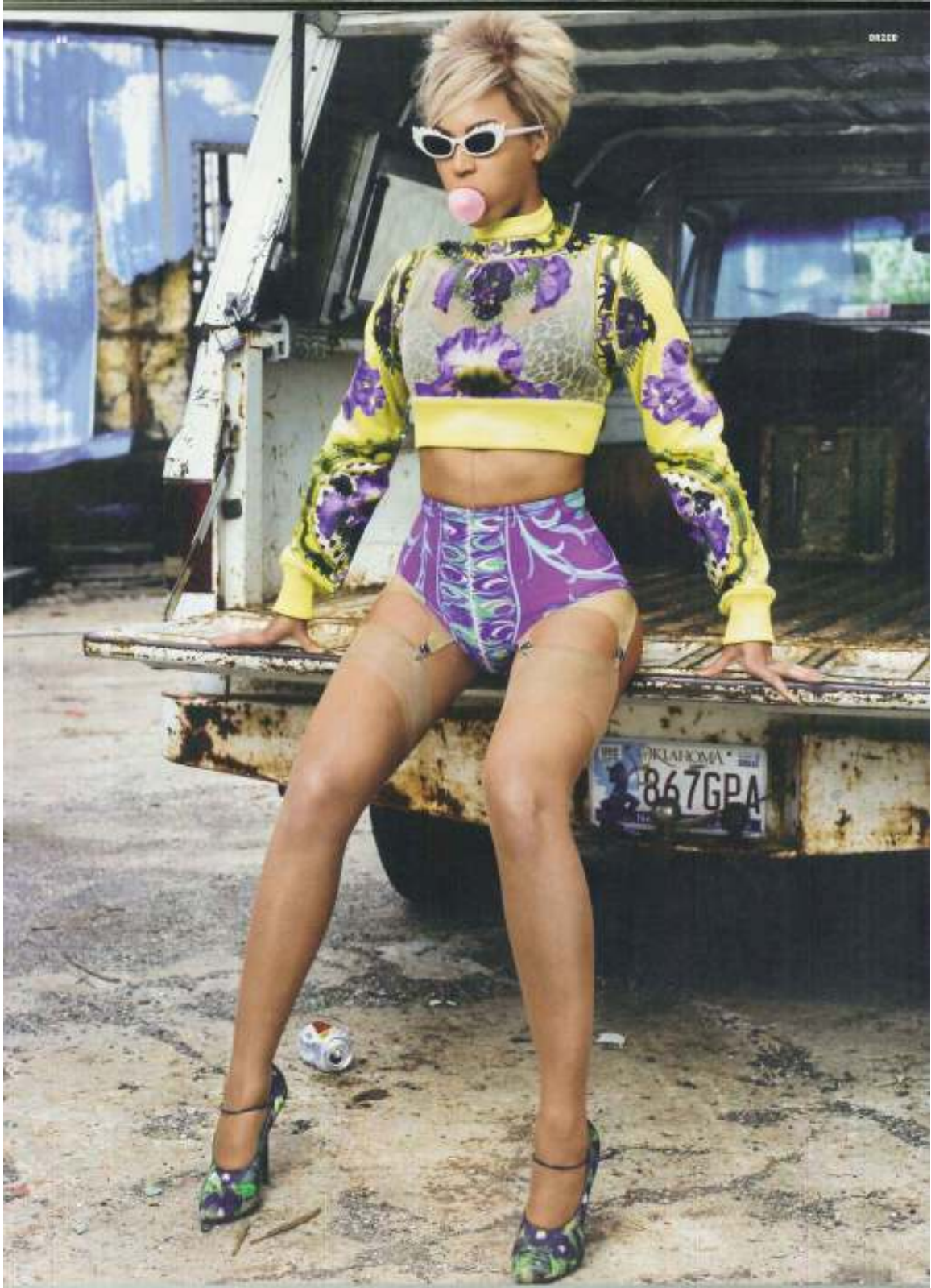
DAVID

BE CONFUSED

Beyoncé pop vs life

Summer music spectacular with Wiley, Zomby, Bon Iver, Wu Lyf, Tom Vek, Vybz Kartel and more.





Last year, Beyoncé Knowles came off tour and teetered on the verge of a meltdown. As the R'n'B diva prepares to return to planet pop, Tim Noakes finds out how a break from the spotlight has changed her life and musical direction

The Simple Life

photography Sharif Hamza
styling Karen Langley

Parked up on a patch of wasteland in the heart of Brooklyn's Navy Docks, Beyoncé Knowles stands outside a tatty Winnebago, cooking a slab of meat over a naked flame. The smell of singed steak and firelighter fluid hangs heavy on the Sunday afternoon breeze as she lip-syncs the words to Prince's "Black Sweat" and swings her hips in time to the purple funk. In strict defiance of BBQ law, she forgoes a comedy apron and attends to the grill dressed in high heels, a shimmering Gareth Pugh silver snood, matching leggings and a leopard-skin bra. "This is the most glamorous handkerchief ever, it's gangsta," she giggles, nestling her nose into the shiny fabric. In a neighbouring apartment block, a bewildered granny stares at the surreal scene unfolding outside of her window. She disappears briefly, perhaps to check the dosage of her meds. After all, it's not every day that a pop icon rolls into your backyard for a spontaneous summer cook-out – especially one dressed head-to-toe in bespoke outfits created by Tom Ford, Riccardo Tisci, Gareth Pugh, Haider Ackermann, Stefano Pilati and Marc Jacobs...

"That was fun! The juxtaposition was something I really connected with," the 29-year-old singer says after the trailer trash fantasy shoot. "Grilling in Gareth Pugh and high heels, that's an everyday thing for me... yeah right! But when I'm doing a shoot like this, I'm not at all shy about having the freedom to wear something fashionable, or something sexy, or showing more skin. I have no problem with being whatever character I need to be. I have my limits, clearly, but I think that's the beauty of being a woman. We have so many different personalities and I love to tap into all of those."

Sitting on a beige sofa in her other motor home, a \$500,000 tour bus parked a few metres in front of the clipped-out camper van, Beyoncé seems quite petite compared to the bootylicious glamazonian on MTV. "I think it's interesting because people think I'm a lot curvier than I am," she says. "I'm definitely not like what people's perception of me is. Every single day of my life somebody says, 'You're tiny!' Every day! I guess everyone else puts more focus on it than I do."

Quiet, considered and extremely polite, she sets aside the MacBook on which she's been reviewing 12 hours of footage from the *Mad Max* inspired "Ron The World (Girls)" video shoot, in which she plays the leader of an all dancing female army who take on a macho SWAT team in the Mojave desert. The quintessential multitasker, she's been cutting scenes throughout the day in between modelling, grilling and getting her hair done and nails did. It's this relentless, sleep when you're dead approach that has kept Beyoncé ahead of the pack for a decade and a half now.

When she started out in *Giri's Tyme* and then *Destiny's Child*, she would always be the one practising her dance moves after the show, or reading the Bible rather than going out and partying. As she evolved into this millennium's first solo pop star, selling 75 million records along the way, her anathema towards taking days off became even more ingrained. She used her spare time to create her own fashion and perfume lines, become a top flight Hollywood actress, serenade the Obamas at the Presidential Inauguration ball, marry the world's most swagged-out rapper, set up a charity foundation for displaced families and, most exhaustingly of all, squeeze in some girl-on-girl action with Lady Gaga. It's a miracle she didn't get hooked on antihistamines, such is her allergic reaction to smelling the roses.

However, as her *I Am...* tour came to a spectacular end in Trinidad on February 18, 2010, the diva, who once memorably sang, "Since fifteen in my stilettos been struttin' in this game" realised that she needed to take a proper break – for the first time in her professional life. More than just fatigue from performing a high-energy two-hour show in 97 stadiums across the world, she yearned

DIVINE DESIGNS

Four of the designers who created new outfits for the Dazed shoot ask Beyoncé one essential question each

Riccardo Tisci:

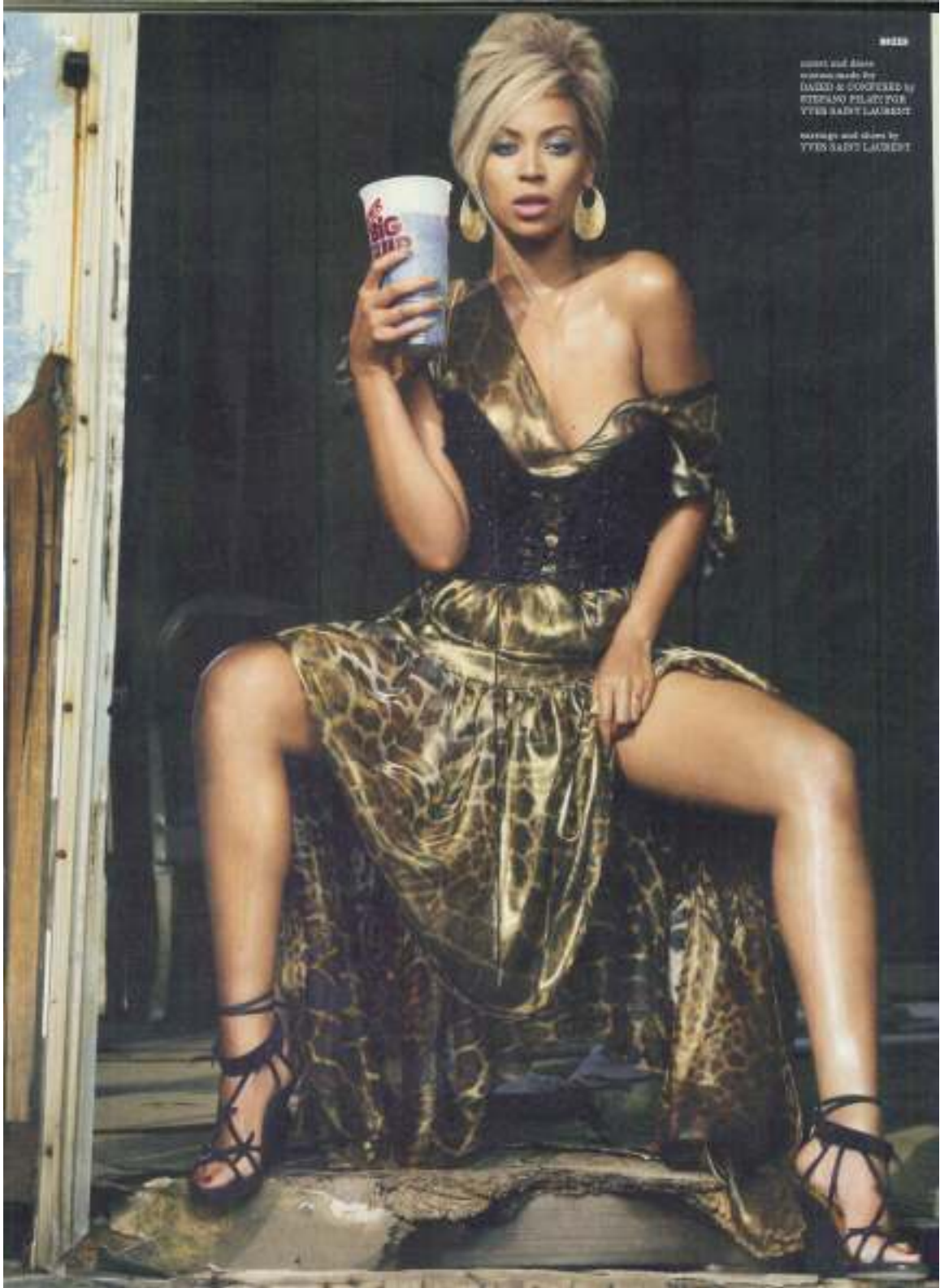
What is the first thing you do when you wake up?

Beyoncé: "Usually I try to stay quiet and meditate. Not literally meditate. I mean lay in the bed and think about everything I need to do, plus everything I learned from the previous day in the past couple of weeks. I've literally fallen asleep with the Blackberry in my hand because I'm up answering emails, coming up with marketing plans and looking at radio numbers. It's really sad! My family is like, 'Oh my God!' I literally have pictures of me knocked out with my finger on the computer space bar!"

Gareth Pugh: You were born four days after me, which means you're a Virgo. What Virgo characteristics do you have?

Beyoncé: "I am a Virgo to the tee! I wonder what signs the other designers are? I like to think outside the box. I don't believe in the answer 'no'. I am extremely driven and extremely critical – sometimes overly critical. Sometimes it is one of the things that I have to work on. I am a control freak. I pay attention to details. When I do something I do it 100 per cent. I have high expectations of myself and expect the exact same thing of everyone around me. I've always been that way. I'm all or nothing."





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hair and skin
styling made by
DANIEL & COVERED BY
STEPHAN PILAT FOR
TYRA BANKS LAURENT

styling and shoes by
TYRA BANKS LAURENT

Stefano Pilati: Do you think a woman has the same opportunity for success as a man in today's world?

Beyoncé: "I think we do. I think the world is changing and it has changed. We still have, you know, ways to go. But I think women are so different now and we have our standards and we don't accept anything less than the same opportunities. I know I don't. That's what my whole message is in my career. I remember being in Japan after I wrote 'Independent Woman', and these young teenage girls were telling me that the song, to them, made it uncool to not have your own job, your own career, and your own mind. It's inspiring to know that something can affect pop culture in that way, and the way women think. Sometimes there are certain things that we have to work harder for, that we have to work double the amount for. Sometimes we don't get the credit. But we're getting there."

Tom Ford: Are you shy?

Beyoncé: "I used to be very shy. I don't think I'm shy any more. I get really uncomfortable when I'm not performing on the stage or on a photo shoot and have too many people looking at me expecting a performance. It makes me kind of shut down and become shy. I'm happier to talk to people and try to learn something from them."

I'm better at one-on-one conversations. I do become shy and a bit intimidated when it's a large group of people. I definitely retreat. At a big dinner I just hope that no one expects anything from me. I wish I'd disappear."

to experience what it was like to appreciate the regular things, like waking up every day in her own bed with her husband, instead of being alone in yet another soulless hotel room. So, after directing and editing the *I Am...* concert DVD, Beyoncé entered her TriBeCa apartment, kicked off her heels and disappeared from public life.

"I needed some time to live," she recalls. "I've been signed to the same label since I was 12 years old and never had more than a month and a half off since I was 13. I've worked so hard for so many years and just felt like, 'Well, why not?' I learned a lot from the simple things in life, like picking my nephew up from school. Cooking. Going to museums. Seeing shows. Broadway plays. Going to restaurants. You know, living."

Unable to fully shake the touring bug, she also hit the road with her *Jigga Man*, an experience that gave her the opportunity to be a bystander for once, to take in new cultures and, most surprisingly, to indulge her inner rock chick.

"It was really interesting being on a tour without working. I was able to go and see bands like The Dead Weather, Thom Yorke, Muse, and Rage Against The Machine. Seeing those audiences was a completely different culture for me. I really learned a lot from watching those shows. It's such a different mindset from my audience. The mosh-pits, the fire, it was all just so soulful. I want people to be that free when they hear my music! I would love people to stage dive at my shows. It would be great. I mean, I say that, although if it happens at Glastonbury I'll probably be like, 'Oh, um, wait a minute!'"

Considering the wonder wall of indie-rock snobbishness that confronted her husband when he played Worthy Farm back in 2008, it's testament to her mass appeal that no one has had a bad word to say about her headlining the Sunday night at this year's festival. Not even Noel Gallagher.

"He (Jay-Z) really opened so many doors. I would have never thought about doing Glastonbury if I wasn't there the night that he played. I guess it's different with pop music as these songs are played at graduations and weddings. It's definitely not as controversial or as hardcore as hip hop, so maybe some people feel more comfortable listening to pop. I am nervous though. But right now, this part of my life is all about embracing change and going to the next level, taking risks and showing my bravery. Not being safe. Not doing the song that everyone else on pop radio sounds like. Basically, what everyone else is doing, unless it's something that's natural for me, I want to do something completely different. I feel like I've earned that right. Risks excite me."

Taking artistic chances has always marked Beyoncé out as an R'n'B renegade who revels in shaking up the mire of identikit

supermarket pop with inspiring visions of future pop. From "Video Phone" and "Sweet Dreams" to the genre-defining "Crazy In Love" and "Single Ladies", her ability to write unforgettable songs of love, hate and empowerment has cemented her place as a musical innovator. Industry bible *Billboard* has just given the singer their first Millennium Award, with Stevie Wonder, Michelle Obama, Bono, Gaga and Barbra Streisand all clearing their diaries to pay tribute. It's fair to say that Beyoncé has surpassed her dreams of becoming the next Whitney Houston.

However, the business side of the show has also been put through the wringer of late. A few days before Dazed's Brooklyn designer BBQ, the news wires hummed with reports that a video game developer was taking Beyoncé to court after she allegedly pulled out of a deal, and that she was no longer being managed by her father, the man who had steered her career from the outset. Combined with last year's headlines about her ill-advised private gig for Colonel Gaddafi's son and gossip columns about her sexy Heat perfume

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advert being banned from UK daytime TV, the timing of her prolonged vacation makes even more sense. So, did "the world's most powerful musician", as voted by *Forbes* in 2010, let unflattering press affect her creativity?

"Absolutely not," the CEO of Beyoncé Inc says, without any hint of irritation when the subject is brought up. "I didn't even know I've had negative press in the past three months! I didn't. I think that's one of the great things about living my life with my family and my friends and the people that I respect and I love. I kinda stand away from that madness. There's always something negative about every celebrity if you're looking for it."

As she sits chatting about the pitfalls of celebrity culture, her legs cradling a big box of tissues, you get the sense that if she had to choose between setting her 6'8" Dutch bodyguard on a newspaper editor or the computer hacker who leaked her "Run The World (Girls)" single early, she'd choose the latter every time.



THE DREAM TEAM

The-Dream, producer of "Single Ladies (Put A Ring On It)" and co-writer of 4 talks about his ongoing musical collaboration with Beyoncé.

Dazed & Confused: How do you think the lyrics on 4 show Beyoncé's personal growth?
The-Dream: When you're way up here and the world is looking in, you're supposed to be superhuman. I think if you hear any vulnerabilities in her it's because she understands that she doesn't have to be a superhuman. She's just a very loving person, and very sensitive - a lot of things that girls are.

You produced 'Single Ladies'. Did you feel daunted about trying to top it this time around?
 No, because people said the same thing to me after I wrote 'Umbrella'. You don't think of it as topping anything because the songs are songs in their space and their time. You can't compete with timing or the space where people are. B is probably in one of the most vulnerable spaces right now because she's coming off such a massive thing. That's what I love so much about the new record. Inside of her she works so hard in different areas of her craft - producing, singing and really ironing out the wrinkles within her own music. But still trying to have fun with it. It's kind of hard with something so big hanging over your head. But I think how you defeat it is that you just don't worry about it. Because you don't know when the next big record is coming.

How has your relationship changed since the last album?
 I can still walk around a little bit. I haven't even made it to where I'm trying to make it yet. I think with B, she's turned over another chapter where if she decides to start from page one again, it's because she wants to. She wants to do something that's never been done before... and she's been doing it for 15 years! That's crazy already! Now she's like kind of reinventing herself. She washed the board and drew up a new equation.

"I have no idea exactly how they got it. It's scary, but what do you do?" she says philosophically in her warm Texan twang. "It happens to just about everybody. It's really unfortunate when it's your first single and you're not prepared. People have had to judge it without me presenting it to them. I shot the video early to pay attention to the details and not have to rush. Things happen that you can't control. It's disappointing but you can't dwell on the past. I recorded that song nine months ago and it's been really hard to keep it from leaking. In the end it leaked five weeks early. But that's better than nine months, so I can't complain!"

The unauthorised airing of the Major Lazer-produced track has meant that the self-confessed "control freak" has had to squeeze five weeks of work into just one, as well as preparing for her summer festival appearances, learning lines for Clint Eastwood's remake of *A Star Is Born*, and finishing off her fourth album, which

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she calls "a gumbo of all of the things I've learned from my travels". Coming out at the end of June, the album is a mix of big, almost retro, power ballads, and hyper hip pop tracks that pay homage to Fela Kuti's afrobeats, Soca, and Brazilian rhythms. Entitled 4 - the date of her and Jay-Z's marriage and both their birthdays - it's packed with some of the rawest, emotional lyrics Beyoncé has ever written. The 16-time Grammy award winner has purposively not attempted to replicate what has gone before. In fact, her alter ego Sasha Fierce has all but been given the boot.

"I don't want to hear about 'Single Ladies' or 'Crazy In Love'. I don't want to hear it. I believe that there are certain things that happen and they happen naturally," she says matter-of-factly. "I killed off needing Sasha Fierce. I don't need her anymore. I am Sasha Fierce. It's interesting because now I've done it for so long it's so easy for me to go into that performance mode. Literally, I go from being

a country girl in the dressing room who's laughing and being silly into, 'Okay, it's time to work' I don't have to mentally prepare myself for it. Honestly, I'm much more interested in showing people the sensitive, the passionate, and the compassionate person that I am. More so than Sasha Fierce."

It's clear from how she carries herself both in private and on record, that her time away from the spotlight has given her a more mature approach to making music. After spending the day with her, it's still hard to believe that a woman with such poise and elegance is not even 30 years old. How she maintains such calmness in the eye of a global media storm is anyone's guess. For this shoot alone, there were three huge privacy screens, a rooftop bodyguard on paparazzi watch, a last minute change of location, two luxury tour buses, a coterie of assistants, a full time videographer and glam squad, and an umbrella to shield her on the three-metre walk from her Escalade to the tour bus. No wonder she covets normality.

"You want to know something that no one else knows?" she laughs heartily, as she has done throughout the whole day. "I get uncomfortable at a club when they play my music. When I go clubbing I end up dancing behind a wall of security guards. That's not fun, right? It's pretty sad. I don't go to clubs very often because of that! Unless it's an environment where people are not staring at me or trying to grab my hair, I won't usually go to the dance floor. You know that Jim Carrey film, *The Truman Show*? That's how it feels to be a celebrity."

With her gap year nothing but a distant memory and 20-hour working days becoming the norm again rather than the exception, you can't help but wonder if being a pop icon is really worth all the personal sacrifice.

"Being an icon is my dream," she says as the MacBook blinks like HAL 9000 behind her. "It is the ultimate compliment and it has a lot of responsibilities. I take it very seriously. I feel like every time I take a picture and every time I perform onstage, I am conscious of my legacy. I'm conscious of the fact it's going to be around even when I'm not. So I respect being someone that is able to be in that position. There are certain things that I just couldn't do because I've worked so hard for my legacy and my career. Probably harder than anyone I know. So I respect it and I take it very seriously."

But is she still as excited about making music as she was 15 years ago?

"Of course!" Beyoncé laughs. "Always!"

4 is out June 27 on Sony Music



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