







"In the HOOD, you can't express joy, because not everyone's HAPPY for you. The music business is the SAME"

dry. Maybe the pear salad instead. "In a marriage, you hold things back," she continues. "I see a lot but I don't say a lot. But I do have the quiet storm in me. That's why I'm so emotional in my music: I hold back so much that when I get to the studio, it just pours out. That's my personality. I may not tell you everything right now, but when I do, you're going to feel it."

I've noticed this about Blige already. When she arrived, she was withdrawn, seeming wary. But as we talk, she opens up more than most. It's this combination of restraint and candidness that distinguishes her as an artist and as a person: stars of her stature are seldom so frank. But this is the Blige that fans have followed for 25 years; the icon who opens her life

anew every time she sings. "I give what I can," she says. "But the things that can hurt me, I keep to myself. I learned that as a child."

B lige grew up in the projects of Schlobohm, a rough neighborhood in Yonkers, New York. She saw women getting beaten up in the stairwell and crackheads prowling the corridors.

"It was so violent. That's why we couldn't tell people when something good happened – they got jealous," she says. "When kids went trick or treating, and they got money or candy, they had to fight off the grown-ups. In the hood, you learn that you can't express your joy or prosperity, because not everyone's happy for you. The music business is the same thing."

There was no holding back her career, though. Blige has been a superstar since her 1992 debut album, What's the 411?. Known as the Queen of Hip Hop Soul, a sound she perfected in albums like My Life, Mary and No More Drama, she's won nine Grammys and sold over 50 million albums. In April, she released her 13th studio album.

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