

DESTINY

CALLS AGAIN

The first time I met Beyoncé, I was wearing gold lamé short-shorts, a sleeveless, sequined polyester vest and roller skates.

This might be considered tragic had it not been 2001.

Okay, still tragic. But, in my defense, I was in costume as an extra on the set of *Austin Powers In Goldmember*.

I took a spill in a faux discothèque while lapping Mike Myers' feet in a constant dizzying circle, and was escorted outside the soundstage to wait for a production assistant to bring me to the on-set infirmary. While I waited a good 15 minutes for my "emergency" care, Beyoncé emerged from the soundstage across the way in full costume—looking decidedly less ridiculous than me and certainly more beautiful—full-on Afro wig, blue-beaded jumpsuit, and a slow-motion saunter (taken straight from the book of Destiny's Child-strut) that seemed to be exclusively for me. She approached.

"What happened?" she asked sympathetically as she cringed and looked at my bleeding shins.

Stunned she was speaking to me, all I could utter was, "roller skate," before a golf cart zoomed up beside us without warning and stopped. (They use these things to get people from place to place on studio lots.) Its driver, a frazzled production assistant probably only five pimples past puberty, began spouting apologies to Beyoncé about his tardiness and then he looked at me, "Sorry, man. Sorry. I gotta take her first. I gotta get Beyoncé to her dressing room."

Beyoncé shooed his sweaty song-and-dance explanation away with a good-natured smile and helped me onto the back of the golf cart. Then she sat beside me. If small talk ensued, I can't remember. I just recall her smiling, and offering a hearty "hold on" as the cart jetted off. Minutes later, I was deposited at the set medic and Beyoncé was whisked away—still smiling—while waving a friendly goodbye. ➔





Today, as I'm poised to talk to Beyoncé again—and this time ready to mutter more than “roller skate”—she is again being hurriedly whisked from one location to the next. She's been busy performing (MTV's Video Music Awards, Fashion Rocks, etc.), promoting *B'Day*, her second solo album, and doling out the dish on her latest project, this month's big-screen *Dreamgirls* adaptation.

The apologies are already pouring from Beyoncé's mouth when she gets on the line because we've rescheduled this chat for at least three different days, and now we're running twenty minutes past our allotted time. “It's been crazy... crazy!” she says. “It hasn't stopped.” Her voice goes muffled for a moment and I hear fumbling on the other end, then a laugh and then more apologies. “I'm so sorry, I don't know how to work my phone.” She laughs again and I hear an assistant come to her rescue.

Despite the hectic schedule and the shuffling from one place to the next, she's still the bubbly, friendly Beyoncé I met more than five years ago when she was making her big-screen debut in *Goldmember*. Now she's headlining one of awards season's most anticipated films, and the boy with bloody shins is getting another opportunity to talk to the diva of song and screen.

I ask her if she's ready to hear a story and she seems relieved that right now all she has to do is get

her phone to work, settle in and listen. I recount for her how my friends and I were at a club in West Hollywood where the beats were pumping but the crowd was relatively tame. The divas all got their due: Madonna, Mariah, Whitney—even Ashlee and Jessica—but when “Ring The Alarm” (still new at the time) hit the sound system—its video projected simultaneously on the walls of the club—the boys snapped to attention with hoots and hollers, amping up the club's intensity for an anthem they seemed to feel was written especially for them.

“Are you serious?! Really?! That is so great! Thanks for telling me that! That is just so great!” It's refreshing to hear such genuine enthusiasm from a multi-platinum phenomenon, “Oh, my god! I gotta come see that!”

My introduction to Beyoncé's September album came in early August when a representative from Sony BMG sat across from me in my office while I listened to one of what he promised were just two copies of the complete CD. “Oh, Lord! He didn't. Really?” Beyoncé laughs, “See, and after all of that, it still got leaked!”

This strict protocol for my listening session was set in place by her manager-father, Mathew Knowles, who has had a handle on guiding his daughter's career since the very beginning. But

for *B'Day*, not even Beyoncé's dad knew what she was up to. “I didn't tell anyone. I paid for the studio myself. I just wanted it to be about the music. About the songs,” she says.

When Beyoncé started *B'Day*, it was the first time she went into a project knowing she wasn't going back to record with her Destiny's Child partners Kelly and Michelle. With *Dangerously In Love*, Beyoncé knew there would be a reunion for *Destiny Fulfilled*, so I wondered what it was like going in solo, with no reunion planned for Destiny's Child. This time, Beyoncé really was on her own.

“I thought about it maybe, but to be honest, it really didn't feel any different because even with the last record it was just as scary. This was the least pressure I've ever felt when recording. But once I realized that I had a record [finished], that's when I started worrying. I was terrified!” She laughs. “I was more scared right before the record came out—more than any other record—just because I knew this record wasn't what people were expecting.”

She needn't have worried. *B'Day* was the top-selling album in the country the week of its debut (bypassing Beyoncé's personal best, *Dangerously In Love*, by more than 220,000 copies), plus it's had the second-best sales week of any album in 2006 so far. “I've snuck on a couple of websites to see what people are saying,” she admits. “It's amazing the different opinions out there, but a lot were saying, ‘Where's Beyoncé? What happened to Beyoncé?’ And it maybe bothered me at first, but after a while it seemed like they liked that, that [my album] seemed innovative and different.”

Beyoncé insists the release of *B'Day* on her own b-day was not a preconceived marketing gimmick. “I knew the concept of my record and I knew I always wanted it to be about empowerment. I wanted it to be like my own writing on the wall. And once I finished—because I wasn't planning on it coming out until 2007—we started looking at the dates. And I saw September 4 was one of the dates and I thought, ‘Well, we can have this come out on my birthday and we can call it *B'Day* and it could be like a big party. A celebration around the world set to up-tempo beats!’”

These up-tempo beats drive nearly the entire album, and I ask which of these might be her favorite. “‘Sugar Mama’ is probably my favorite. I just love it because it reminds me of old school. The second I heard the track it reminded me of the line in Aretha Franklin's song when she says, ‘And so is my money!’ I just thought about her being so... so gangsta!” she laughs. “She's like, ‘You're sweeter than honey, but guess what? So is my money!’” Beyoncé enacts her own form of gangsta-speak for Aretha's classic line to carry her point home. “It's just so soulful, so flirty and just fun.”

Beyoncé also decided to put one song from *Dreamgirls* on *B'Day*. “I just had to put ‘Listen’ on—

the album because it's the moment in Deena's life when she stands up to Curtis [her manager and husband]. And, really, this movie inspired me so much, and I just felt it completed everything because it gave an explanation of why I did the record so fast, and why the songs [on it] are so aggressive...and why I'm screaming!"

Okay, Beyoncé, why are you screaming?

"I was held back for so long while I was filming. For six months I was in character and I was whispering and I felt like Deena. I felt like a product and I wanted to scream out all of these things I was feeling that were emotional and that were raw. That's why I'm belting and being a lot more passionate and emotional than on any record I've ever done," she explains.

Clearly her character in the film, and the film itself, has had a profound effect on Beyoncé the artist and Beyoncé the person. She has repeatedly referred to *Dreamgirls* as 'the film of her life.' I point out to her that she is just 25. "Well, it is, so far. I'm sure I'll do more films and I might feel like this again. I hope I do. But I know that it's no coincidence that not only was I born 25 years ago, but so was *Dreamgirls*. And so was Jennifer Hudson. And I think we were both born for these roles. I don't think it's just a coincidence that we were brought on this earth in the same year, and now they wanted to do this film. I've been preparing for this character my whole life. Even without me knowing."

Beyoncé and crew rehearsed for two months before the movie actually began shooting, and she loved it. She says of the film, the process and the experience: "It was a dream. Literally. I get to be a butterfly, and I get to transform in this movie. It's just magical."

In the tradition of method thespians, Beyoncé lost 20 lbs. for her role in *Dreamgirls* because her character Deena ages from a sweet sixteen to a very womanly 36. "I wanted to make a physical transformation. I wanted to make it real," she says. To take off the pounds, Beyoncé stuck to a strict liquid diet known as the Master Cleanse where she drank a concoction of lemon juice, maple syrup, cayenne pepper and other ingredients. "Oh, it was tough. I wouldn't do it if I didn't have to do it so quickly. I had two weeks. It was so tough 'cause everyone around me was eating! I couldn't wait 'til the end of the movie. I ate everything I could think of! Everything I saw! Krispy Kremes, waffles, soul food and, oh, french fries!"

But more than gaining back the weight, Beyoncé gained an insight into her own life she didn't have before *Dreamgirls*. "It's life-changing for me because I really learned so much about myself," she reveals. "It was like therapy for me. Not because I had to relive certain things—because there are parallels

between the film and my life—but I recognized things, and me and Deena are really different. And the dynamics of our group is really different than [the Dreams in] *Dreamgirls*."

She is, of course, referring to Destiny's Child as "our group," and I ask her to address the obvious parallels people will undoubtedly draw between her real life and her reel life. "Ya know, in *Dreamgirls*, Deena became the lead singer because they thought she was the most marketable. And with Destiny's Child, it was really all about talent. I've never been a 'product.' I've always written my own songs. I've always had a strong voice." She pauses for only a moment, but then goes on adamantly, "In our group, we're friends. We've always been friends. We love each other. Still now. Unconditionally. And that's a different dynamic than *Dreamgirls*."

Still Beyoncé can understand the correlation because there are similarities. "Yes, we started out very young. Yes, we had member changes...and it was of concern that people would think that I was Deena. That I was playing myself. And that's not it," she says with conviction.



BEYONCÉ TALKS ABOUT HER GAY FANS

INSTINCT: With *Destiny's Child* and your solo efforts, there are so many empowerment anthems for women. Do you think gay men relate because some struggles can be seen as the same?

BEYONCÉ: Definitely. Definitely. Especially, I think, probably a song like "Freakum Dress." I can definitely see the clubs going up for that.

Do you write with gay fans in mind?

You know, I have a lot of different people who are fans and I try to be aware of that, but really I just write records I think people are gonna feel good dancing to, or feel sexy dancing to...and have fun going out.

Have you seen a Beyoncé drag queen yet?

Oh, of course! Big time! I'm amazed. They know

Then I point out that both she and Deena are huge divas. She agrees with a chuckle, "I think being a diva is the biggest compliment. As long as it refers to me performing. If it's off stage, that's different. Then, no, I don't really like it. But on stage I want to be the biggest diva in the world! I think people kind of live their fantasies when they watch performers and they don't want to see boring and humble...well, not to say you can't be humble on stage, but you want to see...a diva!"

If that Oscar bee buzzing around *Dreamgirls* brings Beyoncé to the stage at the Academy Awards, she promises she'll be humble then. She has openly admitted in the past that one of her ultimate goals in life is to win an Oscar, but she doesn't want to think about it, let alone talk about it. "People are saying there is buzz, and I want to believe that, but it's just too good to be true. I don't want to build myself up and be crushed."

"If the stars align," I tell her.

"Well, we're all Virgos. All of us. Me, Jennifer and Anika [The Dreams] are all Virgos...which is just crazy."

Crazy. Or maybe it's destiny. **INSTINCT**

all of my tricks!

Hip-hop is not always known to be so homophobic. What are your thoughts on that?

I think that's a misconception to be honest with you. I mean I know I've been around a lot of hip-hop artists, and I just don't see that. At all.

Coming from such a strong faith, do you have an opinion about how some religious groups categorize gay society?

Well, I grew up going to church, but I was raised by my uncle who passed away with AIDS a couple of years ago. He was my mother's best friend. And my mother's cousin. He brought me to school every day. He helped me buy my prom dress. He made my clothes with my mother. He was like my nanny. He was my favorite person in the world. And you know, I never really mixed Christianity with how I felt [about him]. I am about faith and spirituality more so than religion. Doing right by others and not judging.

Do you plan on having kids? A family?

All in the next five to seven years.

If you had a son who came to you and told you he was gay, what would you say to him? Any advice or guidance?

That I love him for the person he is with no expectations back. That I support whatever he does. That who we are is from the inside out.

Do you have anything you want to say specifically to your gay fans?

I love my gay fans and I thank them for being there for Destiny's Child and Kelly, Michelle and Solange from day one!