

## BEYONCÉ IS BACK

HER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PERSONAS LAY  
THE GROUNDWORK FOR AN UPCOMING  
ALBUM THAT EXPLORES THE HIGHS, LOWS,  
AND DUALITIES OF BEING B. HEADS UP,  
BEYONCÉ FANS, HERE COMES SASHA FIERCE

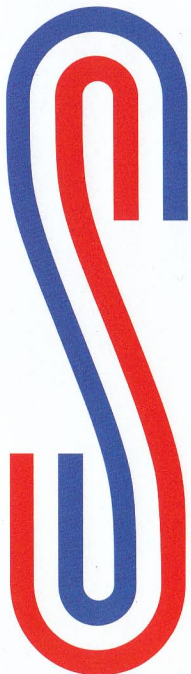
**Photography Bruce Weber**  
**Styling Deborah Watson**

"When I'm onstage," says Beyoncé Knowles, "I'm aggressive and strong and not afraid of my sexuality. The tone of my voice gets different, and I'm fearless. I'm just a different person." Anyone who saw the 2007 BET Awards witnessed this transformation. Before a backdrop of cascading green type borrowed from *The Matrix*, the superstar took the stage in a pointy robot suit with mechanical panels that opened to reveal her clad in metal-plated Balenciaga leggings. As she explains, the pricey pants were found at Harrods after requests to the fashion house went unfulfilled. "I saw them on the mannequin and it was my first time seeing them in person," she recalls. "I was like, 'Oh my God! I can't believe it! I'm so excited!' So I bought them and they fit, and I was like, 'BET Awards, here I come in my Balenciaga leggings!'" Suddenly the glamour girl in Elie Saab gowns with the racks of Armani Privé was channeling Fritz Lang by way of Janet Jackson, with a helping of new millennial futurism.





**"THE SECOND I TAKE THAT FIRST STEP  
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—BEYONCÉ KNOWLES**



eated in the penthouse of New York's Soho Grand hotel, dressed in far more subdued leather stretch pants, her favorite white James Perse T-shirt, and nonthreatening boots by Alexander McQueen, Beyoncé explains that this theatrical persona is an alter ego named Sasha Fierce. It's a character who dominates the more upbeat second half of Beyoncé's new 17-song double album, part one titled *I Am... Beyoncé*, and part two, *I Am... Sasha Fierce*. Sasha Fierce also likes to wear Thierry Mugler, a choice inspired by a visit to the Costume Institute's "Superheroes: Fashion and Fantasy" exhibition. Beyoncé even got her hands on the designer's classic motorcycle bustier. "I'm so excited. I want him to do everything," she says of the blossoming relationship. "There was the one robot corset that I *really* wanted, but I couldn't get it. So he'll make me my own, which is even better."

Beyoncé credits Sasha Fierce with inventions like the song title "Freakum Dress" from her second solo album, *B'Day* (as in, "Pull out the big guns and put your freakum dress on"), and even the lyric "I don't think you're ready for this jelly," from Destiny's Child's "Bootylicious." "I wrote that on the plane to Europe. I heard the Stevie Nicks sample, and you can blame it on the Tylenol PM, but it sounded like a woman doing a shimmy shake," she says of the percussive guitar from "Edge of Seventeen." "For whatever reason, it was like gelatin! And that's how I came up with that craziness."

Beyoncé is matter-of-fact about the usefulness of an alter ego. "It's a way for me to differentiate what I do onstage from who I really am," she says. "It's a way for me to not lose myself, to keep my life in perspective, because it's really hard sometimes to stay on earth when you're a celebrity. There's so much going on, and so many people give you whatever you want and say everything you do is great. At this point, I kind of have it down. I know boundaries, and I can look at somebody and say I don't want them in my circle. I've been doing this for twelve years professionally, and I've learned. It's easier now."

The other half of her double album—represented on radio by the balladic, acoustic guitar-powered single "If I Were a Boy"—is more dressed-down. "It's me revealing a side of myself that people don't really get to see. It's very intimate. It's who I am," she says. "It's no makeup and my natural hair, a white T-shirt or a tank top. Things that are not overpowering me." This Beyoncé is meant to be more about the 27-year-old from Houston, Texas, who achieved fame as a member of Destiny's Child; discreetly married Jay-Z; is managed by her father, Matthew Knowles; and works with her mother, Tina Knowles, to design House of Deréon and its junior counterpart, Deréon, the sportswear label with the singsong name that makes for catchy product placement. She is the down-to-earth

icon who continues to include former cohorts Kelly Rowland and Michelle Williams in her solo successes; supports the career of her sister, Solange Knowles, who was quoted as saying, "I want to be like the black Björk"; and understands that Beyoncé is a brand that needs to be maintained. "Fame is a lot of work, but it doesn't consume my life. I'm not obsessed. I don't have to walk out with lashes," she says, although she might in the glossy, black Yves Saint Laurent heels waiting on the carpet outside the interview room. There's also Beyoncé the actress, who has two upcoming films: *Cadillac Records*, in which she plays blues legend Etta James ("Obviously there wouldn't be a me if there wasn't a her"), a strategically risky role that calls on her to depict James "high off of the heroin"; and the thriller *Obsessed*, her first movie without singing, in which she stars as a lovely wife terrorized by a stalker.

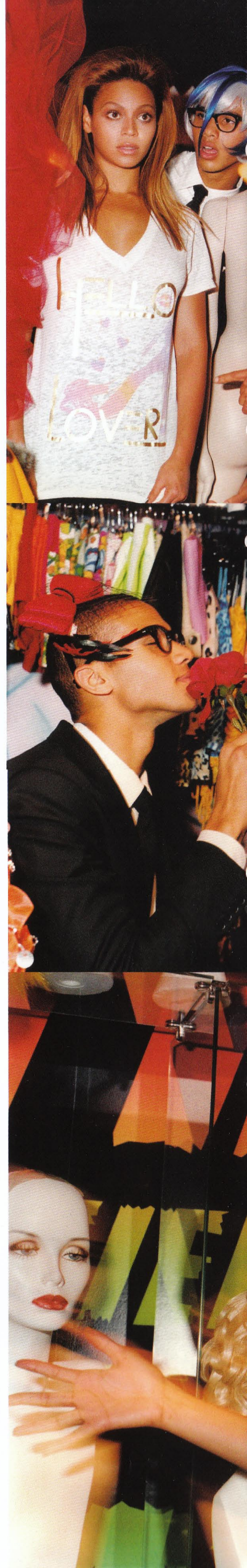
It could be said that the split personality of the new project is fitting in light of recent economic developments. As fantasy and reality part ways after the false extravagances of the last decade, it makes sense that creative output would polarize as well. Crass consumerism and the increasingly vintage notion of "bling" are being replaced with starker extremes: for example, a rational pair of jeans and an otherworldly silicone dress. Disc one, disc two. Asked about the economic downturn, Beyoncé says that it will not influence her creative decisions, and she has no plans to temper the materialism of past videos like *Upgrade U*, in which she rolls in a pile of gold jewelry and bites on a diamond. This isn't to say she is insensitive to the new cultural climate. "The video for 'Single Ladies' is one take, it's one outfit, it's very clean and simple," she explains about her recent interpretation of Gwen Verdon's Bob Fosse-choreographed "Mexican Breakfast" routine from the 1960s. "But that's not because I'm afraid of turning people off by flaunting things. Because I feel like that's a part of my job and it is what it is. It's entertainment, it's not realness."

Beyoncé says the 110-date tour starting in April that accompanies the new album will be "stripped down, but also bigger" than 2007's appropriately titled "The Beyoncé Experience." At those shows, Beyoncé made her entrance in a cloud of theatrical smoke wearing a floor-length, cracked disco ball dress, cued pyrotechnics that rained down behind her, then commandingly asked the audience, in three distinct parts, as a wind machine lifted her hair: "Ladies and gentlemen. Are you ready. To be entertaaaaaaainained?"

"It's funny because right before the show I'm under the stage making sure my double-stick is in the right place, my pack is turned on, and my shoes have the stickies on the bottom so I don't slip—all of these things that are so not glamorous," she says. "Then I take my last sip of water, clear my throat, close my eyes, and tell myself, You are fierce. You are fierce. You are fierce! And the second I take that first step and hear that crowd, I kind of transform. By the time I get up to the stage, I'm in the zone. I don't feel anything anymore. Like if I'm in pain or if I'm nervous it kind of becomes, I don't know how to describe it, I become that other thing. It's like I'm ready for war."

**Mark Jacobs**

*I Am...* is out in November 2008 from Sony



Beyoncé wears Leggings **American Apparel** Prince T-shirt **Mini Market** Printed T-shirts **Patricia Field**  
Nate wears Jacket, pants, shirt, tie **Calvin Klein Collection** Glasses **Cutler and Gross**  
Peter wears Jacket, pants, shirt, tie **Prada** Glasses **Sol Moscot**  
Ryan wears Jacket, pants, shirt, tie **Dolce & Gabbana** Glasses **Cutler and Gross**  
Teron wears Jacket, pants, shirt, tie **Prada** Glasses **Sol Moscot** Accessories **Patricia Field**