



Mary J. Blige



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Blige in January 2010	
Background information	
Birth name	Mary Jane Blige
Born	January 11, 1971 The Bronx, New York, U.S.
Origin	Yonkers, New York, U.S.
Genres	R&B, soul
Occupations	Singer-songwriter, record producer, actress
Instruments	Vocals
Years active	1989–present
Labels	Matriarch/Geffen (current) Uptown/MCA, Verve Records (former)
Associated acts	Diddy, The Notorious B.I.G., Method Man, Nas, Monica, Lil' Kim, R. Kelly
Website	mjblige.com ^[1]

Mary Jane Blige (/ˈblaɪʒ/; born January 11, 1971), known professionally as **Mary J. Blige**, is an American singer-songwriter, record producer, and occasional rapper and actress. Starting her career as a background singer on Uptown Records in 1989, Blige released her first album, *What's the 411?*, in 1992, and has released 10 studio album since and made over 150 guest appearances on other albums and soundtracks.

A recipient of nine Grammy Awards, eight of Blige's albums have reached multi-platinum status in the United States. *My Life*, in particular, is considered among the greatest albums ever recorded according to *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, and *Vibe*. For her part in combining hip-hop and soul in the early-1990s and its subsequent commercial success, Blige received the Legends Award at the World Music Awards. Blige also received the Voice of Music Award from music publishing company ASCAP, with its official Jeanie Weems stating that "[Blige's] music has been the voice of inspiration to women worldwide in both struggle and triumph." Blige made *Time* magazine's "Time 100" list of influential individuals around the world in 2007.

As of 2013, Blige has sold more than 50 million albums and 15 million singles worldwide. *Billboard* ranked Blige as the most successful female R&B artist of the past 25 years. The magazine also lists her 2006 song "Be Without You" as the top R&B song of the 2000s, as it spent an unparalleled 15 weeks atop the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart. In 2011, VH1 ranked Blige as the 80th greatest artist of all time. Moreover, she is ranked number 100 on the list of "100 greatest singers of all time" by *Rolling Stone* magazine. In 2012, VH1 ranked Blige at number 9 in "The 100 Greatest Woman in Music."

Blige also earned high remarks for her work in film. She starred in the 2009 Tyler Perry box-office hit *I Can Do Bad All By Myself* and played a role in the film *Rock of Ages*, which was released to theaters in 2012. She is a recipient of two Golden Globe Awards for her musical contributions to the films *Bobby* and *The Help*. She is named to play music icon Nina Simone in the upcoming biopic *Nina*. In partnership with the Home Shopping Network (HSN) and Carol's Daughter, Blige released her "My Life" perfume. The perfume broke HSN records by selling 65,000 bottles during its premiere. The scent went on to win two FiFi Awards, including the "Fragrance Sales Breakthrough" award.

Career

1971–91: Early life and career beginnings

Blige was born on January 11, 1971 in The Bronx, New York.^[2] She is the second of four children born to parents Cora, a nurse, and Thomas Blige, a jazz musician. Blige's mother was an avid fan of R&B/Soul music and constantly spun Aretha Franklin, Gladys Knight, Patti Labelle, Chaka Khan, and Jean Carne records when Blige was a child. These artists had a profound impact on Blige at a very young age. Blige was taught to sing by her father, who later abandoned Blige and sister LaTonya following his divorce from Cora Blige in 1980. At the age of five, Blige was molested by a family friend.^[3]

Blige spent her early years in Richmond Hill, Georgia, where she sang in a Pentecostal church. She later moved to Schlobohm Apartments in Yonkers, New York, where she lived with her mother, older sister, five cousins, and two aunts. She dropped out of Roosevelt High School in the eleventh grade. Blige recorded an impromptu cover of Anita Baker's "Caught Up in the Rapture" at a recording booth in the Galleria Mall in White Plains, New York. Her mother's boyfriend at the time later played the cassette for Jeff Redd, a recording artist and A&R runner for Uptown Records. Redd sent it to the president and CEO of the label, Andre Harrell. Harrell met with Blige and in 1989 she was signed to the label, becoming the company's youngest and first female artist. Blige's early years consisted of session work for the likes of Jeff Redd, who introduced her during a live performance at the Apollo Theater. A year later, she sang the hook on Father MC's hit "I'll Do 4 U" and was prominently featured, singing, at the end of the video.

1992–96: *What's the 411?* and *My Life*

Production for Blige's debut album began in 1992, with Sean "Puffy" Combs, who was at the time a 22-year-old A&R executive at Uptown Records, selected as the executive producer of the project. When first introducing Mary J. Blige to Uptown Executives at a convention, Sean Combs originally nicknamed Blige the "Queen of Ghetto Love". However, Andre Harrell, Combs's supervisor, found the name unsatisfactory and subsequently dubbed her the "Queen of Hip-Hop Soul".

Establishing Blige's niche in R&B became the paramount goal for Sean Combs. Given the fact that most female R&B acts during that time were very glamorous and refined, Combs purposely molded Blige into the exact opposite so as to underscore her uniqueness and maintain her connection to her urban roots. From her fashion style to her sound, Blige was completely different from most female artists in the early 1990s. Baseball caps, combat boots, and baggy clothes constituted her signature style. In regards to her music, on July 28, 1992, Uptown Records released *What's the 411?*. Blige's inaugural album ushered in a new era and genre of R&B music. Blige's raw and gritty sound

was utterly antithetical to that of pop icons Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, and Janet Jackson. Her East Coast hip hop, Northern Urban City-influenced sound became the blueprint for other artists. "You Remind Me", the album's first single, peaked at number one on the R&B singles chart that summer. The second single, "Real Love", was released in the fall. It too topped the R&B singles chart, and became Blige's first top ten Hot 100 single, peaking at number seven. Both singles were certified gold for their sales volume. More *What's the 411?* singles followed into 1993, including "Sweet Thing", a cover of Rufus's "Sweet Thing", and "Love No Limit". By the end of the year, *What's the 411?* had sold three million copies. Blige, meanwhile, released a hip hop single "You Don't Have to Worry". After the success of *What's the 411*, Sean "Puffy" Combs hailed the singer as "the queen of hip-hop soul".^{[4][5]} The album's success spun off *What's the 411? Remix*, a remix album released in December that was used to extend the life of the *What's the 411?* singles on the radio into 1994, as Blige recorded her follow-up album. With combined sales of over 5 million albums and singles from her debut album, Blige was the best selling female artist on the Uptown label.

On November 29, 1994, Uptown Records released Blige's second album, *My Life* which was again overseen by Combs who also produced more than half of the album along with Washington DC native Carl "Chucky" Thompson (despite his having recently left the label), who, with Combs, co-produced all but one of the album's tracks, and took over as Blige's manager. Unlike *What's the 411?*, Blige co-wrote a large body of the material, basing it on her personal life. In its first week, *My Life* debuted at number seven on the US *Billboard* 200, and debuting at number one on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart, for an unprecedented eight consecutive weeks. The album received critical praise for Combs' production, Blige's songwriting and vocals, and today, is still regarded as one of the best albums in Blige's discography. In 2003, the album was ranked at #279 on the The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time by magazine *Rolling Stone*. In late 1995, Blige topped the *Billboard* Year-End chart toppers as Top R&B Album, Top R&B Album Artist, Top R&B Album Artist — Female, and Top-Hot Dance Maxi-Single Sales (for her collaboration with Method Man on "All I Need"). "Be Happy", the album's lead single, peaked at number 29 and number six on the Hot 100 and R&B singles chart, respectively. In early 1995, it was followed up with a cover of Rose Royce's 1976 hit "I'm Goin' Down", which became her first top 20 hit in the UK, peaking at number 12, it also reached number 22 and number 13 on the Hot 100 and R&B singles chart. Other *My Life* singles include "You Bring Me Joy" and "I Love You". "Mary Jane (All Night Long)" and "My Life" received heavy radio play, despite never being officially released as singles apart from the UK, where "Mary Jane (All Night Long)" became Blige's second top 20 hit from the album there. *My Life* was eventually certified triple platinum. In spite of its success and her growing fame, Blige later admitted that she was simultaneously dealing with long time bouts of drug addiction, alcoholism, and depression, as well as an abusive relationship with then-boyfriend K-Ci Hailey of Jodeci.

Blige involved herself in several outside projects, recording a cover of Aretha Franklin's "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" for the soundtrack to the FOX series *New York Undercover*, and "Everyday It Rains" (co-written by R&B singer Faith Evans) for the soundtrack to the hip hop documentary, *The Show*. That summer she collaborated with rapper Method Man on his song, "I'll Be There for You/You're All I Need to Get By". Later in the year, she recorded the Babyface-penned and produced "Not Gon' Cry", for the soundtrack to the motion picture *Waiting to Exhale*. The platinum-selling single rose to number two on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and number one on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs in early 1996, and became her biggest commercial hit at the time. Blige gained her first two Grammy nominations, and won the Best Rap Performance by a Duo or Group for her collaboration with Method Man. *My Life* was also nominated for Best R&B Album. In addition, *My Life* received a nomination for the 1996 American Music Awards for "Favorite Soul/R&B Album".

Throughout 1996, Blige appeared in collaborations with Ghostface Killah, on their co-written single, "All That I Got Is You", though in the video, Blige was replaced by Wu-Tang affiliate, Tekitha, due to scheduling conflicts. She also collaborated with then up-and-coming musicians, singer Case, on his breakthrough single, "Touch Me, Tease Me", featuring Foxy Brown and also appeared on rapper Jay-Z's single, "Can't Knock the Hustle", released off the rapper's debut album, *Reasonable Doubt*.

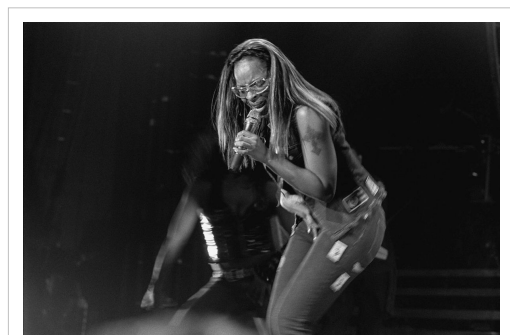
1997–2000: *Share My World* and *Mary*

On April 22, 1997, MCA Records (parent company to Uptown Records, which was in the process of being dismantled) released Blige's third album, *Share My World*. By then, she and Combs had dissolved their working relationship. In his place were the Trackmasters, who executive-produced the project along with Steve Stoute. Sharing production duties were producers Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, R. Kelly, Babyface and Rodney Jerkins. The album was made at a time when Blige was trying to "get her life together", by trying to overcome drugs and alcohol, as well as the ending of her relationship with Hailey. After an encounter with a person who threatened her life the previous year, she tried to quit the unhealthy lifestyle and make more upbeat, happier music. As a result, songs such as "Love Is All We Need" and "Share My World" were made. *Share My World* debuted at number one on the *Billboard* 200 and spawned five hit singles: "Love Is All We Need" (featuring Nas), "I Can Love You" (featuring Lil' Kim), "Everything", "Missing You" (UK only) and "Seven Days" (featuring George Benson). The album became Blige's most commercially successful, selling three million copies in the U.S. In February 1997, Blige performed her hit at the time, "Not Gon' Cry", at the 1997 Grammy Awards, which gained her a third Grammy Award nomination, her first for Best Female R&B Vocal Performance, as Blige was recording the follow-up to *My Life*. In early 1998, Blige won an American Music Award for "Favorite Soul/R&B Album". That summer, she embarked on the Share My World Tour, which resulted in a Gold-certified live album released later that year, simply titled *The Tour*. The album spawned one single, "Misty Blue".

On August 17, 1999, Blige's fourth album, titled *Mary* was released. It marked a departure from her more familiar hip hop-oriented sound; this set featured a more earthy, whimsical, and adult contemporary-tinged collection of songs, reminiscent of 1970s to early 1980s soul. On December 14, 1999, the album was re-released as a double-disc set. The second disc was enhanced with the music videos for the singles "All That I Can Say" and "Deep Inside" and included two bonus tracks: "Sincerity" (featuring Nas, Andy Hogan and DMX) and "Confrontation" (a collaboration with hip hop duo Funkmaster Flex & Big Kap originally from their 1999 album *The Tunnel*). The *Mary* album was critically praised, becoming her most nominated release to date, and was certified double platinum (selling over two million in sales.) It was not as commercially successful as Blige's prior releases, though all of the singles: "All That I Can Say", "Deep Inside", "Your Child", and "Give Me You" performed considerably on radio. In the meantime, MCA used the album to expand Blige's demographic into the nightclub market, as club-friendly dance remixes of the *Mary* singles were released. The club remix of "Your Child" peaked at number-one on the *Billboard's* Hot Dance Club Play chart in October 2000. In 2001, a Japan-only compilation, *Ballads*, was released. The album featured covers of Stevie Wonder's "Overjoyed", and previous recordings of Aretha Franklin's "(You Make Me Feel Like) A Natural Woman" and Dorothy Moore's "Misty Blue".

2001–2004: *No More Drama* and *Love & Life*

On August 28, 2001, MCA released Blige's fifth studio album, *No More Drama*. The album's first single, "Family Affair" (produced by Dr. Dre) became her first number-one single on the *Billboard* Hot 100, where it remained for six consecutive weeks. It was followed by two further hit singles, the European only single "Dance for Me" featuring Common with samples from "The Bed's Too Big Without You" by The Police, and the Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis-produced title track (originally recorded for the *Mary* album), which sampled "Nadia's Theme", the piano-driven theme song to the daytime drama *The Young and the Restless*. Though the album sold nearly two million copies in the U.S., MCA was



Blige in Hamburg, Germany 2000

underwhelmed by its sales, and subsequently repackaged and re-released the album on January 29, 2002. The *No More Drama* re-release featured a new album cover, deleted three of the songs from the original track listing, while

adding two brand-new songs—one of which was the fourth single and top twenty Hot 100 hit "Rainy Dayz", (featuring Ja Rule), plus two remixes; one of the title track, serviced by Puff Daddy and the single version of "Dance for Me" featuring Common. The album sold another million-plus units (3.2 million in total) in the U.S. and seven million worldwide. Blige won a Grammy for 'Best Female R&B Vocal Performance' for the song "He Think I Don't Know." In April 2002, Blige performed with Shakira with the song "Love Is a Battlefield" on VH1 Divas show live in Las Vegas, she also performed "No More Drama" and "Rainy Dayz" as a duet with the returning Whitney Houston.

On July 22, 2002, MCA released *Dance for Me*, a collection of club remixes of some of her past top hits including the Junior Vasquez remix of "Your Child", and the Thunderpuss mix of "No More Drama." This album was released in a limited edition double pack 12" vinyl for DJ-friendly play in nightclubs. On August 26, 2003, Blige's sixth album *Love & Life* was released on Geffen Records (which had absorbed MCA Records.) Blige heavily collaborated with her one-time producer Sean Combs for this set. Due to the history between them on *What's the 411?* and *My Life*, which is generally regarded as their best work, and Blige having just come off of a successful fifth album, expectations were high for the reunion effort.

Despite the album debuting at number one on the *Billboard* 200 and becoming Blige's fourth consecutive UK top ten album, *Love & Life*'s lead-off single, the Diddy-produced "Love @ 1st Sight", which featured Method Man, barely cracked the top ten on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs, while altogether missing the top twenty on the Hot 100 (although peaking inside the UK top twenty). The following singles, "Ooh!", "Not Today" featuring Eve, "Whenever I Say Your Name" featuring Sting on the international re-release, and "It's a Wrap" fared worse. Although the album was certified platinum, it became Blige's lowest-selling to date. Critics and fans alike largely panned the disc, citing a lack of consistency and noticeable ploys to recapture the early Blige/Combs glory. Blige and Combs reportedly struggled and clashed during the making of this album, and again parted ways upon the completion of it.

The album became Blige's first album in six years to debut at number one on the *Billboard* 200, selling 285,298 copies in first week. *Love & Life* received mixed reviews from music critics.^[6] *Allmusic* gave it 4 stars and said the album "beamed with joy" and *Rolling Stone* gave it three stars, saying "You may not always love Blige's music, but you will feel her". The album was eventually certified Platinum by the RIAA. To date the album has sold over 1,000,000 copies in the U.S. and over 2,000,000 copies worldwide. The album was nominated for the Best Contemporary R&B Album at the 46th Grammy Awards.

2005–06: *The Breakthrough and Reflections – A Retrospective*

Geffen Records released Blige's seventh studio album, *The Breakthrough* on December 20, 2005. For the album, Blige collaborated with J.U.S.T.I.C.E. League, Rodney Jerkins, will.i.am, Bryan Michael Cox, 9th Wonder, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, Raphael Saadiq, Cool and Dre, and Dre & Vidal. The cover art was photographed by Markus Klinko & Indrani. It debuted at number one on both the *Billboard* 200 and Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums charts. Selling 727,000 copies in its first week, it became the biggest first-week sales for an R&B solo female artist in SoundScan history, the fifth largest first-week sales for a female artist, and the fourth largest debut of 2005. Since its release, *The Breakthrough* has sold over three million copies in the U.S and over seven million copies worldwide, becoming one of the five best-selling albums of 2006.

The lead-off single, "Be Without You", peaked at number three on the *Billboard* Hot 100, while peaking at number one on the R&B chart for a record-setting fifteen consecutive weeks; it remained on the chart for over sixteen months. "Be Without You" found success in the UK (peaking in the lower end of the top forty) it became Blige's longest charting single on the UK Singles Chart. It is her second longest charting single to date. The album produced three more singles including two more top five R&B hits—"Enough Cryin'", which features Blige's alter ego Brook-Lynn (as whom she appeared on the remix to Busta Rhymes's "Touch It" in 2006); and "Take Me as I Am" (which samples Lonnie Liston Smith's "A Garden of Peace"). Blige's duet with U2 on the cover of their 1992 hit, "One" gave Blige her biggest hit to date in the UK, peaking at number two on the UK Singles Chart eventually being

certified one of the forty highest-selling singles of 2006; it was her longest charting UK single. The success of *The Breakthrough* won Blige nine *Billboard* Music Awards, two American Music Awards, two BET Awards, two NAACP Image Awards, and a Soul Train Award. She received eight Grammy Award nominations at the 2007 Grammy Awards, the most of any artist that year. "Be Without You" was nominated for both "Record of the Year" and "Song of the Year". Blige won three: "Best Female R&B Vocal Performance", "Best R&B Song" (both for "Be Without You"), and "Best R&B Album" for *The Breakthrough*. Blige completed a season sweep of the "big three" major music awards, having won two American Music Awards in November 2006 and nine *Billboard* Music Awards in December 2006.

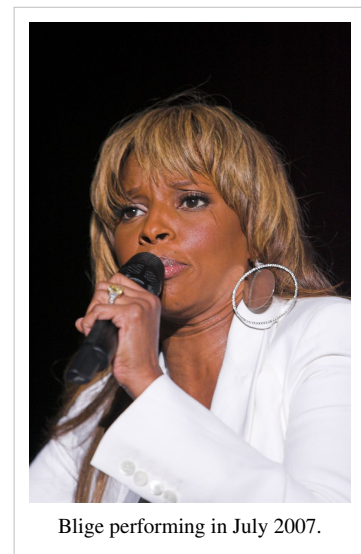
In December 2006, a compilation called *Reflections - A Retrospective* was released. It contained many of Blige's greatest hits and four new songs, including the worldwide lead single "We Ride (I See the Future)". In the UK, however, "MJB da MVP" (which appeared in a different, shorter form on *The Breakthrough*) was released as the lead single from the collection. The album peaked at number nine in the U.S, selling over 170,000 copies in its first week, while reaching number forty in the UK. It has sold more than 1.6 million copies. In 2006, Blige recorded a duet with rapper Ludacris, "Runaway Love", which is the third single on his fifth album, *Release Therapy*. It reached the top five on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and the R&B chart. Blige was featured with Aretha Franklin and The Harlem Boys Choir on the soundtrack to the 2006 motion picture *Bobby*, on the lead track "Never Gonna Break My Faith" written by Bryan Adams. The song was nominated for a Golden Globe and won the Grammy Award for Best Gospel Performance at the 50th Annual Grammy Awards.

2007–08: *Growing Pains*

Blige's eighth studio album, *Growing Pains*, was released on December 18, 2007, debuting at number two on the *Billboard* 200 and at number one on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart. It sold 629,000 copies in its first week, marking the third time since Nielsen SoundScan began collecting data in 1991 that two albums sold more than 600,000 copies in a week in the United States. In its second week, the album climbed to number one, making it Blige's fourth number-one album. The lead single, "Just Fine", peaked at number twenty-two on the *Billboard* Hot 100 and at number three on the Hot R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart. "Just Fine" was nominated for the Grammy Award for "Best Female R&B Vocal Performance", and Blige won "Best R&B Performance by a Duo or Group with Vocals" for the Chaka Khan duet "Disrespectful" (featured on Khan's album *Funk This*) which Blige wrote.

Growing Pains was not released in the UK until February 2008, where it became Blige's fifth top ten and third-highest charting album. *The Breakthrough* and *Reflections (A Retrospective)* were released in the Christmas rush and therefore settled for lower peaks, although both selling more than her top five album *Mary*.^[citation needed] "Just Fine" returned Blige to the UK singles chart top 20 after her previous two singles failed to chart highly. Subsequent singles from *Growing Pains* include "Work That", which accompanied Blige in an iTunes commercial, and "Stay Down".

Blige was featured on 50 Cent's 2007 album, *Curtis*, in the song "All of Me". In March 2008, she toured with Jay-Z in the Heart of the City Tour. They released a song called "You're Welcome". In the same period, cable network BET aired a special on Blige entitled *The Evolution of Mary J. Blige*, which showcased her career. Celebrities such as Method Man and Ashanti gave their opinions about Blige and her music. Blige is featured on singles by Big Boi, and Musiq Soulchild. *Growing Pains* was nominated for and won the Grammy Award for "Best Contemporary R&B Album", at the 51st Grammy Awards held on February 8, 2009, earning Blige her 27th Grammy nomination, in a mere decade. Blige went on the *Growing Pains* European Tour, her first tour there in two years. A tour of Australia and New Zealand was scheduled for June but was postponed due to "weariness from an overwhelming tour



Blige performing in July 2007.

schedule" and then eventually canceled entirely.

On August 7, 2008, it was revealed Blige faced a US\$2 million federal suit claiming Neff-U wrote the music for the song "Work That", but was owned by Dream Family Entertainment. The filing claimed that Dream Family never gave rights to use the song to Blige, Feemster or Geffen Records. Rights to the lyrics of the song used in an iPod commercial are not in question.

2009–10: *Stronger with Each Tear*

Blige returned to performing in January 2009 by performing the song "Lean on Me" at the Presidential Inauguration Committee's, "We Are One: The Obama Inaugural Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial". Blige also performed her hit 2007 single, "Just Fine", with a new intro at the Neighborhood Inaugural Ball after Barack Obama was sworn in on January 20, 2009. Blige appeared as a marquee performer on the annual *Christmas in Washington* television special.



Blige performing at Bumbershoot in September 2010.

Blige's ninth studio album, *Stronger with Each Tear*, was released on December 21, 2009, debuting at number two on the Billboard 200 and at number one on the Top R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart, selling 332,000 units in its first week of release. It became her fifth album not to take the top spot in the United States. The lead single, "The One", which features Canadian rapper Drake,^[7] was released for airplay in June 2009, and was officially and digitally released in July 2009, peaking at number sixty-three on the Hot 100. Blige recorded "Stronger", as the lead single from the soundtrack to the basketball documentary "More Than a Game" in August 2009. The second single from *Stronger with Each Tear*, "I Am", was released in December 2009 and reached number fifty-five on the Hot 100. The third international single from the album, "Each Tear", was remixed with different featured artists from different countries, then being released in February 2010. The single failed to chart anywhere except in the UK where it reached number one-hundred-eighty-three and in Italy where it reached number one. The album's third U.S. single, "We Got Hood Love" featuring Trey Songz, was released in March 2010 and reached number twenty-five on the Hot

R&B/Hip-Hop Singles chart though it failed to reach the Hot 100. One of Blige's representatives reported to US Weekly magazine that a tour in support of *Stronger with Each Tear* will begin in the fall of 2010. On March 2010, Blige released *Stronger with Each Tear* in the United Kingdom, as well as in the European markets. The album performed modestly in the United Kingdom, debuting at number thirty-three on the UK Albums Chart and at number four on the UK R&B Chart. It reached the top 100 in other countries.

Blige was honored at the 2009 BET Honors Ceremony and was paid tribute by Anita Baker and Monica. On November 4, 2009, Blige sang *The Star-Spangled Banner* at Yankee Stadium before the New York Yankees and Philadelphia Phillies played the last game (game 6) of the World Series. Blige performed two songs from her ninth album as well as her previous hits, "No More Drama" and "Be Without You" along with the song "Color", which was featured on the *Precious* soundtrack. Blige appeared as a guest judge on the ninth season of American Idol on January 13, 2010.

On January 23, 2010, Blige released a track "Hard Times Come Again No More" with The Roots as well as performing it at the Hope for Haiti Now telethon. At the 2010 Grammy Awards, Blige and Andrea Bocelli performed "Bridge Over Troubled Water". Blige also performed on BET's SOS Help For Haiti, singing "Gonna Make It" with Jazmine Sullivan and "One." Blige also took part in February 2010's We Are the World 25 for Haiti, singing the solo originally sung by Tina Turner in the original 1985 We Are The World version. At the 41st NAACP Image Awards Blige won Outstanding Female Artist and Outstanding Album for *Stronger with Each Tear*. On November 18, 2010, Billboard revealed Mary J. Blige as the most successful female R&B/Hip Hop Artist on the Top

50 R&B/Hip Hop Artists of the Past 25 Years list. Mary came in at number 2 overall.^[8] Blige named her fans " Mary Janes ".

2011–present: *My Life II... The Journey Continues (Act 1)* & *A Mary Christmas*

In January 2011, Hot 97 premiered Blige's teaser track "Someone to Love Me (Naked)" featuring vocals by Lil Wayne. In July 2011, Blige released the song "The Living Proof" as the lead single to the soundtrack of the film *The Help*. On July 24, VH1 premiered their third *Behind the Music* that profiled her personal and career life. In August 2011, Blige released her first single off the album, "25/8". Blige's tenth studio album, *My Life II... The Journey Continues (Act 1)*, was released in November 2011. The album, primarily recorded in Los Angeles and New York City, saw Blige looking toward the future while acknowledging the past. "From me to you, My Life II... Our journey together continues in this life," the singer explained. "It's a gift to be able to relate and identify with my fans at all times. This album is a reflection of the times and lives of people all around me." The album feature production from Kanye West and The Underdogs, among others. The second single "Mr. Wrong" featuring Canadian rapper Drake was the most successful single from the album, peaking at #10 on Billboard's R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart. The rest of songs released, including lead single "25/8" achieved only moderate success, peaking within the top 40 on R&B/Hip-Hop Songs. The album itself debuted at #5 on the Billboard 200, selling 156,000 copies first week; it was eventually certified Gold in 2012 and has sold 763,000 in the US.^[9]



Blige onstage at the Raggamuffin Festival in Sydney, Australia in January 2011.

On February 28, 2012, Blige performed "Star Spangled Banner" at the 2012 NBA All-Star Game. Blige appeared as guest mentor on *American Idol* on March 7, 2012, and performed "Why" on the results show the following night. On September 23, 2012, Blige was a performer at the iHeartRadio Music Festival at the MGM Grand Las Vegas. Blige was featured on the song "Now or Never" from Kendrick Lamar's album *Good Kid, M.A.A.D City*, released on October 22, 2012.

In early 2013, reports surfaced that Blige was recording a Christmas album. The album, titled, *A Mary Christmas* was released on October 15, 2013 through Matriarch and Verve Records, her first release with the latter. The album includes collaborations with Barbra Streisand, The Clark Sisters, Marc Anthony and Jessie J. In early December, *A Mary Christmas* became Blige's 12th top ten album after it rose to #10 in its eight week.

On October 23, 2013, Blige sang the national anthem before Game 1 of the 2013 World Series.

Acting career

In 1998, Blige made her acting debut on the sitcom *The Jamie Foxx Show* playing a character, the apparently southern Ola Mae; a preacher's daughter who wanted to sing more than gospel music. Her father was portrayed by Ronald Isley of The Isley Brothers. In 2001, Blige starred opposite rapper Q-Tip in the independent film *Prison Song*. That same year, Blige made a cameo on the Lifetime network series, *Strong Medicine*; playing the role of Simone Fellows. Blige's character was the lead singer of a band who was sick, but would not seek treatment. In 2000, Blige was featured in a superhero web cartoon in junction with Stan Lee. Blige used the cartoon as part of her performance while on her 2000 Mary Show Tour. In 2004, Blige starred in an Off-Broadway play, *The Exonerated*. The play chronicled the experiences of death row inmates. Blige portrayed Sunny Jacobs, a woman who spent 20 years in prison for a crime she did not commit. In late 2005, it was reported that Blige landed the starring role in the upcoming MTV Films biopic on American singer/pianist and civil rights activist, Nina Simone. According to IMDB.com the film will be released in 2012.^[10]

In February 2007, Blige guest-starred on *Ghost Whisperer*, in an episode called "Mean Ghost", as the character Jackie Boyd, the school's cheer leader coach grieving for the death of her brother and affected by the ghost of a dead cheerleader. The episode features many of Blige's songs. In August 2007, Blige was a guest star on *Entourage*, in the role of herself, as a client of Ari Gold's agency. In October 2007, Blige was also a guest star on *America's Next Top Model*, as a creative director for a photo shoot by Matthew Rolston. In May 2009, Mary made a guest appearance on *30 Rock*, as an artist recording a benefit song for a kidney. Blige also had a supporting role in Tyler Perry's movie *I Can Do Bad All By Myself*, which was released in September 2009.

Blige starred alongside Tom Cruise, Julianne Hough, and Alec Baldwin in the film adaptation of the 1980s jukebox hit musical *Rock of Ages*. Blige played Justice Charlier, the owner of a Sunset Strip gentlemen's club. Production began in May 2011 and the film was released in June 2012.

Blige will star in the upcoming Lifetime movie *Betty and Coretta* alongside Angela Bassett, Malik Yoba and Lindsay Owen Pierre. She will play Dr. Betty Shabazz, the widow of Malcolm X. The film is schedule to premiere in February 2013.

Other ventures

In 2004, Blige launched her own record label, Matriarch Records, distributed through Interscope, and in mid-2012, discovered girl group **Just'Us**, making the group the first ladies of the label. Blige says "These are my little Mary's; they each remind me of myself at different points in my life." Blige has been reported to be working with Just'Us on their debut album.^[11]

In July 2010, Blige launched her first perfume, My Life (through Carol's Daughter), exclusively on HSN. The fragrance's unprecedented success broke sales records in hours and has been awarded two prestigious FIFI awards from the Fragrance Foundation. The newest fragrance, My Life Blossom launched in August 2011 exclusively to HSN.

In October 2010 Blige released a line of sunglasses called "Melodies by MJB". The first Melodies collection featured four styles with a total of 20 color options. Each style represented a specific facet of Blige's life. Essence magazine reported that in the spring of 2011, "Melodies by MJB" extended their collection to offer more styles.

Blige's production company, along with William Morris Endeavor is also working on several TV and film projects.

Blige has had endorsement contracts with Reebok, Air Jordan, Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Gap, Target, American Express, AT&T Inc., M-A-C, Apple Inc., Burger King and Chevrolet.^[citation needed] She has also been a spokesperson with Carol's Daughter beauty products and Citibank's with Nickelback program.

Legacy

Called the "Queen of Hip-Hop Soul", Blige is credited with influencing the musical marriage of Hip-Hop and R&B.^[12] Ethan Brown of *The New Yorker* says that albums "What's the 411?" and "My Life", in hindsight, invented "the sample-heavy sound that reinvigorated urban radio and became a blueprint for nineties hip-hop and R&B."^[13] Brown further concludes that Mary's "duets with the Wu-Tang Clan's Method Man and Ghostface Killah set the trend for collaborations between rappers and R&B songbirds like Mariah Carey." Tom Horan of The Daily Telegraph comments that Blige, being a hugely influential figure in popular music, "invented what is now called R&B by successfully combining female vocals with muscular hip hop rhythm tracks. All over the world, that recipe dominates today's charts."^[14] Called one of the "most explosive, coming-out displays of pure singing prowess"^[15] and "one of the most important albums of the nineties",^[16] *What's the 411?* saw Blige pioneer "the movement that would later become Neo soul, generating gripping songs that were also massive radio hits."^[17]

Blige has received notable awards and achievements. In 2010, she was ranked 80th on VH1's list of the 100 Greatest Artist of All Time.^[18] Blige was listed as one of the 50 most influential R&B singers by Essence. Rolling Stone magazine ranked *My Life* at number 279 on its list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time.^[19] The album was also

included on Time's list of the 100 Greatest albums of All Time.^[20] Alternately called the "Queen of R&B" for her unprecedented success in the realm of R&B, Blige has amassed eight number one albums on the R&B/Hip Hop Albums chart — a record for a female artist. Blige is also the only artist to have won Grammys in the R&B, Rap, Pop, and Gospel fields.

Personal life

In 2001, Blige met record industry executive Martin Kendu Isaacs (known as "Kendu") who became her manager. The two were married on December 7, 2003, in a small private ceremony at Blige's home attended by 50 guests.

Blige earned her GED in 2010.

Blige has been a resident of Cresskill, New Jersey.^[21]

As part of her efforts to halt domestic violence, Blige opened the "Mary J. Blige Center for Women" in Yonkers, New York in October 2009.

Blige is a Democrat and has supported President Obama, performing at the 2012 Democratic National Convention in support of his re-election effort.

Blige has expressed support for same-sex marriage.

A February 2013 report in the *The Star Ledger* said that TMZ had reported that the State of New Jersey had filed a \$900,000 tax lien on Blige and that she had "been sued for defaulting on a \$2.2 million bank loan".^[22]

In a BET documentary, Blige said that when she hears music, she sees colors. In other words she is a synesthete. ^[citation needed]

Blige and her husband Martin Isaacs had a \$3.4 million tax lien put against them in New Jersey. The Internal Revenue Service filed a notice of a lien on her on Feb. 7, 2013. It stated she owed more than \$574,000 for the 2009 tax year, more than \$2.2 million for 2010 and more than \$647,000 for 2011.

Philanthropy

In 2001, Blige performed "Do Nothin' Till You Hear From Me" for the Red Hot Organization's compilation album *Red Hot + Indigo*, a tribute to Duke Ellington, which raised money for various charities devoted to increasing AIDS awareness and fighting the disease.

In 2008, The Mary J. Blige and Steve Stoute Foundation for the Advancement of Women Now, Inc. (FFAWN) was inaugurated at Roosevelt High School in Yonkers. Its purpose is to inspire women "to reach their individual potential".^[23] On May 27, 2012, myFox1a.com reported that this charity is being investigated and two lawsuits have been filed against it.<http://www.biography.com/people/mary-j-blige-507644?page=2>

Discography

- *What's the 411?* (1992)
 - *My Life* (1994)
 - *Share My World* (1997)
 - *Mary* (1999)
 - *No More Drama* (2001)
 - *Love & Life* (2003)
 - *The Breakthrough* (2005)
 - *Growing Pains* (2007)
 - *Stronger with Each Tear* (2009)
 - *My Life II... The Journey Continues (Act 1)* (2011)
 - *A Mary Christmas* (2013)^[24]
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Tours

- Share My World Tour (1997–98)
- The Mary Show Tour (2000)
- No More Drama Tour (2002)
- Love & Life Tour (2004)
- The Breakthrough Experience Tour (2006)
- Heart of the City Tour (2008)
- Growing Pains European Tour (2008)
- Love Soul Tour (2008)
- Music Saved My Life Tour (2010–11)
- The Liberation Tour (2012)
- The King & Queen Tour (with R. Kelly) (2014)

Filmography

List of acting credits in film and television

Year	Title	Role	Notes
1995	<i>New York Undercover</i>	Herself	"Private Enemy No. 1" (episode 14, season 1) [music performance]
1998	<i>The Jamie Foxx Show</i>	Ola Mae	"Papa Don't Preach" (episode 14, season 2)
2001	<i>Angel: One More Road to Cross</i>	Guardian Angel	Direct to DVD
	<i>Prison Song</i>	Mrs. Butler	Main Role
	<i>Strong Medicine</i>	Simone Fellows	"History" (episode 4, season 2)
2007	<i>Ghost Whisperer</i>	Jackie Boyd	"Mean Ghost" (episode 15, season 2)
	<i>Entourage</i>	Herself	"Gary's Desk" (episode 8, season 4)
2009	<i>I Can Do Bad All By Myself</i>	Tanya	Supporting Role
	<i>30 Rock</i>	Herself	Guest
2010	<i>American Idol</i>	Guest judge/Herself	Auditions were held in Atlanta, Georgia at the Georgia Dome when Blige guest judged.
2012	<i>Rock of Ages</i>	Justice Charlier	
2013	<i>Betty and Coretta</i>	Dr. Betty Shabazz	An original Lifetime movie
	<i>The X Factor</i>	Guest judge/herself	Blige assisted Nicole Scherzinger at her judge's house in Antigua
	<i>Black Nativity</i>	Platinum Fro	

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