

Mary J. Blige: 'I Started Praying and Crying ... My Life Shifted'

It's easy for regular people to think that stars—whether in music, film or TV—have such cushy lives so full of success, glamor and luxury that nothing ever bothers them.

But if the recent suicide of Robin Williams and the overdose death of Amy Winehouse before that taught us anything, it's that stars are people too. And they can suffer setbacks, depression and addictions, and sometimes these problems are amplified *because* they are stars.

Mary J. Blige is a case in point. She's one of the favorite musical artists of President and Michelle Obama and has been to the White House twice. But at this stage in her career, her recordings no longer reliably sell in the millions. She leaned hard on her loyal fan base to have a successful Christmas album last year. But her newest work "sounds like nothing she has ever done before," reports *Billboard* magazine.

"The empathetic quality she displays in person is all over her latest record, *The London Sessions*. Helping her fans feel better about themselves is a major goal of Blige's. But it turns out that she herself actually hasn't seen a therapist, despite a traumatic childhood, the struggles with addiction and bouts of depression," according to the *Billboard* piece written by Jonathan Ringer.

"I've never sat down with a doctor like that, no," she says. "But I meditate and pray and try to really take responsibility. That's therapy too, when you take responsibility for all the foolishness you're doing and all the things you did wrong. It hurts. You got to feel it, deal, then heal."

Her low point came at what should have been a joyous time: working on the songs for her second album, 1994's Sean Combs-produced *My Life*, which went on to be one of the year's biggest records, selling nearly 3 million copies, *Billboard* said. She was just 23 and wracked with self-loathing and doubt about her talent, her appearance, her worth as a human being—all of which she connects to an incident of sexual abuse by a family friend when she was 5.

"I was ready to just check out," she says now. "It was a moment—I can't get into it—but I saw my life going and I was grabbing for it. I was like, 'No, no, no, no, no.' That's when I realized that I don't want to die. And I switched, and I started praying and crying, and my life shifted right there."

The London Sessions kicks off with a clear declaration of intent: a blast of deep soul called "Therapy," which breakout star Sam Smith wrote with Blige in mind. When he first sang it to her in his London studio, she found herself profoundly moved.

"I just had to change a couple little words to make it fit me," she told *Billboard* a few weeks before the album's release. "It touched my heart because it's a topic that people don't like to talk about. I thought it would be nice to let people know, 'It's OK, you're not the only one.'"