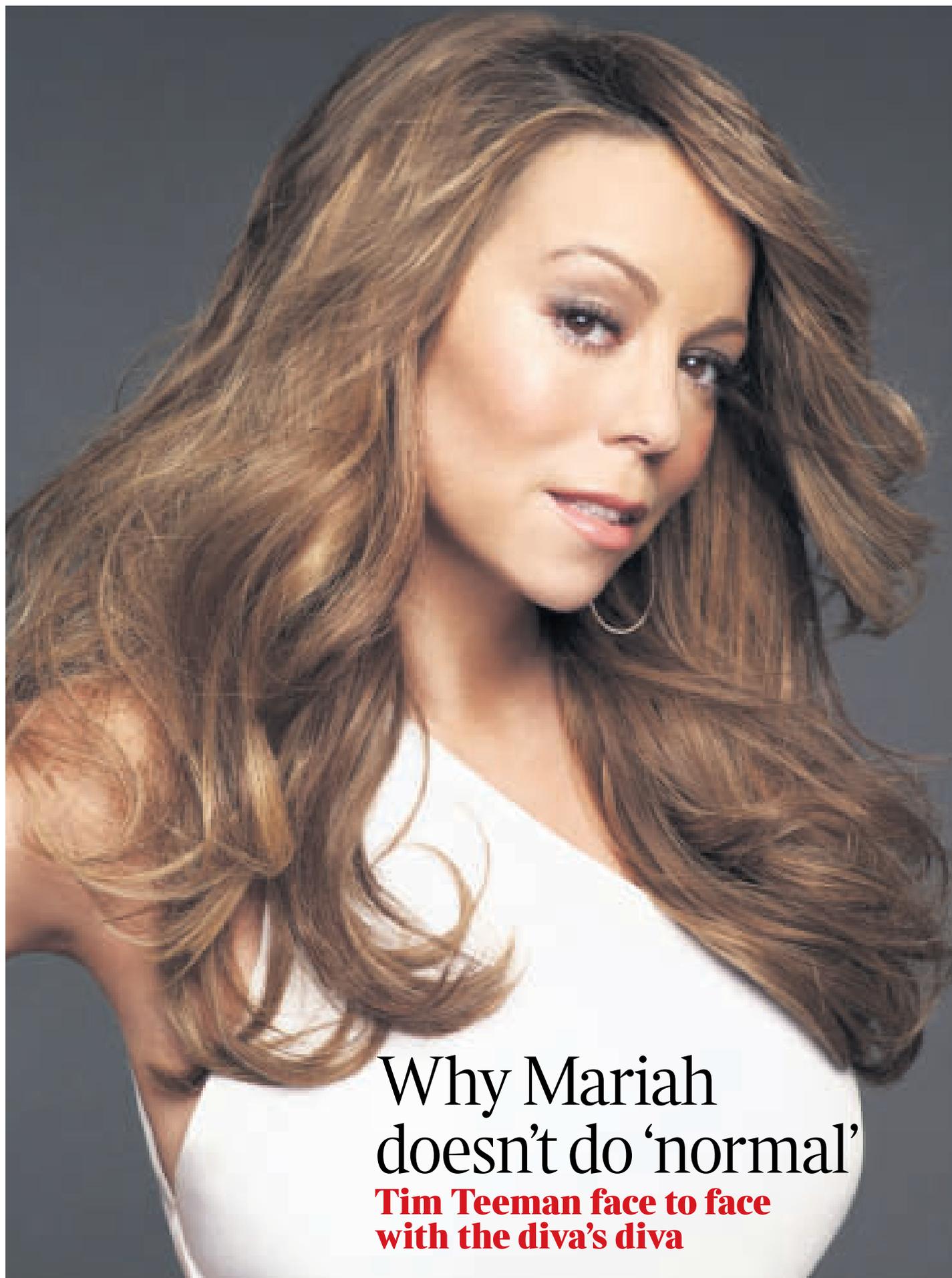


2

arts

**'Go for it,
gorgeous'**

**Would you want Gok
Wan in your pocket?**



**Why Mariah
doesn't do 'normal'**

**Tim Teeman face to face
with the diva's diva**

Celebrity watch

**The truth about David
Beckham's
pants
nose**



TV&Radio Page 18

Puzzles Page 22



**Wish
you
weren't
here?
Seeing
Britain
through
the eyes
of a
tourist**

arts



COVER PHOTOGRAPH: JAMES WHITE; THIS PAGE: DAVID LA CHAPELLE

‘I don’t think I’m normal’

She’s married and pregnant, but Mariah Carey insists she’s still 12. Tim Teeman meets the diva’s diva

Is she OK? What does she want? Outside the New York hotel suite, the corridor is seething with Mariah Carey’s jittery flunkys. The day of our interview has changed, our appointment is hours late. But this is Mariah-world, where — if one apocryphal story is true — rose petals must be found should madam pitch up at a hotel at 3am and find the floor not to her liking. When she appeared on GMTV last year, she had two people lower her on to the sofa. She brought her own toilet paper (but it was GMTV, who can blame her?). Carey once said her dogs had their own entourage and her assistants had assistants. Today she will claim she is still a little girl living a far from normal life, while also “the boss lady” of her own corporation, happy finally to have found unconditional love.

The night before we meet, the

40-year old singer attended a lavish event at the Lincoln Centre, where an audience was played, at ear-splitting volume, her thirteenth studio album, the inelegantly titled *Merry Christmas II You*. The room was decked out with giant baubles and faux presents. The album is a lush, orchestral and supremely camp smorgasbord of hydraulic chords and Carey’s five-octave-spanning whoop-de-whoops, topped with the grand cherry of a razzier version of her 1994 hit *All I Want for Christmas*. If you like Carey’s melismatic histrionics, beltingly deployed most famously on *Hero*, you will be enraptured. Everyone from the record company clapped heartily; the woman in front of me looked at her friend with a kind of “Was that for real?” grin at the end of every bombastic number, including a deranged disco version of *Auld Lang Syne*.

Carey was ushered on to the stage in

a plum, body-hugging dress, looking much, much bigger than her airbrushed female Santa album-cover shot (by David LaChapelle) in vertiginous heels: her feet are “repelled” by flats. She thanked us for coming, even though she wasn’t sure who was here. She also thanked Nick Cannon, her TV and radio presenter husband, “for sharing my moment, as he should because it’s momentous”. The wordplay tickled her, but the room felt thick with corporate tension rather than Christmas joy. “She looks totally pregnant,” someone whispered, referring to the baby Carey was said to be carrying, a rumour that she confirmed a few days later. She told me that she and Cannon had discussed baby names in their very first “serious conversation”.

“I think all women are allowed to have their own private space,” she said, declining to talk about her pregnancy. “When you’re in the public eye people don’t respect that line, whereas if you just saw a woman on the street, you’re not going to say, ‘So have you gained a couple of pounds or are you pregnant dear?’” She says this in a perfect English accent. “I still consider myself

One of these two will turn into a puddle of slush: Mariah Carey poses for David LaChapelle for her Christmas album cover

“**I don’t adhere to modern rules or the normal rules of time**”

private.” What nonsense: Mariah Carey is quite patently not a “woman on the street” and she invalidates her heartfelt desire for privacy days later when she announces her pregnancy on a primetime TV show.

Of course Carey craves attention, just on her own terms and at her own bidding. She told her husband on his radio show that pregnancy had left her nauseous and exhausted; he is trying to ration her use of high heels. She is no cartoon but rather a canny, witty operator who knows how to play up, and also subvert, her diva image. Carey writes most of her own songs and, with 19 English-speaking No 1s in America, is second only to the Beatles (20), “and she’s alive”, as one of her people put it.

Carey has won five Grammy Awards, has sold more than 200 million albums, singles and videos worldwide and is bullishly proud of her success. “I can sing my songs however I want and if somebody doesn’t like it, I’m like: ‘Guess what, I don’t care what you think. When you’ve written the song, and you don’t like it, then you can tell me you don’t like my singing,’” she says.

She grumbles at the daily invasions ▶

of privacy; that people “twit-pic” what she eats in restaurants. She eulogises her “fans” as the ones who “know” her best, faithful throughout what she admits has been a “rollercoaster” life. “And, you know what, I love rollercoasters. You start here, go down, go up, go down, up. I ride them over and over again.”

Before we speak, I watch a farcical piece of arse-licking, when the producer of Disney’s Christmas Day TV show begs her to be his lead act, swearing “on my mother’s life” to provide the singer with a suite at Cinderella’s Castle at the Orlando theme park itself, “where she can turn into a child”. I must have misheard that, I think; but no. When I ask about turning 40, Carey, now opposite me solicitously offering water, says: “Who turned 40? I have no idea what you’re talking about. I’m 12.” You feel 12, I ask. “No, I am 12. Honestly, I don’t think I’m normal,” she says. “I don’t think my life has been quite normal. I disregard time, you don’t see me wear a watch. I don’t adhere to modern rules or the normal rules of time.”

OK, I say baffled, but you did turn 40. Physically, you’re not 12 (or her pregnancy would be an underage one). “I don’t have birthdays. Literally,” Carey

ALLSTAR: LARRY MARANO / CORBIS; SEX: PACIFIC COAST NEWS



says firmly. “If anyone wished me happy birthday, I’d be like, who are you talking to? It’s about not being tied down to anything.”

Carey grew up on Long Island, the youngest of three. Her mother, Patricia, was Irish-American and an opera singer, her father, Alfred, was an Afro-Venezuelan aeronautical engineer. They divorced when she was 3. Did she have a difficult childhood? “I

had to protect myself against a couple of things,” she says. Like the racists who reportedly torched the family car? “I don’t feel comfortable talking about that,” Carey says.

“It’s hard to explain the family dynamic. I don’t remember them as a couple. They’d been married ten years and then I came along. It wasn’t a normal household. We were artistic. We weren’t a typical suburban family, and every time you have a mixed-race family in that setting it’s not going to be the easiest thing. I’m pretty sure that people did their best to make me happy. I was always creative: singing was always my outlet and still is.”

On her new album, she and her mother duet on a delirious *O Come All Ye Faithful*. Patricia, a vocal coach as well as a singer, had noticed her daughter’s musical leanings, although Carey never wanted to sing opera herself. Are Carey and her mother close? She looks stricken. “I’m sure we were when I was younger. There have been complicated moments. At least having the duet is something I’ll be able to have and say this is her, this is a special moment and I’m glad we did it.” Her father died of cancer in 2002.

Carey’s mother never “tried to impose rigour” on her; and she wishes she had when it came to learning the piano, because she thinks musically “way farther than my hands can take me” — although “why sit there for six hours when I can call somebody else and say, ‘Come over and help, please?’”

At school, she was “one of those people who didn’t apply themselves, but I had faith that singing was going to be my life. There was no other option: it was this or be a genie.” She remembers taking the radio from the kitchen and listening to it under the covers of her bed: Jimi Hendrix, Stevie Wonder, Al Green and Michael Jackson. “Anything musical lifted me out of the moment,” she says, adding that even today she is happiest when “fully connected to my creative self, especially writing melodies”. She professes not to know where that five-octave voice came from. “I do have nodules in my throat and know how to make those work. I won’t work in the belting register for longer than two to three hours because nobody should.”

Carey has said before that her relationship with Tommy Mottola, president and CEO of Sony Records, was confining; she released her first record at 20 under him and they married in 1993, divorcing five years later. Next came an ill-fated \$80 million deal with Virgin Records which yielded the risible movie and album, *Glitter*. The label dropped her. In 2002, she signed with Island



Higher, mum! Clockwise from top left, Mariah Carey in *Glitter*; in performance in January; out and about in New York; and with her husband Nick Cannon

Records and released her bestselling album *The Emancipation of Mimi* in 2005. She became known for her bizarre behaviour. This year she gave a rambling — some thought drunk — speech at a film festival while accepting an award for her role in Lee Daniels’s *Precious* as a social worker.

People think you’re fragile and emotional. I say, “Really?” Carey says, wittingly. “I’d love to see them handle one hundredth of what I handle.

If they consider themselves fragile after living even one day of my life and they made it through that day, that would be pretty amazing.” She cares about what her family thinks, she says. “But the public? I don’t really know who that is. People who couldn’t name five of my songs? That doesn’t matter to me because my fans will know the lyrics at the drop of a hat. They are attached to them on a personal level.” Carey’s most personal song, “and the one true fans really relate to”, is *Close My Eyes* from the *Butterfly* album. “I wrote it as a diary over a four-year period from when I did my first live show, then the *Hero* video, and I would come back to the house I was living in” — she sighs very heavily, her voice wavers — “and I remember looking out of the window, reflecting on my life



and it was like: ‘OK, my dreams are coming true, but I’m living vicariously through myself, the person I am on TV.’ In America I’d had a lot of No 1 songs very quickly, but I was becoming a little sequestered person. And I’m not. I’m not a diminutive person” — she puts on a dainty voice — “who says: ‘Oh, please tell me what to do because I don’t know how to sing this part, help me through this.’ I’m mostly in the situation where I am the boss lady and I hate it. I hate telling people what to do, but I end up having to do it because if things aren’t running smoothly I have to put them in order. It sucks but that’s how it is.”

Like the narrator of *Close My Eyes*, she felt as if she had grown up too soon, “with the weight of the world” held “deep inside”, having “learnt many things little ones shouldn’t know”. Presumably she, like the song’s narrator, learnt “to grow numb to the madness, and block it away”. She says a German girl who’d been abused as a child wrote to her thanking her for expressing what she had felt. Did Carey suffer abuse as a child? “I’m sure all kids feel some sort of thing of that nature,” she says, looking away. “I wouldn’t be comfortable. ... I definitely felt abused at school.”

What about Mottola, did Carey feel abused by him? Today, she is wearing a Van Cleef & Arpels silver butterfly, and the album of the same name seemed to stand for her declaration of independence from him. Well, he certainly changed her, she admits. “Our best moments were when we agreed on things creatively.” She started composing *Butterfly* the song “when I was leaving a situation that was very confining”. She left their house with “literally nothing. I just had to get out.”

Mottola is writing an autobiography, in which he reportedly plans to put her difficulties down to her upbringing rather than their relationship. How does she feel about that? “We’ll see,” she laughs. Is she nervous? “Absolutely not. He has to ask for my approval on every single thing!”

When her career was in apparent freefall at the start of the millennium, she got fed up with people opining about her state of mind. “Unless they went through the experience I did, they don’t know what it was like,” she says impatiently. “I equate it with being in

third grade and you’d fall over in the freaking sandbox and you get a grain of sand in your eye and for years afterwards people say: ‘Can we talk about that because it’s soooo interesting?’ Life is full of surprises. The most important thing is that I try to be my best creative self.”

A lot of the time, she observes, the criticism of her is “visual: so for a while I had my hair in a bun, instead of looking glamorous and now you have to be camera-ready all the time and people judge you by how you look. You can’t control it, but I see why people become reclusive.”

Has she had plastic surgery or Botox? She gasps. “No, I haven’t. I take really good care of my skin. I’m ethnic and people forget we have a different skin constitution.”

She doesn’t care about being called a diva (“Isn’t everyone now?”), because “I know the true meaning of the word. First: a woman of great vocal talent. Most people called a diva don’t have that. I’m not saying I do, ha ha ... The second is a difficult woman and, yeah, I can be difficult, but I’m pretty nice compared to most people I’ve seen do what I do. If you want to work for someone difficult, work for a bank or company where people don’t care about you. I take care of a lot of people and it’s not easy.”

Is she demanding? “Can’t you see all the pink flowers at my feet? The dogs were supposed to be here,” she says, parodying a *grande dame* strop. “What a disappointing diva I’m being.” She pours scorn on the report that she demanded the petals at the London hotel: “Yeah, at three in the morning, having just flown in, that’s what I cared about. I just wanted to sleep.”

Is she living the life she wanted? “What else could you see me doing?” she retorts. I meant, from when she was a young girl. God, I forgot ... “I’m still a young girl,” Carey says. “Perhaps when other people grow up they become really jaded, but I have this really weird combination of having this sarcastic wit and also having innocence that I refuse to be penetrated. I get the joke and I don’t mind laughing about myself, but I love making music. When I’m in my studio at home, that’s my equivalent of a desk job.”

Is love important to her? “Of course,” she says quietly. Why? “Because I don’t think I have ever felt truly unconditional love until this point in my life.” With Cannon? “Yes. I think we both knew from the beginning. Being in this adult relationship, which is also a public relationship, is different from anything I have ever experienced.”

So marriage to Cannon has transformed her? “Some people look for a husband or wife earlier in their lives. My priority was my career. I don’t think I was ready to be married. I just did it to survive in the relationship and that was difficult.”

What next? Well, Carey “loves” gospel and hip-hop but making the Christmas album has taken her in “lots of new directions”; the lush orchestration led her to fall in love with Nat King Cole, Bing Crosby and jazz standards. So jazz? “Yes, maybe. I’m a jazzy girl. Bye, darling.” Carey trills in that spot-on English accent, as she is surrounded by her unsmiling escorts and bundled protectively away: just the way this very pregnant 12-year-old boss lady likes it.

Merry Christmas II You will be released on Mercury Records on Nov 15. The first single from the album will be *Oh Santa!*



Blunt-speaking for the Twitterati

This week’s lesson is never to underestimate a pop star’s urge to search for their own name on the internet. When it fell to the Diary to review James Blunt’s new album, *Some Kind of Trouble*, we tweeted: “Lock the windows, leave your prejudice with your coat at the door — we’re about to review James Blunt’s new album. Come on JB, surprise us.” The requested surprise came sooner than expected when Blunt, singer of the airwave-hogging *You’re Beautiful*, replied @DirtyLilBlunt: “Try out track 12, *Turn Me On*”. Despite our attempts to dig ourselves out of a hole by thanking the warble-toned singer and making musical small-talk, Blunt did not reply a second time and swiftly deleted his original tweet. And was the track a surprise? With rock guitars, a gravelly voice and a thumping bassline it most certainly was. But only when compared with the first 11 tracks of entirely unsurprising saccharine pop. Nice try, James.

Bruce shows his drummer who’s Boss

Bruce Springsteen himself was present for last weekend’s screening at BFI Southbank of his new DVD documentary *The Promise: The Making of Darkness on the Edge of Town*. In black T and denims, “the Boss” was transformed into blue-collar Santa, sitting patiently in an armchair post-screening while industry execs and wide-eyed celebs (that’s you Rob Brydon) queued to be snapped with him. Best bit of the film? An irate Springsteen repeatedly shouting “stick!” at his drummer because he can “hear the wood from the drumsticks as well as the drums!” Cue baffled expressions all round.



Departed ballet star now in safe Hans

Ivan Putrov, the Royal Ballet principal whose abrupt departure from Covent Garden earlier this year raised more than a few eyebrows, has resurfaced as the star of a high-profile dance production at Sadler’s Wells next March. Putrov will join forces with the Pet Shop Boys and the choreographer Javier De Frutos for *The Most Incredible Thing*, a new creation based on a Hans Christian Andersen story. Given that De Frutos also made a hasty exit from his old job, as director of Phoenix Dance Theatre, he and Putrov should have plenty to talk about.

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