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Bitch! I Interviewed Madonna (Part One)

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It's been one hell of a week for Madonna. More than three decades into her phenomenally successful, exceptionally prolific music career, the undisputed Queen of Pop and Dance Anthem Enchantress officially released her 13th studio album, "Rebel Heart," to critically acclaimed reviews.

Ticket sales launched for her next concert series, presumably entitled "The Rebel Heart Tour," which is scheduled to kick off in Miami on August 29 and will continue worldwide through at least early 2016. This of course also means the Marketing Girl has embarked on one of her legendarily calculated full-court-press media tours, which, naturally and luckily, included several gay publications.

EDGE witnessed the media mayhem that only the Material Girl can create firsthand last Monday night when Madonna sat down with select members of the gay press at the Midtown Manhattan offices of her record label, Interscope.

The album is arguably Madonna's best effort in years. From the first single's deep-house, gospel-infused empowerment anthem, "Living For Love" (her record 44th number-one hit on Billboard's Hot Dance Club Songs chart) to moody and mature ballads like "Devil Pray" and "Joan of Arc," the hauntingly redemptive "Ghosttown" (the likely next single), and just about every other genre in between, the album fully embraces its diversity.

Among the many standouts in the epic 19-song set (just 14 are featured on the standard album) are the ridiculously over-the-top "Holy Water" ("Whenever I write about sex, I always do it tongue-in-cheek," she recently told Rolling Stone. "[This song] is obviously meant to be funny.") and the girl-done-been-wronged track "HeartBreakCity." And then there's the deluxe album's fierce finale, the Avicii-produced, rock-tinged title track "Rebel Heart" (oddly not included on the standard album).

Mondays are almost always a drag. Except on the rare occasion when Madonna offers to sit down, face-to-face, with an intimate group of gay journalists to talk about her new album, her favorite collaborators, her favorite carburetors, and, well, just about anything and everything -- except what she has planned for her next tour.

They say you should never meet your icons or heroes, because you'll likely be disappointed if they don't live up to the pedestal upon which you've placed them. In this particular case, though, speaking as a hardcore, decades-long loyal fan, I am thrilled to report that "they" were wrong. The meeting, interview and brief impromptu photo shoot that followed were everything for which any gushing fan could hope.

As polite and professional as any superstar you'll surely ever meet - it's quite obviously not her first time at the rodeo - Madonna went out of her way to personally greet and shake hands with all of her would-be questioners, not just with intent eye contact, but also a seemingly genuine interest in actually hearing who we were. Perhaps her Stevie Nicks-inspired flowing black gown

with black chiffon half-cape and black lace gloves helped balance an ethereal yet affable grounding that encouraged her casual kindness and candidness. Or maybe it was the eucalyptus oil-scented humidifier situated by her side that delicately lubricated not only her vocal chords but the all-white-embellished ambiance as well? We may never know, and, honestly, it does not much matter.

Here's a taste of what the gorgeous, golden-locked goddess had to share.

EDGE: I'd like to ask you about the process of the album -- it is a great album, by the way -- I know that you've generally stuck with one producer on the last few albums --

MADONNA: Thank you. I try to...

EDGE: And this time you just let it rip with multiple producers. How was it different approaching it this way?

MADONNA: I didn't mean to work with so many different producers. First of all, I didn't know that Avicii was going to have a life-threatening illness and disappear. So a lot of the songs that I wrote with him or his songwriting team, I ended up having to go out and find other producers to work on them, to finish the songs with me.

And then Diplo came along and I very much wanted to work with him, and he also wanted to work with me, but I didn't know that he also was working with 5,000 other people and had to get on a jet and go to the other side of the world to play festivals and then go here and play that and then go here and do that -- just getting him to sit still for a couple of days to finish a song was a challenge.

So I ended up working with a lot of young DJs and I naively didn't think it through. Oh, it's summertime -- it's the festivals, and they're on tour, and I'll be lucky if I get them for three days, so a lot of that had to factor in. OK, I can't wait for three months for this dude to come back. I have to find somebody else.

EDGE: Was it ultimately satisfying? Or you wouldn't do it that way again?

MADONNA: Ultimately satisfying...? [Long Pause] If I had my way and I could do it again, I would make people sign an iron-clad agreement that they would stay and ensure they would not leave me until all the songs were finished.

ROUNDTABLE # 2: You were forced to change album release schedule because of the leaks that happened last year. The next time you go to create a new album or film, is your practice going to change because of the way these new tracks [were leaked]?

MADONNA: Well, I'm never going to put anything on a server and send information back and forth as had been done. That was the first mistake. That's when we first realized that the music was being hacked on the server. But then the last leak came from a mastering lab and that was just a technician's oversight. After everything had happened and everyone knew we had to crack down and be really super secure, someone sent the record on the server - AGAIN! My hacker's very clever, obviously. It was not up for very long, but it was snatched. So I would never do anything like that again. Hand delivery.

ROUNDTABLE # 3: Did it change anything about the way the album was -- like how the tracks were sequenced?

MADONNA: It changed EVERYTHING. First of all, it drove me insane and made me feel an overwhelming sense of anxiety, and it made me second-guess everything, because suddenly I thought, "Oh God, everyone's heard all these demos" -- because there were some demos that I actually liked the demo version of and I thought, well, they've heard the demo and now they're going to be expecting other things. Then they heard the next level of versions and it kept making me think, "Should I change it or should I just leave it how it was?" I was second-guessing everything, rather than just choosing for myself and putting it out as I would normally, as an artist. It started making me think, I don't even know which version I should be putting out!

Because some people were like [of the demos], Oh, I love it, I love it. And I was like, No, don't love it because it's not done. So it made me crazy.

ROUNDTABLE # 3: It was devastating as somebody who has always admired your work, too, I thought, wow, what a horrible thing to do.

MADONNA: Yeah, and also very confusing. Because a lot of these things were being shared on my supposed "fan sites," and I was thinking, "Well, my fans should be supporting me and protecting me." So I don't know -- the whole thing confused me...still does. And what [the hacker] did -- he's in jail in Israel -- what he's done is considered a white-collar crime, so I don't even know what's going to happen to him. I hope he goes to jail for a long time. But let's not dwell on that stuff, though [smiles and laughs].

ROUNDTABLE # 4: Of all the collaborators you worked with on this album, who was the biggest surprise -- or was there a particular track that you felt was the most unexpected?

MADONNA: Hmmm...I felt like I wrote a lot of good songs with Avicii's writing team, and I didn't expect that, because I ended up writing a lot of personal and very soulful songs with them, whom I refer to as my Viking Harem, who are all really wonderful, intelligent, soulful people, and they made me feel really comfortable. So I guess I felt like I was safe enough to write those kind of songs, and that surprised me.

EDGE: We're all very excited about the upcoming tour. Can you give us a preview of what you have planned?

MADONNA: No. [GROUP LAUGHS] Now why would I do that? I want it to be a surprise for you.

[Editor's Note: With some floor seats selling as high as \$860 at Madison Square Garden - and others legally "reselling" as high as \$8,155 at the same venue - without any arenas sold out or second nights announced thus far, perhaps a little teaser may have been wise and helpful?]

EDGE: I'll accept that. Getting back to the collaborator issue, who do you feel -- over the years you've worked with so many people -- who's pushed you the furthest as an artist, a writer, and a performer? Who challenged you the most?

MADONNA: Well...[long pause]...I would say as a songwriter, working with Toby Gad -- he really pushed me a lot. He was constantly questioning my choice of words and sometimes I would get really irritated with him. "Just because I like it, okay? Just leave me alone. The song is finished. Stop." And then we'd be done and he'd send me an email, What about this one little word? He'd just drive me crazy. I'd be calling him an SS Officer, which he's clearly not -- he's the sweetest, most lovely guy ever. He really pushed me.

And Diplo really pushed me. As crazy as everybody thinks he is - "he's a fun party boy," whatever -- he really was particular about lyrics and praising me on my vocal performances. He pushed

me a lot, too. Of course I don't like it, but it served me well on this record.

EDGE: DJ Paulo, who did a remix of "Living For Love" --

MADONNA: Yeah, yeah, he's amazing!

EDGE: He's going to be playing at Viva [at Stage 48 at 48th St. & 11th Avenue in Manhattan] in a couple weeks. If you want to go, just let us know. [GROUP LAUGHS]

MADONNA: Is he really? What date?

EDGE: Black Party weekend, which I believe is March 21st, Saturday night?

MADONNA: [To Publicist Liz Rosenberg] Am I here that weekend?

LIZ: Yeah, you may be.

EDGE: He is so amazing live! [The party is produced by] John Blair, who used to do Roxy Saturdays.

MADONNA: Well, [Paulo] better drop "Living For Love" ... or I'm not coming! [GROUP LAUGHS]

Check in with EDGE on Monday, March 16 for part two of the Madonna interview

Matt Kalkhoff is a New York-based freelance writer whose love for dance music is only surpassed by the depth and passion with which he writes about it. A full collection of Matt's work can be viewed at his website :: <http://www.mattunleashed.com>

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