

Don't go to a Mary J. Blige concert if you don't want to be a fan.

From the first note to the end of her two-dozen-song show at the Landmark Theater last night, Blige alone gave the sold-out concert audience more energy than most groups.

If her intensity doesn't convert you, her stage presence and sheer devotion to the performance will.

With a natural command of the stage, Blige performed ballads, remakes and hip-hop numbers with the same exuberance. She glowed, but never did the audience see her sweat.

Known for her homegirl-next-door appeal, Blige's outfits were almost as exciting as her performance. Opening with red hair, a metallic bikini top, white hip-huggers and her trademark humongous hoop earrings, Blige first belted out "Deep Inside."

Except for a brief stint with four male dancers, Blige's moves appeared to be more of a personality statement than the result of tight choreography. She swayed, spun, bopped, bounced and hopped to punctuate her points.

With her older hits, the songstress took the audience back with old school dances, including the Robot. For one number, she brought out a disco ball and confetti.

Her six-piece band and four back-up singers jazzed up her more popular songs, including "All That I Can Say" and "Real Love," and for the 1993 hit "Reminisce," Blige started popping and locking.

For some songs, Blige didn't even need to sing. The audience performed "I'm Going Down" and "My Life" so well, Blige applauded herself.

Showing off her chiseled figure, Blige scatted and gave motivational advice between songs. The queen of heart-wrenching storytelling had women in the audience testifying with arms outstretched. In a sparkling, beaded hat, Blige implored her fans "be No. 1 in your own life."

Taking roses from the audience, Blige thanked the audience for its support throughout her eight-year career.

The show exhibited how Blige has grown as singer and performer. Maybe that's why it's called "The Mary Show."

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