



PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREW MACPHERSON

Here comes trouble

Beloved of teens, dreaded by parents, Pink made her name singing rowdy anthems and picking public scraps (not least with Prince William). A decade on, married, a mother, with 40 million album sales to her name, has she finally mellowed? HELENA DE BERTODANO finds out

Pink has made a career out of being miserable. So it is perhaps worrying to hear that the singer is now happily married to the motocross racer Carey Hart with an 18-month-old daughter, Willow, who is 'a bundle of joy'. Does this mean the end of Pink as we know her? 'No way,' she says, with characteristic vigour. 'When you have a dark side nothing is ever as good as it seems.'

One of the most successful singers of all time, Pink has sold more than 40 million albums and 70 million singles worldwide. In 2009 *Billboard* magazine named her the number-one pop musician of the decade. And yet, until recently, she has been curiously underrated, adored by her many fans but surprisingly ignored by the mainstream. With her raspy, distinctive voice, she

can out-sing almost anyone – Lady Gaga, Rihanna, Katy Perry – but has never risen to their levels of fame. Fearless, quirky and clever, she is difficult to categorise: more of a rock star than a pop star – belting out her hard, witty, emotional songs.

Her latest album, 'The Truth About Love', debuted in America at number one in September. 'I've never been this pleasantly received before,' says Pink, 33, sounding genuinely surprised. We've met at her trailer at Sony Picture Studios in Los Angeles, where she is rehearsing for her next tour. 'It's my first number-one album anywhere except Australia. And then there is this whole CoverGirl thing [Pink was recently chosen as the new face of CoverGirl cosmetics]. It just feels really good. This is the dream I had when I was four, and

now I've done it. I no longer feel like the underdog with a point to prove. My husband is, like, "Hey, it only took you nine years to get people to like you." I'm like, "It took me nine years to like you, too..."

Arriving on her motorbike from her home in Malibu, Pink is dressed from head to toe in black, the only splash of colour the pink circle of gems stuck to the sides of her helmet. She wears a black hoodie, black sweatpants and black biker boots and – after she takes off her helmet – she quickly covers her platinum-blond hair with a black beanie. 'I'd love to have time to do my hair, honestly. I'd love to be Victoria Beckham just for one day – to look that good. But I can't.'

In fact, today Pink looks tired and wears little make-up. She sits on the narrow trailer couch with her head thrown back against the polished-wood wall, her legs drawn up beneath her. But there is no hint of fatigue a few nights later when she explodes on to the stage at a concert. The audience are on their feet in seconds as she belts out classics such as *Me and Bobby McGee*, as well as her own compositions such as *Who Knew*, plus her current single, *Try*, which



'Now every time I hear a curse word in one of my songs it's like a slap across the face. I totally get it now; before I didn't care'

was released in Britain last week. Wearing a skin-tight top, leather miniskirt and high-heeled black leather boots, she is mesmerising. Between numbers, she is relaxed and chatty, joking with the audience.

Acknowledging that there are children present, Pink pledges to sing 'the clean version' of *Blow Me (One Last Kiss)* – the hit single from her new album. Like many of her most popular songs, *Blow Me* is an angry, defiant ode to the implosion of a relationship. She skips a word whenever it's a swear-word, which means there are a lot of blanks in the song. Earlier she tells me that having a child has changed the way she views her lyrics: 'Now every time I hear a curse word in one of my songs, I...' – she physically winces – 'it's like a slap across the face. I totally get it now, whereas before I didn't care.' Not that she plans to lose the hard-ass attitude completely: 'We need our girls to be feisty.'

Top: Pink at the Teen Choice Awards in 2000. Above: performing at the iHeartRadio Music Festival in Las Vegas in September



In the past her sometimes outrageous acts, with her clad in little more than underwear and simulating sex with blow-up dolls, had parents dragging their starstruck children to the exit doors. 'I've had parents walk out in horror because I use stripper poles as part of my act. Although that changed after *Stupid Girls* [a song that railed against the cultural tyranny of making girls feel they have to be waif-thin sex bombs]. The parents were very happy with me after that song. They were, like [to their daughters], "Honey, maybe you could listen to Pink. Maybe she isn't the piece of trash I thought..."'

Although the songs on her new album still mine a rich seam of despair, Pink feels they are evolving. 'Everybody goes, "Oh, another break-up song by Pink,"' she says, rolling her eyes as she imagines the reaction. '*Blow Me* starts, "White knuckles and sweaty palms from holding on too tight..." For me, there is only love and fear. I hold on to things that are important to me so tight that I literally squeeze the life out of them. So it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. So, to me, it's a more sophisticated story than just a straightforward break-up song. But I totally get why people would think that.'

'I guess people look at me and say, "You're happy; what could you possibly have to add?" I'm married, my life is more real than ever. I'm still engaged in the world, I'm still a career mom, I still have a relationship I'm trying to keep.'

Her tempestuous relationship with Hart – the couple met in 2001, married in 2006, split up in 2008, got back together in 2009 and had their daughter in 2011 – provides the material for many of her songs. *So What*, her passionate, witty response to their temporary split, topped the charts in many countries, including Britain, and became her first number-one hit in America as a solo artist.

Typically, her first meeting with Carey was dramatic. She saw him competing at the 2001 X Games extreme sports event. 'He fell 40ft and broke 14 bones the day I met him. I thought he was dead. I was like, "Wow, he was cute, he would have made a good baby daddy." Then I ran into him a couple of months later and the rest...' She shrugs and smiles. Pink proposed to Hart in 2005, holding up a sign during one of his races saying, 'Will you marry me?' Initially Hart ignored the sign and did another lap. After she had added the words,

'I'm serious,' he pulled out of the race to pick her up and they married in Costa Rica a few months later. Today she wears two large diamonds on her ring finger. 'Regardless of whatever happens,' she says today, her eyes welling up with tears, 'he'll always be my love.'

Born Alecia Beth Moore, Pink grew up in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Her mother was a nurse and her father an angry Vietnam vet. In *Family Portrait* she sang searingly about the break-up of her parents:

'Daddy please stop yelling,
I can't stand the sound,
Make Mama stop crying,
'cause I need you around.'

'That was my life,' says Pink today. 'I was a daddy's girl and I was devastated when he left because my mom and I never really got along. But it was also, "God what a relief!" You spend the first nine years of your life afraid of what's going to happen in your house and then you just have quiet. I flinch now when people fight. I can't handle it.'

Doesn't she fight with her husband? Pink laughs, acknowledging her hypocrisy: 'I do, and passionately. But I don't have to listen to it as I'm yelling louder than he is. We used to fight a lot more, especially when we were drinking. He's Italian-Irish and so stubborn. I'm, like, "Have some more Jameson [whiskey]. You're on the couch again."'

Now she and her mother are close: 'We have the coolest relationship. I call her almost every day. We just needed some years and age and wisdom.'

But she believes it was the influence of her father that made her who she is today. 'He would fight, fight, fight for what he believed in; he marched on Washington, wrote endless letters. My dad would always say, "To thine own self be true," and, "Sometimes you've gotta walk up the mountain alone." People used to call him Mr Cause – "Here comes Mr Cause..." Yeah, that's my dad, you b—. And that's how I am.'

Pink's first dream was to be an Olympic gymnast, and she often incorporates trapeze acts into her performances. 'I got kicked out [of gymnastics] when I was 12. I was an a—. I was really competitive. I wouldn't clap if I didn't win first place. The actual remark was "non-teamlike attitude". I was like, "F— you, I'm out of here, I'm going to be a rock star instead."'

First, however, she went off the rails, experimenting heavily with drugs from the age of 13. Eventually her mother kicked her out, and she went to live with her father. She began performing in Philadelphia clubs and, by 16, she

had a record deal as part of an R&B group signed by the producer LA Reid. The group failed, but Reid encouraged her to go it alone, creating a solo album. Her second album, 'M!ssundaztood', made her a global superstar. Pink has never looked back. At first she was labelled the anti-Britney, a reference to the once-saccharine pop star Britney Spears. Now, as she puts it, 'I think Britney became who they thought I was.'

I wonder how her family reacts to her very public airing of all their troubles. 'I have hurt my parents several times with my lyrics. The thing I realise now is that I signed up for this life and they didn't, so me being as honest as I am and as open – maybe that wasn't always fair.'

She hopes that she helps people with her music: 'I try to lead by example and tell these stories because we're all going through the same

s—. If I feel like I empowered somebody, then I did what I was raised to do.'

There is nothing Pink likes better than a good scrap and, in the past, she has picked fights with everyone from her parents to Prince William. Hearing that he wanted her to play at his 21st-birthday party, she wrote to the prince saying that she would not perform for him because she was disgusted at his pro-hunting stance.

I see the tough side of Pink at first-hand when she takes a call from someone auditioning for

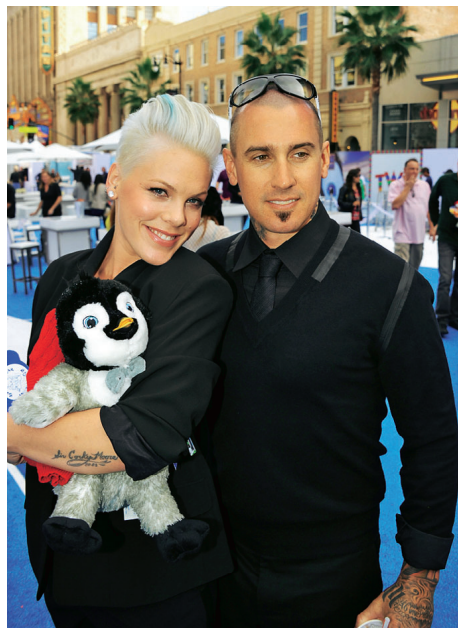
her next video. Afterwards she strides out of her trailer in a black mood: 'I do not want him on my video. We're moving forward without him. That's a final. And he should probably lose my phone number as soon as possible.'

'Uhhh, OK,' says her manager meekly.

Pink plans to stop touring once Willow is in school, and hopes to have more children: 'I want a basketball team. It's the best thing I've done. In 10 years I'll have an 11-year-old and an eight-year-old and a five-year-old and a three-year-old and a six-month-old and 18 dogs, a horse and a pig.'

She claims that she is a 'gipsy' at heart and will never sign up to the Los Angeles lifestyle: 'I don't live in the Hollywood bubble. I never have and I never will. I wasn't invited to that party.' She chuckles. 'And if I was, I'd probably arrive late and be dressed inappropriately.' ●

Pink was labelled the anti-Britney. Now, she says, 'I think Britney became who they thought I was'



Pink with her husband, Carey Hart, in November last year

Pink's new single, *Try*, is out now