

WE'RE TALKING TO...

BEVERLEY KNIGHT MBE

The British singer and actress talks about how staying fit inspires her performances

YOU'VE HAD AN AMAZING YEAR. WHAT WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS?

'The BK25 tour and album came about because I wanted to celebrate 25 years of making music – it's a big deal for a soul artist like me to have a career that's still going! Singing the songs that reflected my music and theatre career with the Leo Green Orchestra at the Royal Festival Hall in May was a highlight, as was meeting Stevie Wonder properly at Hyde Park, and receiving an award for my musical endeavours.'

WHAT'S THE SECRET OF YOUR LONG CAREER?

'I've stayed true to the vision of what I think I should do. The music industry didn't know what to do with me as a degree-educated black woman who didn't drink, smoke or take chemicals. They couldn't market me as the "badass chick from the streets", so I had an uphill struggle. But I knew who I was, and I ploughed on. And I'm still here! I encourage all women to believe in themselves and be strident in their views. Love and accept yourself as you are.'

HAS KEEPING FIT AND HEALTHY ALWAYS BEEN IMPORTANT TO YOU?

'I was sports mad at school and uni, but for about two years – when my career was taking off – I let everything go. I looked at myself and thought "who are you?" So, I decided to get back into fitness, and that's where I've been since. I get tons of creative ideas when exercising – it keeps me focused and driven. I train four or five times a week with interval and strength training. I also love rebounding, which I found via my friend, Jason Vale, whose juice retreats I often go to.'



Being fit and healthy has helped with a busy schedule in 2019



Doing it her way: Beverley says staying true to herself is the key to her music success

WOULD YOU HAVE GOT THROUGH 2019 IF YOU WEREN'T SO HEALTHY?

'No way. I would have got ill and been one of those people cancelling performances all the time, but I'm not about that. Being able to deliver live is essential, and to do that well, and sustain it, you've got to take care of your body and be all over your fitness. Two years ago, I underwent a total abdominal hysterectomy and was cut right open because I had massive fibroids, but I ate clean and moved around during my recovery, and six weeks later I was running on a beach on holiday. That's not to say I'm superwoman. But it shows that you can shrug things off so much easier if you're already fit, well and strong.'

ARE YOU GOING TO TAKE THINGS EASIER IN 2020?

'I've got lots of shows and festivals lined up, and in the summer, I start rehearsals for a new musical called *The Drifters Girl* in the West End. I'm starring as the woman who managed the group and brought them to worldwide acclaim. That will be my life for eight months, so no slowing down! People have come up to me and said I should be the Celine Dion/Whitney/Aretha/Tina of our modern times, but it hasn't happened because I've done things the way I wanted to. That's my sacrifice, but I believe it will happen one day.'

