

Still pop's queen of reinvention

Madonna has shared more intimate family moments with the world in her new Madame X concert documentary which premiered in New York on Friday.

And in keeping with the theme, the pop megastar was joined on the red carpet by dancer boyfriend Ahlamalik Williams and 16-year-old son David Banda.

The documentary, which was shot in Portugal where Madonna lived with her children for three years, follows the star during her 2019-20 Madame X tour where she played 75 dates across the US and Europe (skipping Australia).

And while she has played epic tours in the past, this tour was particularly meaningful.

"Four of my children were in it so it was great working with them every night," she said.

"And the other thing is, I lived in Lisbon for three years, and I had a chance to meet and work with and share the great artistry of all these great singers and musicians in my show and that was a wonderful experience for me."

Madonna's son Banda also loved performing with his mother.

"It was incredible," he said. "She told me one day, she said, do what you want, I don't care what it is but do it the best and that goes for everyone, whatever you do, do it the best."

In a departure for Madonna, the Madame X tour took in smaller theatres instead of stadiums, giving fans an up close and personal experience. Indeed, she was infinitely chattier than she had been on previous stadium tours, often wandering into the audience to talk to fans.

Madonna said time constraints in the new documentary meant some of the more intimate exchanges with her audiences were lost. "There were a lot

Covid might have ended her Madame X tour but in this exclusive chat Madonna reveals why family pride meant she had to share it with her fans. **Tiffany Bakker and Kathy McCabe** report

of moments where I talk to the audience during the shows but we have to cut that down for time so you don't see a lot of that," she said.

"I love talking, I love people heckling me or calling out and saying things and talking to them about specific moments or what was going on in the world whether it's Donald Trump or a natural disaster or another artist, I loved having that back and forth with the audience and I don't – we capture it to a certain point but not completely."

Madonna's cultural muscle is still pumped and flexed as she approaches the 40th anniversary of signing her first record contract with Sire (an imprint of Warner Music Group) and releasing her debut single Everybody next year.

On her 63rd birthday in August, the savvy businesswoman announced she had signed a new deal to return to her original record label home at Warner Music. The "monumental" partnership brings all 17 of her studio albums back into the Warner fold to be given the deluxe, reissue treatment as they reach a significant anniversary.

The three records she recorded for their rival label Interscope – 2012's MDNA, 2015's Rebel Heart and 2019's Madame X – will become part of the reunited catalogue in 2025.

Her singles, soundtrack records – and there have been some big sellers there – compilations and live releases are part of the new agreement and no doubt be given refreshes over the next decade.

Having sold more than 300 million albums, with vast and unexploited potential for her hits to be discovered by new generations via streaming platforms, the new Warner deal would have to be worth hundreds of millions of dollars. But for

all the enviable stats which confirm her power as one of the pop's most influential provocateurs, Madonna doesn't want yesterday's hero status and remains creatively driven to command the zeitgeist.

Madame X screamed "I am an artist!" as it yet again underscored her primary objective to push the boundaries of postmodern pop and stir the social conscience. While making it all about her, even as a posse of hitmakers and rookies assist her vision.

That has always been one of Madonna's greatest strengths – tapping the producers, writers and musicians who are crafting the sound of now, as she did on Madame X with Latin superstars Maluma and Anitta and rappers Quavo and Swae Lee.

Although it was a chunk of clunky cliché, Madonna's "And they said we wouldn't last" speech to open the recent 2021 MTV VMAs – as the music channel celebrated its own 40th anniversary – was more about her future than her past.

Madonna will rebrand for the future with new music, earlier this month sharing photos from a studio session with her boyfriend Ahlamalik Williams.

Perhaps more impactful will be the Madonna biopic she has scripted with Juno and Jagged Little Pill musical writer Diablo Cody.

More recently, Madonna has been working with writer Erin Wilson.

"I'm doing it in sections – there are all different parts so I'm just getting to the end of part one and I've had a 40-year-career so we're not there yet," she laughs. "But I take the same work ethic into everything I do and that is to pay attention to detail, to leave no stone unturned, to keep pushing to get to what you consider is the best possible story. I consider myself a storyteller. The shows are me telling a story and the film will be me telling a story about my life so it's going to be good."

It will likely send her music back into the charts for months on end, and boost it on streaming, as the Bohemian Rhapsody and Rocketman films did for Queen and Elton John.

Even when she isn't flexing her



Madonna on the red carpet ahead of the Madame X documentary premiere in New York on Friday; (inset below) with boyfriend Ahlamalik Williams. Pictures: Getty



creative muscle, the pop survivor who is determined to defy the industry's use-by date stamped on female artists, remains culturally relevant for all the right, and occasionally wrong, reasons.

An artist who craves the spotlight even when she doesn't have something to sell, Madonna can be a controversial or adored presence on social media, with her posts often polarising fans and commentators. She fights against ageism and encourages fans to be their authentic selves yet applies flattering filters to photos of her face, which may or may not have been altered by

cosmetic surgery. She ploughs millions of dollars into charities which support children's education and health initiatives but posts glamorous videos and photos of her smoking.

Regardless of the adulation or furore she provokes, Madonna plans on being the forever Queen of Pop.

And for fans Down Under praying for another tour: "We'll see, we'll see – I love Australia," she said.

THE MADAME X DOCUMENTARY WILL BE AVAILABLE TO STREAM ON PARAMOUNT+ ON OCTOBER 8