

CBS Mornings

04/18/22

8:00:36 a.m. [TEASE]

8 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Janelle Monáe Live]

GAYLE KING: Is there anything the multi-talented Janelle Monáe cannot do? It doesn't seem like it. She is here today to talk about her new book of short stories.

(...)

8:33:37 a.m.

3 minutes and 35 seconds

VLADIMIR DUTHIERS: She is singer, songwriter, actor, and fashion icon. And now she's adding author to her resume. Her new book is called *The Memory Librarian: And Other Stories of Dirty Computer*. It's a collection of short stories about the same futuristic world she created for her Grammy-nominated album *Dirty Computer*. The stories explore the ideas that appear in songs like *Crazy Classic Life*. Listen.

[CLIP FROM *CRAZY CLASSIC LIFE*]

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Janelle Monáe Live; Singer-Songwriter, Actor and Author on New Book "The Memory Librarian"]

DUTHIERS: So, Monáe collaborated with authors to write the book. They address themes of race, gender, and sexuality with a futuristic sci-fi twist, and Janelle Monáe joins us now. Good morning.

NATE BURLESON: Good morning.

JANELLE MONÁE: Good morning. I'm so happy to be here.

DUTHIERS: We're so happy that you are here. I'm so — I love this book because I'm a huge sci-fi nerd. And I just wanted to ask you, first of all, you created this futuristic world, right, where there is a totalitarian regime that can control people's thoughts and memories. And you play — you are a character in one of these books. You're Jane 57-821. Where did this come to you? I read that it was like a nightmare.

MONÁE: Yes, it was a nightmare that I had before I wrote the album *Dirty Computer*. This book is inspired from the same soil and I had a nightmare that I was kidnapped at a movie theater. I wanted to eat popcorn and sit down and an usher was trying to help me with like, "hey, come backstage. Come through this secret way, because they're kidnapping people." I didn't listen. And I was one of them that they caught and they swiped all of my memories clean and made me

into somebody different and so this book deals with them literally taking people's identities, erasing our pasts, erasing the people that we once were, and making us into something that they can control.

DUTHIERS: But you know, sci-fi is often an allegory for the world that we're living in today.

MONÁE: Yeah.

DUTHIERS: What you just described, somebody might describe as reality.

NATE BURLESON: Mmmm.

KING: Yes.

MONÁE: Yes, I know, it is pretty meta. I hate to say that, but it is pretty meta, especially when we're thinking about, you know, Greg Abbott, who put into law in Texas, a law that bans us talking about the LGBTQIA+ communities in books, bans critical race theory, like — [DUTHIERS NODS] — there's a lot of erasure happening in our very country, and I hope this book can serve as a warning sign of what that will look like and feel like if we don't fight against those abuse of power.

KING: Yeah, because the stories feature Black and queer protagonists —

MONÁE: Yes.

KING: — in a futuristic world. Why did you want to tell that particular story —

MONÁE: Because we're cool.

KING: — at this particular time?

MONÁE: Because we are so cool.

KING: Because we're cool.

MONÁE: We are so just like — and for so many years, and so many centuries, you know, rooted, it's deep that there's something wrong with us, like, soon as we come out, we're considered a dirty computer. And, you know, it's this whole culture of assimilating, and, you know, how do we — how do we thrive in a society that just tells us that we're too Black, we're too this or too that, we're too — but we are so beautiful and I wanted to represent that in the literary world. The story doesn't stay in that totalitarian society. It really does, I think, embrace hope. It embraces —

KING: Love.

MONÁE: — you picking love —

KING: Yes!

MONÁE: — your self-love, like, how do we overcome those things? Because we're going to be dealing with these things, right? But my message is to Black and Brown and marginalized folks, like, we will prevail in the end, we will.

(...)

8:47:44 a.m.
10 seconds

BURLESON: But Janelle, you know, I want to talk about these stories. Whenever I write, I feel like I learn something about myself. As you're writing these stories, what did you learn about yourself?

(...)

8:38:43 a.m.
1 minute and 33 seconds

MONÁE: [W]hat did I learn? I wrote this book in the pandemic. So as I was writing it, I will not lie, like, this is when we were still spraying Lysol on cardboard boxes. We didn't know what this was.

KING: Yes, what we were dealing with.

MONÁE: Right?

BURLESON: Right.

MONÁE: So I went through — you know, I went through some depression, some anxiety, some isolation, and —

BURLESON: A lot of us did.

MONÁE: — honestly, this was a really good way for me to just like, go inward and see like: How can I still help people and reach people? And I think what I learned about myself is that one, it's important that I stay present.

BURLESON: Yes.

MONÁE: You know, stay present. I think that when I'm writing about the future, I'm in the future so much. I think now is my moment —

BURLESON: Mmm.

MONÁE: — where you will see me through music, through art being more present. Being more present and having —

BURLESON: Being exactly where your feet are.

MONÁE: — having, yeah, like rooted —

KING: Bravo, Janelle. Bravo.

MONÁE: — just like, what's around me? I'm in the most like carefree, having fun, I have nothing to prove space that I've ever been in.

KING: Can I just tell you one critic says: “This book confirms Monáe’s incredible power of imagination and creativity. Whatever medium she’s working in —

BURLESON: Yes.

KING: — the ability and talent of her co-writers in bringing her vision alive on the page.”

DUTHIERS: Co-signing that.

MONÁE: It's so you.

DUTHIERS: Janelle Monáe.

BURLESON: One of the most versatile talents on the business.

MONÁE: Thank you, guys. Oh my goodness, you guys, look —

DUTHIERS: Thank you so much.

MONÁE: — I am just trying I'm just trying to do the Lord's work.

DUTHIERS: You're doing it.

BURLESON: Amen.

DUTHIERS: You're doing it.

BURLESON: Amen.

KING: And looking good doing it.

DUTHIERS: That's right. Janelle Monáe, thank you very much.

KING: So good to see you.

DUTHIERS: So good to meet you.

BURLESON: Thank you. Thank you.

DUTHIERS: *The Memory Librarian* goes on sale —

MONÁE: Yes. Pick it up.

DUTHIERS: — tomorrow. *Knives Out 2* also, Janelle.

MONÁE: Yes.

DUTHIERS: You've got that coming up.

MONÁE: That's this year, the end of the year.

DUTHIERS: That's going to be huge.

MONÁE: Yes.

DUTHIERS: Time now for a check of your local weather.

KING: Doing the Lord's work.