

# 'Tis the Season for Hitting High Notes

*LeAnn Rimes closes out 2015 making spirits bright with a new Christmas album & tour, Chalk Talk and Cibrian family Christmas traditions*

Words by Vanessa Pascale  
Photo Credit Sara Hertel

EXCLUSIVE



T raffic has put LeAnn Rimes behind schedule, and I am told that when she arrives she needs to slip away for a quick spray tan. She has a bikini shoot tomorrow. And then she appears in the entryway of The New York EDITION hotel, where she's staying. Dressed in a chic, dark brown Bohemianish outfit, the 33-year-old multi-award-winning-singer-songwriter (2 Grammys, a CMA, 12 Billboard Music Awards, and an American Music Award) strolls through the long corridor leading to the lounge, where I am seated, with star-quality elegance. Her handsome husband actor Eddie Cibrian and assistant for over three years Kiki hang back by the bank of elevators as she hugs me hello before retreating to her room with them.

Minutes later, Kiki (we've met on two other occasions: during my first interview with LeAnn the summer of 2013 and that following Valentine's Day when I ran into LeAnn and her in Manhattan) comes down to keep me company. She orders a glass of Sauvignon Blanc and Steak Tartare. "LeAnn is none of what people say she is. She is the sweetest person, biggest heart I've ever met," responds Kiki when I ask what might surprise people about LeAnn. A sentiment I agree with, LeAnn is among the few celebrities who corresponds with her fans via social media and frequently gives her concert-goers meet-and-greet passes. Our conversation pauses when Eddie stops by the table (my first time meeting him) on his way back from checking out the second floor lounge.

Now dressed casually in a black crew neck Zoe Karssen "Good Girls Love Bad Boys" t-shirt and leggings, LeAnn joins me in front of the roaring fireplace. "That's a very happy little egg. I don't know if I want the egg. I'll do this." She scoops the quail egg off the tartare. Kiki relocates to the bar area and as she walks away LeAnn stops her and asks for a glass of wine. Without hesitation Kiki hands LeAnn hers—a gesture telling of their close relationship. The cheerful chanteuse takes a sip of wine and turns to me with a smile. "How are you?" she asks.

This October, LeAnn released her Christmas album *Today is Christmas*—which reached #2 on Billboard's Holiday Albums chart, #18 on Billboard's Top Country Albums and landed in

iTunes Top 100 Christmas Songs (#48) and Top 100 Christmas Albums (#25)—featuring 12 songs including, classics, originals, "Joy" (my favorite) and two duets (her favorites) with Gavin DeGraw on "Celebrate me Home" and Aloe Blacc on "That Spirit Of Christmas." (The Target edition includes three exclusive bonus tracks.) "I was watching *Christmas Vacation*, [in March] one of my favorite films, and I heard "The Spirit Of

I'm super excited," she says with a big smile. The song's chorus was written within 15 minutes while LeAnn was in hair and makeup for the *TODAY* show last year—after her manager-friend Darrell Brown suggested they write the show a Christmas song. "I always feel like everybody is such a different person around the holidays... more giving and open... So if people could act like that," she laughs, "all year long, we'd have a better world." LeAnn's schedule has

been packed with television appearances—*TODAY* show, *The View*, *Meredith*, *Christmas Through the Decades* on the History Channel—and performances on ABC's *CMA Country Christmas*, Hallmark's Christmas Special *Home for the Holidays*. And she's presently on her Christmas tour up until five days before Christmas.

I know that LeAnn loves to go all out when decorating for Halloween and it's the same for Christmas. The Cibrians put up two trees and were considering, at the time of our interview in late September, a *Nightmare Before Christmas*-theme to get an early start on the decorating. What are you asking for this Christmas? Aside from some rest and relaxation, LeAnn is not one to make a wish list. "Eddie's really cute—he's one of the great husbands... He's learned 'cause I love listening to what people want throughout the year and start writing a list out. I have a Pinterest now of gifts, who goes to what. I know, I'm a little insane. It's where the Virgo comes out in me. But he's gotten into the habit of that," she says adoringly.

When it's just Eddie and her celebrating Christmas, they lie around, eat breakfast in bed and just chill, but every other year, when her stepsons Jake and Mason are with them, they're awake at 5:30 a.m. "There's paper *everywhere*, which is the most fun. It makes Christmas a totally different experience. They're 8 and 12. The little one still believes in Santa Claus, but he's starting to get to that point where he really questions everything. And we're, 'it's so real!'" she says excitedly. Eddie's mom serves a big Cuban feast on Christmas Eve, and for the last six years LeAnn has whipped up lasagna for Christmas Day, though she's not sure how this tradition started since none of them are Italian, she says with a laugh. "I'll prep everything before and it'll all be—once again, Virgo—measured out. I'll look like a whole cooking show in the kitchen," says LeAnn, who pulls recipes from Food Network and Pinterest ("My favorite thing in the entire world!").

LeAnn is in New York City to film with the *TODAY* show anchors. "Today is Christmas" is actually their theme song for like 45 days, so it'll play like every hour for four hours. You'll get very sick of me.





EXCLUSIVE



On occasion, the kids join her in the kitchen. “I’m like, ‘No knives! You’re going to chop off your finger!’ They like to scare me... ‘Don’t do that!’ They’re like, ‘Oh, really? Like this?’ But I kinda get very territorial. ‘Don’t touch it! Don’t eat it!’” she says of her perfectly prepped spread.

Has it gotten easier dealing with their mom? “Um.” She pauses a moment, then out pours such a candid response that I am taken aback by her honesty. Brandi (Eddie’s ex-wife and Jake and Mason’s mother) and LeAnn do not interact, except for when the kids are around, then they are cordial. “It’s difficult.... As much as people want to judge and pick apart everything that we do or don’t do... I totally understand and empathize with the difficulties of being in her position, which has taken a lot for me to, after all that’s gone on, truly empathize in that way, but I do... We are as integrated as we can be at the moment...” Untruths continue to be said—but what matters most to them is how the boys are doing: their grades are good and they’re comfortable at each household, she tells me.

Have you ever had the kids say anything to you about it? “Oh, all the time, that they’ve read. But they know not to believe everything they read. But some things have to seep in at some point,” she says solemnly. “As a stepmom, you do worry: *How are they perceiving me? What are they hearing about me?* Eddie and I have always focused on making sure that their home life is solid and loving, so I know that one day that they’ll be like, ‘What are you talking about? My stepmom’s not that way at all.’ That’s all you can hope for.” She peppers our conversation with sweet anecdotes about the boys. “LeAnn is the sweetest stepmom,” says Kiki, during our earlier chat. “She does everything for those two kids. They’re her life—they and Eddie. Family comes first.”

This April, Eddie and LeAnn celebrate their five year wedding anniversary. “Oh my gosh, that’s crazy.” A big smile spreads across her face. Throughout our chat, she speaks affectionately about her “outdoorsy dude” and family trips in their RV. The compliments on Eddie’s parenting skills, handiness and thoughtfulness flow freely. Last Christmas, he had bespoke black boots made for her. “It was so sweet. It was something I never thought I would’ve loved, but I totally love them. I wear them all the time. It was very cute... I love that he always,” she smiles, “it’s the little things with him.” And if a picture is worth a thousand words, refer to her Instagram where you will find photos of the cute couple

dressed as 80s fitness icons Jane Fonda and Richard Simmons for Halloween, and merrily twinning ugly sweaters to dinner after their annual family Christmas card photo. Happy and going strong, a cornerstone to their successful union is therapy—a place where the focus is solely on them. “It’s like going and learning to just be really great communicators... going there when there’s nothing going on necessarily, like, you’re not in crisis-mode or anything. It’s about growing together instead of growing apart. That’s something solid for us that is actually fun, believe it or not,” she laughs. “And after all that we’ve been through, we’ve fought for so much, we are so committed to making this be the best thing we can possibly make it.”

As an advocate of self-help, LeAnn embraces the chance to better herself and motivate those around her. The country singer’s social media headlines read: “Inspire... lift others, lift yourself.” This inspirational-quote-lover decided at the beginning of 2015 that she needed to incorporate positive affirmations into her daily life. “Instead of just seeing them on Pinterest everyday, I wanted to have them around the house and to do a chalkboard so that the kids could have something positive in the morning in their lives.” For Valentine’s Day, Eddie gave her a chalkboard he made from reclaimed barn wood found at The Ranch at Rock Creek in Montana—their annual vacation spot and where they escaped to this past Thanksgiving. “See! There you go, he’s MacGyver. He could do anything with anything.” And so she established and devoted herself to “Chalk Talk.” (Eddie also made her a small chalkboard “Chalk Talk Travel Edition” for when she’s on the road.) Each day, LeAnn writes out an inspirational quote that she needs that particular day and she shares it with her Instagram and Twitter followers. To her pleasant surprise, in addition to connecting and inspiring fans, she’s reaching people who don’t even listen to her music, she tells me. “People really respond to it... I get a lot of joy from it and I need it for myself, so I might as well share it... Look, I’m not that freakin’ positive everyday of my life, let me tell ya, but it helps me.” If you read each post’s comment section, you will see how much it truly is brightening the days of others.

Before our mini selfie photo shoot and hugs goodbye, I ask if there’s anything we haven’t covered. There isn’t. “I haven’t answered some of these questions about life in awhile,” she says softly. “It’s good, though,” LeAnn says with a genuine smile. **ML**

## We Want More!

### #TIGHTTUSHTUESDAY

The picture of strength, health and hotness, LeAnn feels she is in the best shape of her life (check out her Instagram: @leannrimes)—which she credits to consistency. “It’s not about cramming for something... I’m much more at ease knowing that I’m healthy, that I can kinda handle a bikini shoot whenever I need to do one ‘cause they can be incredibly intimidating,” she laughs. Her fitness mentality has changed—it’s no longer about “being in the business or competing against others,” it’s about her. LeAnn works out five days a week, and with a trainer when she’s at home. Her workout routine incorporates boxing, Pilates, plenty of band work, body weight work, circuit training, and intervals. “I get up and make myself work out... it gets out energy I need to get out.”

### BABY TALK

The couple’s reality TV show *LeAnn & Eddie* showcased LeAnn’s desire to have a baby. Is there anymore talk about that? “Yesterday, it was, ‘We’re going to have a baby in ten years.’ It changes. And I was like, ‘Oh my god, we’re going to be so old’... Eventually. I think I have a couple more years of music stuff to really embrace and get set up the way I really want. I was in my deal for twenty years, so now that I’ve had a moment to breathe and start focusing on new things... then we’re totally all about it!” Boy or girl? Growing up she wanted boys, but now that she has two boys, she’s open. “Now, I would love to have a girl, just ‘cause we have so much testosterone in the house... We need more than three girl dogs. We actually need a girl in the house, but I would be happy with either. Eddie’s the best dad. He spends so much time with them. It’s nice to see him already as a dad and know that that’s super solid.”

### TV TIME

“I got so obsessed with *Empire*—it’s such a guilty pleasure. It’s so good. Cookie is my hero. I was over in London the beginning of the year writing and I happen to just get hooked on the whole first season... I’m not a big TV watcher, but that’s kinda my show.”

### ON THE STEREO

“I find myself listening to singles. I’m listening to a band called Until the Ribbon Breaks and song called “Spark,” which I really love—it’s a great dance song... I find music randomly. “Coffee” by Miguel, it’s a really dirty song, but I like it, that somebody turned me onto the other day. I like old school music. I was just listening to the old Fiona Apple record the other day, the title record. Alanis Morissette, Sheryl Crow, there’s a lot of fantastic, powerful women... I’m going through a 90s moment again. Salt-N-Pepa. The 90s are the best. I’m totally into the whole cutoffs, combat boots, and flannel. Now, my combat boots have a 5 inch heel and they’re Prada, but still.”