

THE DIVA NEXT DOOR

*How to be a Singing Star
Wherever You Are*



JILL SWITZER

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Wherever You Are*

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To Lindsey, my heart

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About the Author

Jill Switzer is one of the most sought-after vocalists in South Florida. For the past fifteen years, she has performed at venues ranging from Donald Trump's Mar-A-Lago Club, to large outdoor amphitheaters, to Birdland in New York City. She and her husband's band, Heartbeat, held the much-coveted position of the house band at the Poinciana Club, a private club in Palm Beach whose members and guests included Tony Bennett, Steve and Eydie Gorme,

Princess Stephanie of Monaco, and Wayne Newton. Jill has appeared on stage with Tony Award®-winner Faith Prince, Ann Hampton Callaway, and members of the Four Freshman. Her voice has been heard on a public radio concert broadcast, in commercial jingles across the United States, and most recently on the nationally syndicated weekly television show *Dick Robinson's Lifestyles and Music by the Sea*. She lives in Palm Beach, Florida.



Photo by Bob Lasky

I'm Every Woman

IF I CAN DO IT, YOU CAN, TOO

*Sittin' on the front porch, watching the world go by,
Wonderin' to myself, what is the meaning of my life?
When there on my rocking chair a butterfly did light
And in that moment the answer was inspired.**

What woman hasn't, at least once, fantasized about being on stage in the spotlight, clad in something gorgeous that celebrates all her feminine glory, singing to an adoring audience? I know I always did. As a young girl, when I stood at the top of the stairs giving concerts to my two best friends (what a lovely audience), I knew without a doubt that I wanted to be a singing star. I didn't question my calling, even when my brother pleaded with my mom to make me stop singing all the time.

But sometime around high school, I started wondering if being a professional singer was a realistic goal. I mean, no snazzy-looking gal in an evening gown ever showed up on career day handing out pamphlets touting the great and many opportunities for vocalists in my area. I just couldn't envision how I could possibly make it in a business in which I had no formal education, and one that was,

according to all my sources, fickle, unstable, and dependent on managers, contacts, and lucky breaks in faraway big cities.

My “Aha” Moment

My doubts couldn't have been farther from the truth. My “aha” moment came six years later at a friend's wedding. I had just had a baby and was dreading the return to my nine-to-five, uninspiring job. I desperately wanted to find work that was fulfilling, exciting, and fun and that would allow me to spend more time with my newborn. And having just become a mother, I had begun to think more as a role model: I wondered how I was going to keep a straight face when the time came for me to pass on to my daughter that lustrous pearl of wisdom: “Follow your dreams.” I certainly hadn't done that myself up to that point.

But a dream job that still allowed me to be the mother I wanted to be seemed like almost too much to ask—until that Sunday afternoon wedding. I had been told that the band entertaining at the reception was the best in town. My friend's parents had booked them months in advance and had paid top dollar. As I sat eating the chicken and enjoying the music, I suddenly had an epiphany. I focused on the female singer, and my destiny was revealed.

“The real power behind whatever success I have now was something I found within myself—something that's in all of us, I think—a little piece of God just waiting to be discovered.

Tina Turner

I thought to myself, I can do that! I had always been in the school chorus, and I was even in a few garage bands in college, but I had never dared to dream that I could make a living as a professional vocalist—until that moment.

The Journey

The following Monday, I started calling entertainment agencies in the phone book asking if they knew of any bands that needed a singer. The stock answer was: “We’re not in the business of putting bands together—we just book them.” But finally, an agent in the Ms happened to know of one wedding band whose female singer was moving out of state. They were in desperate need of a replacement. I auditioned the next day, learned twenty-five songs from their repertoire, and a week and a half later, I was singing at my first bona fide gig.

“I’m the lady next door when I’m not onstage.”

Aretha Franklin

By way of a wacky, wonderful, “learn as you go” journey, I was eventually able to quit my day job to work as a professional vocalist, performing for royalty, the rich, and the famous, as well as singing commercial jingles and studio demos. I was thriving far from major music centers like Los Angeles, New York City, or Nashville, without the aid of a manager, a publicist, a stylist, a personal trainer, or even an assistant. And when the next-door neighbor yelled, “There goes ‘the diva!’” as I was leaving for a gig one evening, I gladly took the title and ran with it.

Point A to Point Diva

In this book, I tell you everything you need to know to prosper as a singer in your local music market and beyond. I’ve already done the pavement pounding, door knocking, head-against-the-wall banging, and lesson-learning, so that you can take a direct route from point A to point Diva. I share the practical gems, the tricks of the trade, and the golden rules I’ve picked up so far, as well as tasty tidbits, diva quotes, and words of wisdom. But the most important thing I want you to learn from this book is this: Anyone—and, yes, that includes you—can be a diva without moving to a big city, breaking the bank,

I totally do not believe in backup plans. If you want something that bad . . . go for it!

Kelly Clarkson

or sacrificing your firstborn. So if you've always dreamed of being a sexy chanteuse but never knew how to make it a lucrative, local reality, let *The Diva Next Door: How to Be a Singing Star Wherever You Are* show you the way.



A DIVA NEXT DOOR SAYS . . .

I am a pharmacist by day, but on four weekend nights a month, I trade in the white lab coat for the black leather to sing in a classic rock band. Before I started performing, I was extremely frustrated because I had no creative outlet to balance the stressful concentration necessary in my profession. Now, I'm enjoying the best of both worlds—I can use my college education and live out my rock-and-roll fantasy. I love to see the reactions of co-workers or customers from the pharmacy out in the audience. They usually do a quick double take when they spot me up onstage, and then their jaws drop. —Leticia

PHASE 1

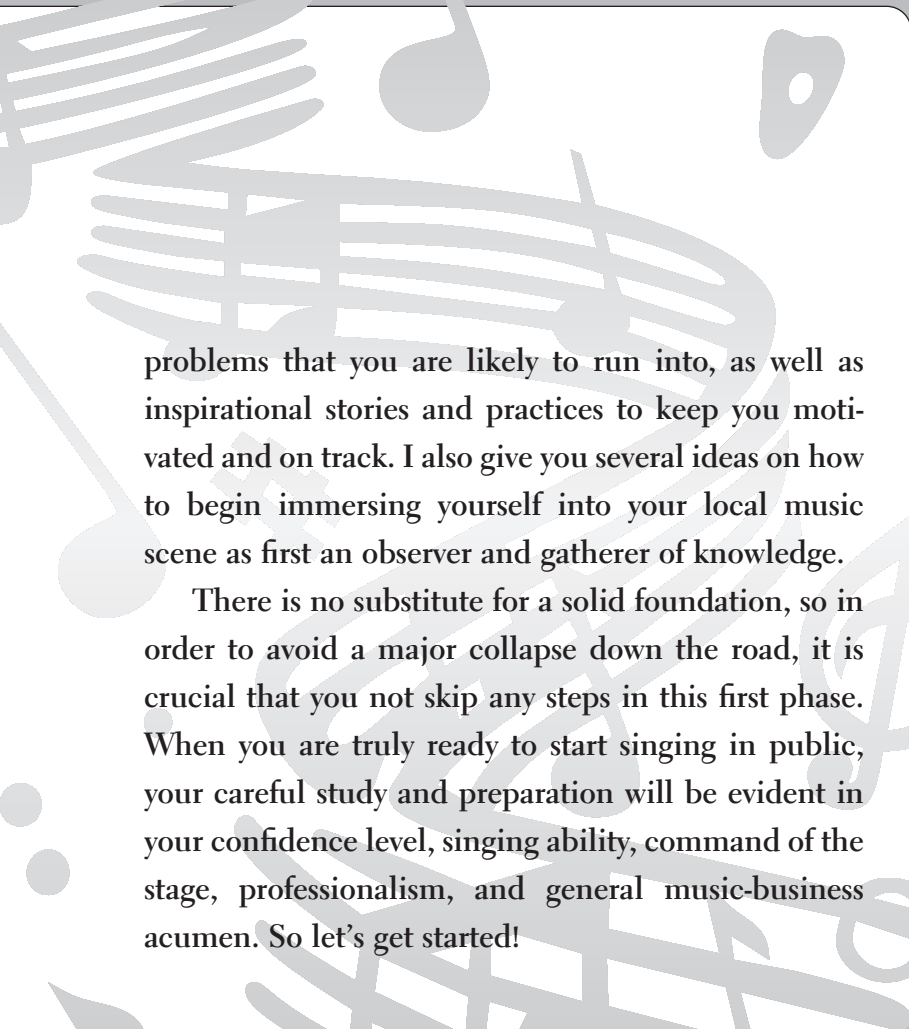
The Verse

*Building a Solid
Foundation*

The Verse

*First thing that I'll do is change my earthbound ways.
From here on out the sky's the limit, it's a brand new day.
Show my brilliant colors singin', "This is who I am!"
Surrendering to heaven's perfect plan.*

The verse is the first section of a song, and it serves to set up the tone and content of the rest of the song, just as the first phase of this book serves to set you up for a successful and rewarding career as a professional vocalist. I guide you through the mental, technical, and physical challenges that a diva-in-training will face. I share the most effective and cost-saving solutions to the



problems that you are likely to run into, as well as inspirational stories and practices to keep you motivated and on track. I also give you several ideas on how to begin immersing yourself into your local music scene as first an observer and gatherer of knowledge.

There is no substitute for a solid foundation, so in order to avoid a major collapse down the road, it is crucial that you not skip any steps in this first phase. When you are truly ready to start singing in public, your careful study and preparation will be evident in your confidence level, singing ability, command of the stage, professionalism, and general music-business acumen. So let's get started!

It Don't Mean a Thing If It Ain't Got That Swing

HONORING YOUR PASSION TO SING

Most of us are not child prodigies with a sparkling, undeniable talent that begs to be nurtured and fostered by parents and teachers. No, most of us have to search and experiment, or stumble upon that thing that makes us light up inside, that thing that is the magic ingredient to a fun life—our passion. We may not, by society's standards anyway, even be very good at our passion, but it beckons us all the same. And if we ignore the call, we understand all too well that it don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing.

By virtue of the fact that you were drawn to read this book, it is pretty safe to assume that singing is your passion, but I've included a list of symptoms just to be sure. If you can identify with two or

I was a nothing kid. Not particularly good. Not particularly bad.

Dusty Springfield

more in the following list, you are definitely reading the right book, and we can get on with the business at hand.

You Know Your Passion Is Singing If . . .

- * You sing everywhere, all the time.
- * As a child, your play often involved singing.
- * You've annoyed at least one friend or family member with your incessant singing.
- * You are or were in your school chorus and/or church choir.
- * You know the words to practically every song on the radio.
- * You think karaoke is the most significant invention of the twentieth century.
- * When you turn on the TV, you immediately flip to a music video channel.
- * You have a ridiculously large music collection.
- * You cry whenever you hear or see a great vocal performance.

Now that we've confirmed what your passion is, the next step is to commit to a course of action, to honor your calling. It is a pre-

The biggest devil is me. I'm either my best friend or my worst enemy.

Whitney Houston

precious and crucial time. Precious because you are bravely opening yourself up to judgment, from yourself and others, in order to learn and grow.

And crucial because the door can slam shut in an instant of overwhelming insecurity, societal pressures, lack of focus, or negativity from those around you. The purpose of this chapter is to make sure that none of that happens, so listen up, girlfriend.

Time Is Not the Enemy

Please be kind to yourself and know that there are no time limitations or deadlines, and that the competition is always with yourself. I've divided the process of becoming a singing star into three phases, and it is irrelevant whether it takes you two weeks, two months, or two years to get through each phase. Singing well is a combination of desire, daily practice, and confidence, and the time it takes to achieve this meeting of the mind, body, and soul is as unique as the individual.

Late Bloomers

Since I, myself, am considered by some to be a “late bloomer,” I know the pressures our youth-worshiping society can put on a gal. The message seems to be that if you don't have a record deal and a song at the top of the charts by the age of eighteen, you may as well hang up your microphone. And the talent seems to be getting younger every year. What's next—an infant pop star gurgling and cooing through a song on MTV? It's almost comical, except for the negative effect it has on many people, especially females. When I hear one of my thirteen-year-old voice students worrying that it's too late for her to choose singing as a career, I know that our obsession with youth has gone too far.

Older and Wiser

I'm here to tell you what I told her: The female voice only begins to reach its prime at the age of thirty. The real artistry for a vocalist comes when she can evoke powerful emotions in her audience when she sings, and I'm of the mind that most of us have to do a bit of living before this can happen. Every passing year is one more year of life experience that you can bring to a song. So think of your years as an advantage rather than a cross to bear, or worse, a big fat excuse not to pursue your dream.