

Victoria Blackie: A Rising Star Emerges in Native Music

by AJ Naff

Navajo recording artist Victoria Blackie has been singing since childhood, chiming out scales before the age of one and performing by the age of three. Her audiences have ranged from tribal, city and state officials to foreign dignitaries. Her versatile voice and song interpretation have earned her a number of engagements, including a performance spot at the 2002 Winter Olympics. With a tour lined up in Germany and her debut album, *Wanted Man*, a contender for this year's Native American Music Awards, Victoria is poised for a very promising career in music.

"Singing's always been in my family's genes," said Victoria. Her grandparents both sang for XMU, the radio station where they also happened to meet. Her dad used to sing karaoke and her aunt, Martha, sings, teaches music and is Victoria's vocal coach and manager. "I started singing at about one and a half. Ever since I've had voice lessons that go anywhere from five minutes to two hours a day. Singing is my passion."

She began performing at age three. As a child, she toured with a musical group, even traveling to Japan to sing for a NASCAR event. One of her earliest performances, though, was hampered by stage fright. She entered a school talent show while she was in kindergarten and was going to sing *Tomorrow* from the Broadway musical *Annie*. The music started, but, overcome by shaky nerves, Victoria forgot the words. "I asked them to restart the music, thinking I could think of the words again, but I still couldn't," she said. "After four times, I still couldn't recall the words." Victoria has been competing ever since, determined to never again let her nerves get the better of her.

At a talent contest in Las Vegas, Starmania, Victoria took second place to a contestant who yodeled to the song *I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart*. Dedicated to her craft and to learning from her mistakes, Victoria asked her aunt to teach her how to yodel. "You don't really hear a lot of yodeling in songs today," Victoria said. "But I know how to do it when the time comes."

Her debut album, *Wanted Man*, was a labor of love and, according to Victoria, somewhat of a miracle. Short on funds for the album's production, Victoria sold several belongings to raise the necessary capital. She then traveled to a studio in Nashville, Tennessee to lay down the twelve tracks. The songs were composed by writers from Warner Bros. and Sony, and then selected by Victoria. She chose a mix of songs with wide appeal, ranging from love songs to tracks that honor our nation's soldiers. "I wanted to include patriotic songs because I feel that our patriots aren't as recognized as they should be," said Victoria, whose grandfather served in the Navy during WWII. "They're celebrated on holidays like Veteran's Day, but



they put their lives on the line every day." Victoria dedicated two of the album's tracks, *Remember America* and *Prisoner of War*, to the nation's patriots.

Victoria has undertaken a number of performances to promote her new album, including a special concert in New Mexico for the Navajo Code Talkers. She has also booked several upcoming shows, including art galleries, conventions and a week-long tour in Germany. "Since the album, we've really been going full throttle," she said. "I've always loved singing, I've always wanted to do this as a career, and now it's starting to happen."

All of Victoria's promotional efforts have been taken on by her family. "We've been learning to do all of this on our own," she said. Victoria's aunt, for instance, not only gives her vocal instruction, but also manages her, handles PR, and is her makeup artist. "I've had a lot of great support. If we don't know how to do something, then we'll learn how to do it."

Stylistically versatile, Victoria draws on a number of musical influences, including Patsy Cline, Barbara Streisand, and Celine Dion. "I was more or less raised on traditional country music," she said. "I like to sing all different types of music. It really depends on the environment, whether I'm singing for a performance, and what my inspiration is at the moment. One day, hopefully, I'll be on Broadway, but right now I'm going country."

Victoria is submitting *Wanted Man* for the 2010 Native American Music Awards and has been putting all of her efforts into getting the album airtime as well as establishing a fan base. "Right now I'm being heard in Austria, the Four Corners and Canada," she said. Amid her touring, Victoria is already looking ahead to her second album, which she hopes to record in 2011. "I'd like to write the songs for my next album. Nothing is set in stone right now, but that's what I'm planning for." ♣

For more information about Victoria Blackie, visit www.victoriablackie.com.