

JESSICA ANDREWS

"Driving in the fast lane to country stardom"

by Tamela Meredith Partridge

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Jessica Andrews, country's Sweet Sixteen Songstress," has the soulful vocal expression of a woman twice her age.

"I come from a very musical family," Andrews said during a recent phone interview. "My mom's side of the family is very talented and my grandmother sings. I remember while growing up they would get together and sing church

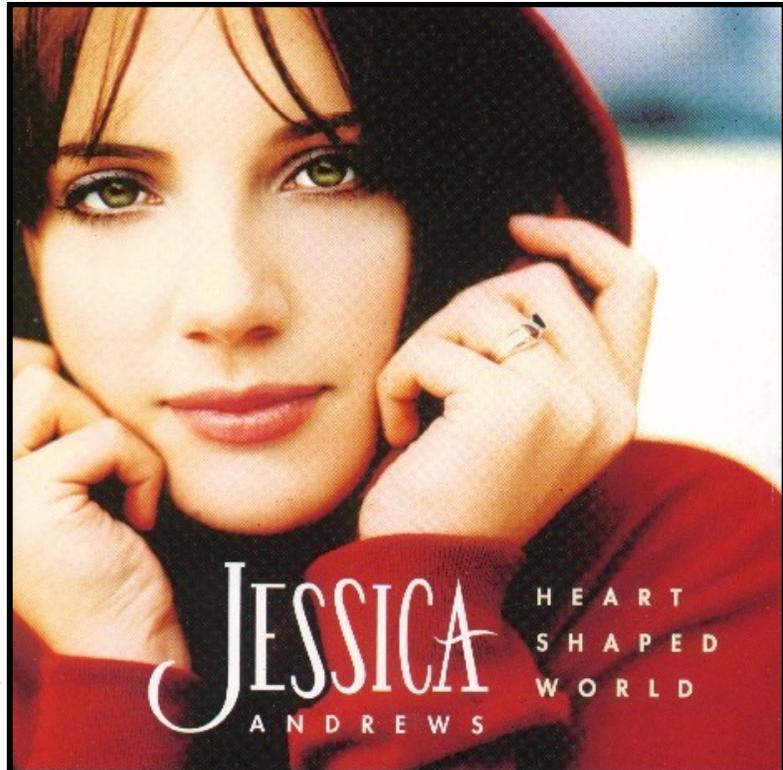
songs. My mom played in groups up until she was nine months pregnant with me. I have always had music in my life. I could never imagine not listening to music or singing. I just can't imagine it."

Andrews musical career began after singing Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You" at a grade school talent show in her hometown of Huntingdon, Tennessee.

"When I was 10 years old I entered and won my fourth grade school talent," Andrews said. "I started getting local bookings and being asked to perform here and there. After three years of doing that, I really wanted to go to Nashville. We found my producer, Byron Gallimore, who liked my voice and started working with me. Byron invited James Stroud of Dream Works to hear me sing at a showcase and I was offered a recording contract. For six years everything has been completely centered around music and singing, which is what I wanted to do. I guess, if I woke up one morning and found that I didn't have a voice, I would probably still want to be in music some way or the other, such as producing or songwriting. But, I really don't have an interest for anything else."

Moving to Nashville to concentrate on her music career involved choosing home school over public school.

"I started home schooling when I was in eighth grade," Andrews said. "I really don't miss going to public school at all. Not that I am saying anything bad about public school, because I really had a great time when I was there. It's just that public school



is not for me. I think it was better that I chose home schooling so I could get out there and really start pursuing my career 100%. And I think I made the right choice. When I was recording my debut album, I was still in public school and it was like I had two different lives. I had a music life and a regular life. I wanted to be able to combine those two lives into one, and home schooling allowed me to do that. It has really been the best thing for me."

Andrews '99 debut DreamWorks label album, "Heart Shaped World," garnered the hit singles, "I Will Be There For You," "Do You Wanna Kiss ?" and "Unbreakable Heart."

"I have to sing meaningful songs," Andrews said. "Story songs that reflect something I or someone close to me has lived through. It's not important that I myself go through it, as long as I can relate to the emotions, feel them and make sure they come through in the song."

Besides music, Andrews has been gathering all the necessary paperwork needed in order to apply for her drivers permit.

"I am working on a drivers permit right instead of a drivers license because it is a law now that you have to have your permit for three months before you can get your drivers license," Andrews said. "But I have read the Rules of the Road book and I am ready to go. I am just waiting on some attendance papers that prove I am in school. It is so much trouble trying to get your license now, because you have to get your birth certificate, social security number and all that. So, I'm in the process of getting it all together."

Even though she is constantly surrounded by music industry adults, Andrews never forgets she is a teenager.

"I am still such a typical teenager it is not even funny," Andrews said. "People hear my music and see me perform and probably think, "She is way beyond her years." I really am just a normal 16-year-old. I still love to go to movies, bowling and out to eat. I bought a Sony Playstation last night. I really enjoy doing all those fun things. It just so happens that I also have a music career I am trying to balance out along with the fun."

Andrews has been busy in the studio this summer, choosing and recording songs for her sophomore album, which is slated for a November release.

"I'm so anxious for everybody to hear the new album," Andrews said. "I have been in Nashville working really hard on the album, which has been my main focus this summer. We listened to a lot of songs and I was very fortunate to find 12 really great songs that I'm excited about. The album is almost finished, but we are still putting the final touches on everything as far as overdubs, guitar, background vocals and a photo shoot. I wish I could tell you what the album title and first single will be, but it is still a little too early because we have not decided those things yet."

When it comes to keeping her music career in proper perspective, Andrews falls back on some priceless words of wisdom received from country and pop divas, Brenda Lee and Faith Hill

"Brenda Lee and I were eating lunch together one day," Andrews said. "I asked her, 'If you could give me one piece of advice that would last my whole career, what would that be?' And she thought about it for a minute and said, 'I would tell you not to ever change who you are. You will go through many things in your career and meet many people. Just don't change who you are.' And that really made me think that I just need to loosen up, have fun and be myself. And then the very first night I was on tour with Faith Hill awhile ago, Faith came up to my dressing room and gave me a camera and a scrapbook. There was a little handwritten note inside that said, 'Take pictures and keep a scrapbook because you will want to remember these early days.' Those are the best pieces of advice I have ever been given."