



Staff photos by Anthony Smedlie

Sal Dupree instructs Emma Love Johansen during singing lessons at Platinum Grind studios in Nortfield. Johansen flies in from Sweden to take lessons with Dupree, who helped coach Tiffany Evans to a victory on 'Star Search' in 2003.

# Swedish father hopes a star is born in Linwood

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**NORTHFIELD** — A slim, 11-year-old blonde stood inside the vocal booth at the Platinum Grind studios Friday, listening to vocal coach Sal Dupree's advice on how to perform the song "Right Here, Right Now."

"Let's do 'my heart belongs to you' with a more tender 'you,'" Dupree said. "Stay on the belt, but draw your head back from the mike."

Emma Love Johansen caught on after a few tries. As Dupree instructed, studio owner Mike "Donz" Donohue sat behind a console recording every take. Alexander Johansen, Emma's father, stood nearby, using his camera phone to shoot pictures and giving the girl a thumbs-up sign when she did exactly what Dupree wanted.

When the sessions end, Emma doesn't just jump into her parents' car for a quick ride home.

Instead, Emma and her father board a plane and fly back to their home in Sweden.

For the third time in five months, father and daughter have traveled from Europe just to take voice lessons with Dupree.

The Linwood vocal coach became well known through his work with Tiffany Evans, who was the "Star Search" grand champion in 2003 and is now a Sony Urban Entertainment recording artist. Just how well known became apparent when Alexander Johansen traveled from Sweden seeking lessons for his daughter.

Johansen decided he wanted his little girl to work with Dupree after seeing Dupree and Evans interviewed for a program that aired in



Emma Love Johansen sings in the studio while her father, in the red shirt, listens from the control booth. The Johansen family decided to study with Dupree after seeing him on a Swedish TV documentary about child singers.

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# Girl

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Sweden about child singers.

"I could see he was calm, determined and professional ... All those things were something to look for," said Johansen. "At the same time, we (he and his wife) said, 'We want him. Whom do we call? What's the name of that show?'"

An August family vacation in Florida turned into a road trip to see if Dupree would take on Johansen.

"I was nervous, but I knew this was it. I had to do my best," said Emma, who added she knew of Evans because the "Star Search" winner's appearance on the "Oprah" show aired in Sweden.

After a five-minute initial meeting, which included Emma singing for Dupree, he took her on as a student. Between the August visit and now, Alexander Johansen also brought his daughter here for a lesson in October and wants to continue to bring her every couple of months. They coordinate their visits with Dupree's schedule as he teaches other students and works on Evans' upcoming CD, scheduled for release in June.

"She's got a lot of wonderful little gifts and talents," said Dupree about Emma. "For them to come here from another part of the world, I'm very honored. The parents know they have something special in their child."

When Emma and Alexander Johansen come to this country to see Dupree, they usually stay

for a week with two or three lessons during that week running one or two hours each. Emma is the youngest member of Mensa in her home country and does high school-level work. She does her reading for her school classes during the plane trips across the Atlantic. Her father takes time off from his job with the Swedish equivalent of the Internal Revenue Service to bring her here while his wife, an attorney, stays in Sweden to look after their two other girls, one 16 years old and another 16 months.

In between visits, Emma practices the songs she studies with Dupree, including hits by "American Idol" winner Kelly Clarkson, for two hours daily.

"She has never been trained before ... It was really interesting to see. He's like an artist shaping

a beautiful sound," Johansen said. "She is determined, goal-oriented. She wants to be a star, a performing artist. She's working toward that goal. ... Her friends will call, and she will say, 'I'm quarantined. I can't get sick. I'm going to see Mr. Dupree.'"

At times Friday, the Swedish contingent outnumbered the local people at the Northfield studio as Swedish TV producer, Kajsa Johnsson and her cameraman shot video of Johansen and Dupree for a documentary to air in the spring in Sweden.

"I sing better than before. My voice has gotten stronger," Emma said. "It's very important for me to sing. It's my future."

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