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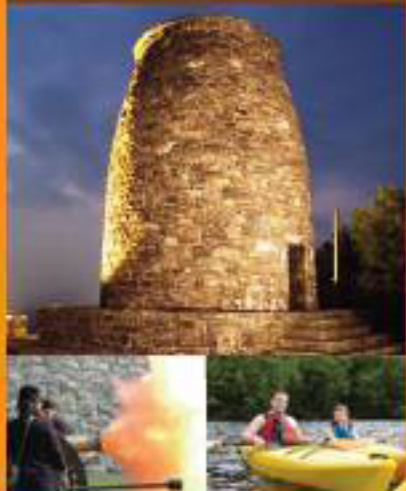


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January/February 2012

Big Things Come in Small Packages: Hannah Richardson

Ten-Year-Old Powerhouse Performer Hannah Richardson Stays Grounded While Reaching for the Stars.

by Ryan Grove + photos by Rodney Cool, Aesthetic Life Studio

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Performing at the legendary Apollo Theater in Harlem, N.Y. is an impressive achievement for anyone at any age, especially if you've only lived a decade.

Ten-year-old Hannah Richardson of Waynesboro, Pa., is a natural entertainer with a dynamic voice. In September 2011, she won first place in the theater's Amateur Night "Child Stars of Tomorrow" competition. Her performance of "Home" from "The Wiz," arranged with the help of her vocal coach Sal Dupree, brought a standing ovation from the packed house — and an invitation to return and perform in October, when she finished in a tie for first place. Hannah believes that those performances were some of her proudest moments to date. "They've definitely been my best. The crowd is so interactive and enthusiastic. They really cheer me on."

Whether it's a renowned venue like the Apollo or local festivals, dinner theaters, competitions and charitable events, this little star with a big voice feels the stage is where she belongs. In any genre, Hannah charms audiences with her presence and vocals. She's more than a performer — she's a storyteller.

'Music to Our Ears'

Hannah's parents, Matthew and Mary Richardson, say their daughter works diligently and is self-motivated — not by fame and fortune but by the love of performing. "Things are just happening; we are learning as we go," says Matthew. "We feel that if this is her dream to sing and perform on stage, then we should help her any way we can. When we first watched and heard her sing and she lit up and enjoyed it that much — that was the music to our ears."

Being home-schooled by her mother and Agora's Cyber Charter School offers Hannah flexibility. Depending on the event, Hannah and her family will ramp up the practices as needed. Sometimes it's once a week, other times every other day or more. While her family also looks out for her, Hannah, who seems mature beyond her years, says she knows her own limits. "I can't overdo it. I know when enough is enough. If you're tired, then your voice sounds tired." A typical practice day may only last 30–45 minutes, including warm-up, note checks, arrangement and actual singing. Mary, who plays piano and has musical talents of her own, helps guide her daughter. "Hannah and I have a mutual trust. I always want her to be open with us on what she wants to do and how she wants to do it, and we give her honest feedback on how it sounds."

Hannah's practice certainly has paid off. She began singing in church and elementary school talent shows, and now has performed more than 150 live shows to date. Many of those include "Cowboy Christmas" productions at Antietam Recreation in Hagerstown. The Richardsons are thankful for the guidance and generosity of the Rotz family, who own the facility, as they have provided Hannah a place to hone her skills and develop her own style, while making long lasting relationships. Hannah has won numerous events, including local contests like the Franklin County Fair and Waynesboro's — You've Got Talent. In January 2011, Hannah even recorded her first original song, "The Country Bug," and later was named both Vocalist and Performer of the Year at NACMAI (North America Country Music Association International).

But no matter where she performs or what recognitions she receives, Hannah is less nervous and more often excited about showcasing her talents. "I love that I can just forget about everything else. I can focus on entertaining and becoming the character or person in the song. When that happens, I feel like I can really connect with the audience."

Richardson Family Values

Through it all, Hannah's parents make sure she has ample time to be a "normal" 10 year old. When not singing, Hannah loves dancing and playing with dolls. She might also be found reading, playing tennis, riding bikes and playing with her younger brother, Sam. Someday, she hopes to be on Broadway. "I like to sing all types of music, but I love Broadway. It allows you to act, dance and sing all at the same time so you can entertain people in multiple ways."

More amazing than the size of her voice is the size of her heart. In addition to charity shows and fund-raisers she has performed in, she donates monthly to St. Jude's Children's Hospital with money earned from her performances. "I just want to give hope to people who aren't as fortunate as me and always remember to give back," says Hannah. She is also a generous big sister and shares portions of her winnings with her brother, just for helping her at performances. Fame may come, but at the end of the day it's not what's most important to Hannah or her family. "We want her to stay grounded," says her mother. "If she does that, we believe she will truly soar."

Follow Hannah on the Web!

Visit Hannah's YouTube page at www.youtube.com/user/mlpgrow123 to watch her live performances at the Apollo, original song recordings and more.

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16th - Hello Strangers
23rd - Big Whiskey
30th - TNA WRESTLING (no Wind Down!)

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