

With a Song In Her Heart

BY JENNI HART || PHOTOGRAPHY BY JENNIFER RHODES



Raleigh second-grader Katherine Fritsch captivates with a mega-watt smile, and a voice that leaves the rest of us breathless.

We've all seen them. The hour-long biographies of the Hollywood A-listers, the music industry icons, the superstars before they became household names. I've squandered many an evening caught in the spell of these stories myself, peering into the past of these talented and driven souls, wondering what it is that sets them apart; what singular trait catapults them from small-town obscurity to fame and unfathomable wealth.

Those of us in the Triangle who have had the good fortune of hearing a solo sung by Katherine Fritsch, the "little girl with the big voice", have no doubt imagined that we've been witness to the first chapter of just such a story. But if it's "humble beginnings" that seem to unite these child wunderkinds, little Katherine is innocence and humility personified. "Mom, why would anyone want to interview me?"

Apparently that was Katherine's reaction when she first learned that I wanted to write a story about her. That anyone would be so taken by her talent, so interested in finding out more about what makes her tick, seemed amusing to her, if not downright perplexing. But when I came to have a chat with Katherine and her family, she met me on the front porch with her toes tapping, exuding a plucky enthusiasm and a genuine interest in sharing her story.

Eight-year old Katherine, or "KK" as she's known to close friends and family, can't remember a time when she didn't love to sing. Older brother Evan, 11, nods in agreement. Her mother, Suzanne, hears



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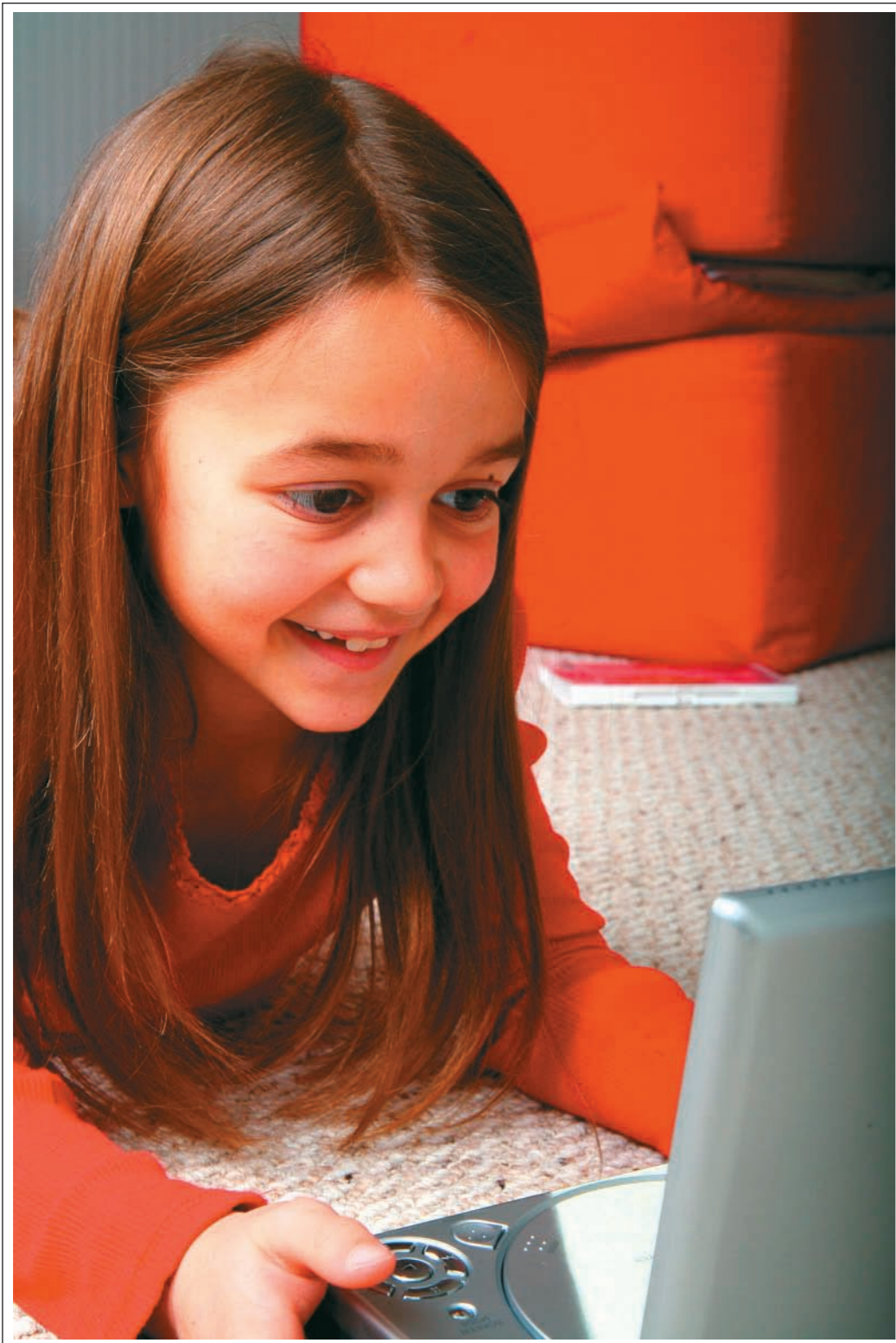
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The Fritsch family has "well-rounded" down to an art. In addition to her involvement with NCT, the North Carolina Theatre, Katherine also participates in competitive gymnastics, and plays soccer with the Capital Area Soccer League, with Dad as her coach.

her singing throughout the day, every day – in the house, the yard and even in the car. In the wee hours of one night not long ago, she even woke to hear Katherine singing in her sleep. Now that's passion!

Some of you may have heard Katherine sing the National Anthem for the Carolina Hurricanes. She has done so eight times in the past season, to the delight and astonishment of the fans. They've surely wondered, as I have, how such a powerful voice can come from such a tiny girl. I asked Katherine's father, Tom, if the gift of song could be attributed to anyone on his side of the family. He credits Suzanne's mother with the beautiful voice, adding that Suzanne herself is a very good singer. "Oh, no, I believe that it skipped a generation," Suzanne insists modestly. Katherine tells me that when someone asks her where she got her voice, she tells them, "It's just a gift from God".

Katherine, a second-grader at St. Timothy's school, remembers being inspired by a Shania Twain concert that she attended with her family at the RBC Center in May, 2004. Another favorite singer is Whitney Houston.

Tom, a commercial real estate broker with Highwoods Properties, entered Katherine in the "Living Room Live" talent competition featured on the CBS Early Morning News program this past winter. The segment was designed to solicit videotaped entries from young people across the country, and aired over a 13-week period. Tom didn't think much of it at first, but decided to do it "just for fun, to see what would happen" and against very stiff competition, among such diverse acts as an 11-year-old opera singer and a hard rock band of high-schoolers, Katherine made it to the final three. With votes coming in from viewers all across the country, her moving rendition of the Star-Spangled Banner, in a home video taken beside the family fireplace, garnered gushing praise and won her many devoted fans.

One such fan penned a blog entry on the CBS website that reads, "Katherine...nobody who's heard you sing at a Hurricanes game needs to hear my thoughts, but those of you who haven't have missed out on something pretty special". Special indeed. And while the National Anthem is her favorite song to sing, she says it's also the most difficult.

"It gets a little bit easier every time I sing it, but I still get very nervous when I'm up there." She says every performance comes with a case of butterflies, but when she looks out at the crowd, she knows that everyone there is pulling for her. "My family and my friends are all there, and I know they're giving me support and my brother is there, too, and I know he's giving me support. It makes it easier and I really want to do a good job."

One might think that such a love of singing and such irrefutable natural talent would have Katherine dreaming of stardom. But with wisdom far beyond her years, Katherine muses, "I think that would be so cool and everything, to be a professional singer when I grow up, but I know that I also want to do things like buy a house and stuff, so I've decided that I just really want to be a veterinarian. I've wanted to do that for a really long time".

Whatever the future holds for Katherine Fritsch, I have a feeling that a lot of lucky people will be touched by the music she's sure to make along the way. ♦