

Nashville's Deborah Allen has published over 1,000 songs. She's recorded a string of hit country records, including her signature smash, "Baby I Lied." She's made forays into jazz singing, record producing, and running her own label. But it all flows from a single bit of advice from her mother: "Sing it from the heart."

"WE USED TO SING ALONG TO THE CAR RADIO WHEN I WAS A little girl," remembers Allen. "That was in Memphis, which is a very soulful, musically uninhibited town. The words 'sing it from the heart' always stuck with me. As a singer, you think you're doing it all the time. But over and over throughout my career, I've been hit with the fact that I had to go further in order to remove the wall between myself and the listener. If what you do is intended to move other people, you've got to be that uninhibited."

Deborah insists she knew since early childhood that she would be a singer, and she moved to Nashville at age 17 to pursue that dream. Before long, she was singing backup for such legends as Roy Orbison, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and Jim Stafford. Her recording breakthrough came about when she was selected by Jim Reeves' widow to add the vocal duet parts to several songs left incomplete at the singer's death. They became posthumous hits.

But it was a fateful meeting with the great songwriter Shel Silverstein that inspired Allen to cultivate a second career as a songwriter. "Shel came to hear me and said I was a good singer," recalls Deborah. "But then he told me something that changed my life. He said, 'The sun don't shine on the same dog's back every day. You can't always be in the spotlight even if you have the best of luck. Writing songs is a great outlet, and it keeps you from going crazy when times are bad. It's something you can keep with you always. Once you write that song, it's yours forever.' The things he said made so much sense! So the next time my parents asked what I was doing, I matter-of-factly said, 'Oh, I'm a songwriter.'"

Many of Allen's songs were created on a Yamaha portable keyboard. "I use a PSR8000, and I love it," she says. "It's a great writing tool. It's such an inspiration to have such a huge selection of sounds and

grooves at my fingertips. I just dial through the patterns and see what hits me on a given day. Then I look for the right sound to mesh with that — maybe grand piano, maybe organ, maybe strings. And then the creative process really begins. The PSR8000 has given birth to many great song ideas, and I don't even use it to its fullest capacity. You're never at a loss for inspiration when you have a PSR8000. It's limitless."

Deborah is currently on the road with a four-singer production. "We call it The Pajama Party," she explains. "It's me, Michelle Wright, and Heather and Jennifer Kinley. We have a great, hit-driven show — we sing together onstage and back each other up with harmony. And it's been great hanging out with my girlfriends!"

Allen's other recent ventures include singing at a Nashville Symphony concert conducted by Allen's own sister, Dr. Nancy Sutton, and producing discs for young Texan singer Kimarie and traditional jazz chanteuse Adrian Rose. And Deborah's just released a new album of her own. "It's called *Hands On*" she explains, "because I produced it myself and was involved in writing every song." Released on Allen's own SBS label, it can be purchased at www.deborahallen.com.

The way Allen sees it, she has a duty to encourage young artists like Kimarie. "I want to give back the sort of encouragement that I got from Shel when I first came to town. Maybe in some small way I can help maneuver someone toward their dreams. And my advice for someone like that is to keep an open mind, work hard, and absorb what you can from every possible influence in order to enrich your talent. And most important, tear down the wall between yourself and your heart. If you aren't exposing your heart and living every song to its fullest, you're cheating yourself and the listener out of the full experience."

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Deborah Allen: 1,000 from the Heart