

Ingrid Michaelson

"I GREW UP PLAYING A REAL PIANO. SO I WANT THE CLOSEST THING TO A REAL PIANO ONSTAGE."



ONCE UPON A TIME, THERE WAS BASICALLY ONE WAY to make it in the music business: Start small and work your way up. Record a demo, play the clubs, and try to get a deal. Cut an album, get airplay, start touring, and hope for the best.

But these days, new options are opening up for independent musicians. Just ask singer-songwriter Ingrid Michaelson, who launched her career through song placements in ads and television. Thanks to her initial exposure on *myspace.com*, Ingrid's music began popping up on shows like *Grey's Anatomy* and *One Tree Hill*. When Old Navy picked up the intimate "The Way I Am" for a major ad campaign in 2007, things really took off. Since then, she's continued to build her career through recording, touring, and promotional appearances on shows such as *Good Morning America* and *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*.





On both 2007's *Girls and Boys* and her latest release, *Be OK*, Ingrid's music has near-universal appeal. "I've been told that something about my voice and my lyrics is very familiar," she says. "Maybe things are phrased in a way that you wouldn't have normally thought of, yet it makes complete sense to you."

Michaelson describes *Be OK* as "just a little appetizer to keep people happy until the next record comes out." But this appetizer is being served with a full plate of concert dates: She recently supported the Dave Matthews Band at Madison Square Garden before embarking on a three-week European tour with Jason Mraz, followed by her own U.S. tour. "First I'm doing about ten shows with the all-female Hotel Café tour," she says. "And then I start my own tour, covering a lot of my major markets in the States."

Ingrid's path to success has been far from typical. After childhood piano lessons, she studied musical theater in college, then toured with a children's theater group. "I had written a couple songs, but I'd never thought of playing music in front of anybody," she says. "But I would play the pianos in these theaters before shows, and my fellow actors would walk by and say, 'Oh, what's that? That's so pretty.' So I got a little boost of confidence. Then when I went home, I wrote some more, and ended up playing five of my songs at this show in New York. But I wasn't actively gigging—maybe once or twice a month, which was a lot for me."

Everything changed when an independent music licensing company contacted Ingrid through myspace.com. "They said, 'We really like your music, and we think it would be a good fit for TV and film,'" she recalls. "And a few months later, in late 2006, they placed one of my songs in *Grey's Anatomy*. That's when the ball started rolling for me."

Ingrid signed with a manager, and began to see more money from song sales. "Over the next year I started performing a little more," she says. "And I started making connections, meeting with people, and working on new songs. Then a year ago I had my song placed in an Old Navy commercial, and that kind of busted everything wide open. From there, I really started touring."

Though Ingrid plays a bit of ukulele and guitar, her main instrument is the piano—or a Yamaha CP300 when she's on the road. "I grew up playing a real piano," she says, "so I want the closest thing to a real piano onstage. I usually just use the CP300's acoustic piano sound, because that's my thing. But I sometimes use the electric piano when I'm being goofy, like when I want to play pretend-'80s songs."

The CP300's built-in speakers come in handy for in-store performances, she adds. "You don't have to haul a separate piece of equipment, which is pretty cool. It's a gi-normous instrument—we call it 'the beast!' But it sounds so good that it's worth it. I like a keyboard that feels really, really stable. The weight of the keys, the feel of the keyboard—it just feels very natural to me."

And feeling natural makes all the difference as Ingrid exposes her songs to the ears and hearts of new fans. "A big part of my live show is bonding with my audience," she says. "When I have a great show, I feel like I know these people—we've gone through something together. Whenever I'm blue, or just not particularly in the mood to do a show, nine out of ten times the audience will bring me back. They make me realize how great my job is, how lucky I am, and how much fun it is."

