

Janelle Arthur

Janelle Arthur grew up in Oliver Springs, Tenn., a quaint little town in the heart of Appalachia. Janelle's mother wrote in her baby book that her little girl was singing before she could talk. By the time she was eight years old, Janelle was cast in the role to play the young Dolly in the icon's theme park show "Paradise Road." Two decades later, the superstar is featured on Janelle's single "Hand Me Downs," in the same year Janelle signed her first record deal with Black Sheep Label Group.

Janelle, a Top 5 "American Idol" finalist and Grand Ole Opry favorite who starred in the movie "Runnin' From My Roots," has the voice of Southern honey -- a tone so rich, sweet and authentic that it wraps around you like a hug from your closest friend.

Arthur's parents weren't musical people, but they loved music and filled their home with the sounds of Vince Gill, Faith Hill, Trisha Yearwood, Reba and many others. Janelle was exposed to the amazing music of the 90's whose videos she saw on Country Music Television (CMT) and heard on Country radio. When her parents recognized Janelle might have a special gift, they fostered her talent. In the first grade, she wanted to perform in her school's talent show, so her mom bought karaoke tracks to help her rehearse. The six-year-old won the competition.

Janelle tried out for a show choir in a neighboring town the next year and was devastated when she didn't make it. Undeterred, her mom found an advertisement in "Country Weekly" stating Dollywood was searching for entertainers for its live shows. She called the number listed on the ad and learned they needed one more singer – a little girl to portray a young Dolly Parton. Janelle auditioned, got the part, and performed for the next three years.

At 11 years old, she moved from her job at the theme park to the nearby country music variety show "Country Tonite" where she could sing more mature songs. Janelle cultivated her voice covering Martina McBride, LeAnn Rimes, and other vocally challenging songs on the radio. She played 370 shows a year, which made it harder to commute, so her family settled in Sevierville.

Janelle outgrew her youth role at "Country Tonite" and was called to join the cast at "Smoky Mountain Jubilee" for the next two years before "Country Tonite" created a position and welcomed her back. She spent seven years with the production and credits the rigor of the show for preparing her for life in Nashville.

"'Country Tonite' is where I developed into the entertainer I am today," she said. "I learned so much about performing when I was just dead tired. I challenged myself every year physically and vocally. I experienced a ton of growth."

Janelle was on stage somewhere in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., for 12 years. When she was 20 years old, she moved to Nashville to focus more on songwriting. A few months later her family talked her into auditioning for "American Idol." The first time she tried out, she didn't make the show. The second time, Janelle landed in the Top 60. Despite being eliminated, she was asked to join other American Idol contestants for an Armed Forces Entertainment tour, spanning locations from England to Kuwait. She was the only person outside the Top 24 who got a spot. The trip was the best of her life, but nothing could have prepared her for what was yet to come.

The following year, "American Idol" welcomed Janelle to the national television stage and being cast on the show was one of the most rigorous experiences of her life. Her alarm went off before 5:00 a.m. every day and being judged in front of millions of people for her performance on songs she had just learned was scary. The consummate professional that she is, Janelle rose to the challenge. Mariah Carey declared her "fiery," and Keith Urban said she has "a thing none of the other girls have."

The popular television series opened doors for her and continues to do so. Janelle's run on the show led to her first invitation to perform on The Grand Ole Opry. It also caught a casting director's attention who tapped Janelle to appear in the faith-based movie "Runnin' From My Roots" alongside Aaron O'Connell, Janine Turner, Deana Carter and Neal McCoy.

After filming the movie Janelle returned to Nashville and jumped back into co-writing. She penned "Hand Me Downs," a sentimental ode to her family, with Emily Lynch.

"Family is so important to me. As we began to write 'Hand Me Downs' all of my childhood memories just flooded into view," Janelle said. It was very easy for both of us to write. It was just meant to be."

Janelle sent the song to a mutual friend and who happened to share it with Dolly, who loved it! "The fact that she wanted to be a part of it was the biggest compliment ever! She could have easily just said something like, 'That is such a beautiful song. I love it. I'm so proud of you. I wish you the best,' and that would have been enough for me."

With her career blossoming and family growing, Janelle is inspiring, too. She – like Dolly - is proof that diligence is the path to dreams.