

My Playlist Through Stories

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I like to call myself a storyteller. That is a huge part of my job as Miss Mississippi and hopefully one day as Miss America. Stories connect us, keep us engaged, and bring us together. Stories are the legacy that we leave behind after we are gone from this earth. After so much time passes, stories may be the only thing that exists to show our mark here on Earth. They open up an authentic window inside of who we are, why we are the way we are, and who we strive to be. I am a firm believer that there is a reason for everything.

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is Ecclesiastes and in a nutshell, Ecclesiastes points out that there is a time for everything in our lives. This verse brings me comfort when I try to plan what the Lord has already laid out before me. Each person has a story different from the person sitting next to them. I like to use the word “idiosyncratic” when referring to the story of each person’s life. Stories are like thumbprints, no two people have the same one. I have a deep love for music and the arts so a lot of the “story” of my life revolves around music. A major high in my story was earning the job of Miss Mississippi 2022.

We all have songs that unlock our deepest memories, the good and the bad. These are the songs that unlock mine and remind me of who I am. I hope that you ponder your life playlist today and get a better understanding of who I am and how I represent you all as Miss Mississippi. Before I was Miss Mississippi, there was a collection full of stories that brought me here.

1. “Piano Sonata No. 16 in C Major” by Mozart

When my mom was pregnant with me, she played classical music around the house. I cannot remember these moments or songs obviously, but I feel that I can attribute my love for music and the arts to this phenomenon. According to the documentary *Alive Inside*, studies have found that classical music, and Mozart in particular, is the most stimulating genre for babies in the womb. Babies in the womb are stimulated by classical music more than other genres. Only twenty-two days after the conception of a baby, the rhythm of the baby's heart begins to beat in time with the mother's heart. Even the cries of a baby after birth will reflect the sound of the mother's voice. Music lays down the foundation of our lives. I believe I loved the arts before I even saw the world around me. The majority of my family is also tone-deaf so this may be the reason behind my love of singing!

2. "Tomorrow" from Annie the Musical

Music was never at the forefront of my life leading up to the year that I turned nine. I tried, keyword TRIED, to play soccer, dance, paint, etc. with very average to below-average success. I approached my mom one day about auditioning for a local production of *Annie The Musical* because I was jealous that my next-door neighbors got to try out! My mom, supportive of all my dreams, took me to the audition. When I opened my mouth and sang, everyone asked my mother if I was adopted. She was in shock! From this day on, my life was consumed with music.

3. "The Second Star to the Right (Main Title)"- Peter Pan the Musical

After my first musical experience, I was enthralled. I had found my gift, my "why," my "it," and my purpose in life. I wanted to share music and storytelling in any way that I knew how. I got involved with a local theater group and tried out for Peter Pan the musical in the fifth grade. I starred as Peter Pan that year. I got to fly across the stage with the help of cables and a

professional flying company! I will never forget my parents reminding me to remember the moment because not many fifth graders could say they had gotten to fly! Music has taken me to new heights... literally. I went on to continue to do theater, drama, show choir, and more throughout the next several years.

4. Theme from New York, New York- Frank Sinatra

My love for music took me to New York City. Not once, but five times. I competed in vocal competitions and I took Broadway workshops. When I was around fourteen or fifteen, I had a voice lesson with a well-known vocal teacher in New York City. After our lesson was over, she looked at me and told me if I sang the way I did, I would never make it to Broadway as I had dreamed of. I cried the whole way back to the hotel as we walked back in the rain. It was like a movie scene. My parents reminded me that her words could hold me back or ignite a spark in me. If only she could see me now! This is a reminder to take the word “no” with a grain of salt and use it to motivate you. It only takes one yes.

5. Can't Help Falling In Love- Elvis Presley

In my junior year of high school, I signed up for the Elvis Presley vocal competition at his birthplace. I won first place and received a 5,000 dollar scholarship for college. I like to say Elvis Presley partially funded my education! This propelled me to declare a music minor for my college years at Mississippi State University. I knew my journey with the arts could not stop at high school.

6. Beautiful Day- U2

Before moving to my college years, I cannot fail to give a nod to both of my parents for exposing me to an eclectic variety of music. I listened to everything under the sun growing up. Most kids in middle school were attending Hannah Montana concerts, but I was jumping up and

down to Bono from U2. When given the option to write to a celebrity in middle school, I wrote to Stevie Wonder, needless to say, he probably could never technically “read ” my letter. When given the option to listen to music in class, I chose TLC’s “Don’t Go Chasing Waterfalls” or “Lovely Day” by Bill Withers. I could go on with all the musicians I love for hours! My grandparents fed my musical obsession by giving me an old record player. I currently own 202 vinyl records and counting. If you look at my albums, you get a glimpse of who I am.

7. Who Let the Dogs Out? -Baha Men

Next came college. At first, I assumed I wanted to go to Alabama but I will always be a bulldog at heart. My dad played baseball under the legendary Ron Polk, and my mother is an alumnus of MSU among many of my family members. I started college with a major in pre-med biology (I have changed to public relations since), and a minor in music. It was at this time in September of 2019, that I found the correlation between music and the healing powers that it possesses. I realized the capacity music had to draw people together and lift people. From this, my platform Music Is Medicine was born.

8. Amazing Grace- Andrea Bocelli

Music is Medicine brings the arts and music to hospitals, nursing homes, and school systems. With the use of volunteers, this program is “costless yet priceless.” Music does not discriminate. It sees no age, race, socioeconomic background, or political side. One memory that comes to mind about the effectiveness of Music Is Medicine took place at a nursing home. A man with dementia was bent over and mute during the majority of my musical presentation. When I started playing “Ave Maria,” the man sang out in an operatic voice. The nurses told me that he had not spoken in months and he suffered from dementia. He sang opera in his younger

life. Music Is Medicine. It is this story among many others that make me so ecstatic to see where this platform goes. I have a lot of exciting things in the works... stay tuned!

9. There She is- Emmie Perkins

In the future, I hope I can serve as Miss America. I already have the best job serving Mississippi, but I would love to serve our state and country in a larger capacity. I wrote an original song to help define the relevancy and modern definition of who Miss America was to me. Whether being Miss Amereica is a part of my story or someone else's, this song serves to identify to girls on all levels who aspire greatness. I want this song to be that representation that anyone can be Miss America. I was never the little girl who watched the amazing women at Miss America and pictured myself in that role. I never saw myself on stage in a beautiful gown with the ability to articulate and fight for the things I was passionate about. Quite frankly, I never had the confidence. The dream of being Miss Mississippi or Miss America was so far from my list of dreams or interests until it wasn't. I have gained a voice from my experience in the Miss America Organization. The Miss America Organization spreads the message of confidence and strong women.

As a child, I would ride by Leontyne Price Blvd in Laurel, MS on the way to visit my grandmother. If you do not know Leontyne Price, she was the first African American to receive international acclaim for her opera skills and she was from right here in Mississippi. I think this was when I realized that the state of Mississippi was home to some pretty artistic people. I am spreading the priceless joy of music and the arts in the state that is known as the birthplace of music and I do not think it can get any better than that.

I hope you got a glimpse of my story through some of the songs on the playlist to my life. But I am curious, what is on the soundtrack of your life?