

Kids Korner

Twelve-Year-Old Sings Country

WESTMINSTER, Md. — Ashley Marie has learned a lot about balancing a career with education ... and all at the ripe old age of twelve! Ashley left her middle school in 1994 to be home-schooled, just so she could accept singing engagements on school nights.

"With my mom teaching me (on home-school) I could accept singing engagements during the week because I didn't have to get up so early. Sometimes I wouldn't get up until noon the next day. But my mom would make me do workbooks and studying for hours the next day to make up for it!"

Ashley Marie (her middle name) decided when she was in kindergarten that she wanted to be on stage. "Back then I thought I would be a comedian," she says. "But then, in second grade, when I sang in my class talent show, I knew I wanted to be a singer!"

Ashley's mom, Lois Szymanski says she held Ashley back (from the stage) for awhile. "I wasn't sure I wanted her to do this so young," Mrs. Szymanski says. "But after awhile I couldn't stop her. I think it is something she is meant to do!"

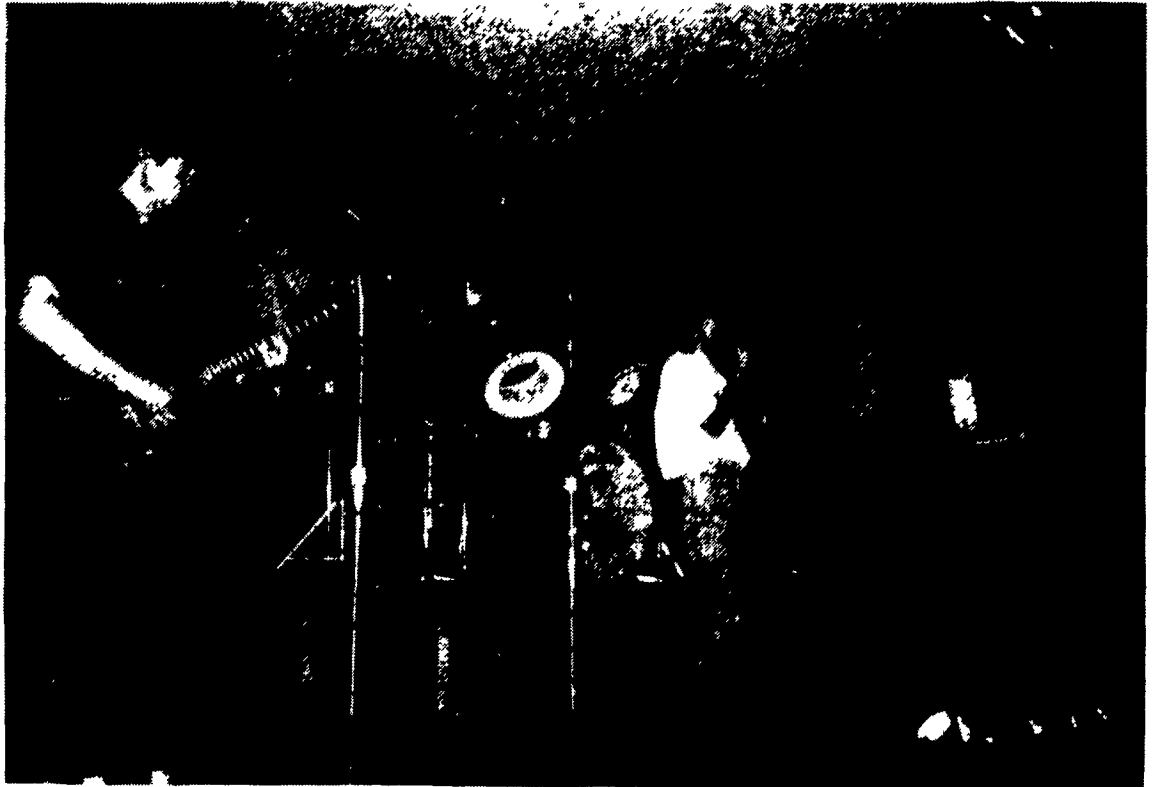
Although she had sung for many family gatherings and parties, Ashley Marie's first opportunity to sing publicly came in the spring of 1994 when she joined the Carroll County 4-H Performing Arts Club. Leaders, Ron and Debbie Zepp invited Ashley to do several shows with the Performing Arts Club,

nurturing this young girl's talent with a lot of love and positive encouragement.

But Ashley says her first real break came when she sang at the 1994 Carroll County 4-H and FFA Fair. After singing for the Farm Queen Contest, and again that night in the Talent Show, she was interviewed by a writer from the Carroll Sun who wrote a story on her for the paper, and then she was interviewed live on a local cable television station.

Since that time Ashley's career has exploded. She has continued to perform on a regular basis at restaurants and Fall Festivals, Lions Club and church events and at Moose Lodges, she has made a hit with many people in the area. She has begun to take voice and guitar lessons and has performed with many local bands. "I love the Dixie Highway Band," says Ashley. "I take voice lessons with the lead singer, Dusty Springer, and guitar with her husband, Ron Carney. They have been so nice to me," Ashley says. "They even let me perform with them at carnivals all summer and other places, too!"

Support has come from all over. Country Roads, a country and western wear store in the Cranberry Mall in Westminster has agreed to give her a 20 percent discount on costumes in exchange for promotion. Harris Automotive of Westminster was so impressed with her voice that they purchased and donated to her a cordless microphone. Mrs. Szymanski says,



Ashley sings with the Dixie Highway Band at the Harney, Maryland carnival.

"They play tapes of her in their shop and promote her to anyone who will listen!" Marshall's Melodies, a Westminster Karaoke Company called a talent scout to hear Ashley sing in January of 1995. Since that time the (local) talent agency has cut a three song video to promote her and has a Christmas album in the works.

"So many people have done so much to help her!" says Mrs. Szymanski. "Everyone seems to believe she will make it...and it's all she wants to do!"

"Her voice is so much more mature than you would expect," says Sharon Alfaro, a writer with "Country Plus" magazine. She came to see Ashley in a Show at Mountain Shadow's Restaurant in Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania, then wrote an article about Ashley for Country Plus. "She sounds like a young Reba McEntire!" Ms. Alfaro says.

Even though her career seems to be in full swing, young Ashley has decided that she wants to be a normal kid, too, so after a year of homeschool she is back in school this year as an eighth grade student at East Middle School in Westminster. "I'm a people person, and I missed my friends too much!" she says.

This past year Ashley Marie had a chance to meet with Country Music legends Ronnie Dove and Narvel Felts and to perform a song for them in shows in Vienna, Virginia and in Smithsburg, Maryland. She performs once a month at Mike Pryor's Mountain Shadow's Restaurant in Blue Ridge Summit, Pennsylvania where she has a regular following of friends and fans. "It might take me years," Ashley Marie says, "but someday I'll make it to Nashville!"

Folks can catch Ashley Marie at any of these upcoming shows:

- October 14 - Chapps Lounge - Cancer Benefit - Woodsbridge, VA (Info. - Jay Padgett (703-730-3581))
- December 23 - (Christmas Show) All at Mountain Shadows Restaurant, Blue Ridge Summit, Pa. - Dinner and 1 hour Show \$6.00 (Info. - Mike Pryor - 717-794-2705)



Dreaming of Nashville, Ashley Marie performs locally to a growing number of fans.

Rainbow Crayons

Don't throw away your old crayons. Instead make rainbow crayons.

Take all the paper off the crayons and break into one-inch pieces. Line the muffin cups with foil and preheat oven to 300 degrees. Put crayon pieces into each foil-lined muffin cup and fill about one-half

full. Put the muffin tin into the oven for about 5 minutes. Watch carefully and remove before crayons are completely melted. Cool completely in the muffin tin for about 30 minutes. When cool, remove from tin and peel off foil.



Ashley Marie sings for diners at Mt. Shadows Restaurant in Blue Ridge Summit, Pa.