

A photograph of Taylor Swift in a recording studio. She is wearing a purple long-sleeved shirt and has her blonde hair styled in a messy bun. She is leaning over a large mixing console, adjusting a black microphone on a boom arm. Her hands are on the faders and knobs of the console. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the studio equipment and a computer monitor.

**TAYLOR MADE** *Can a small-town Pennsylvania girl who has conquered both mean girls and dirty, cheatin' boys find happiness—and massive fame—on the music scene? Yep... if her name is Taylor Swift. She's living proof that you can achieve some pretty great things by going your own way.*

*By Rory Evans // Photographs by Sasha Eisenman*

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Every woman experiencing a bad breakup, romantic infidelity, or maybe even just garden-variety heartache should have access to two drumsticks, a 30-gallon galvanized-steel trash can, and a capacity crowd of 22,000.

**FAVORITE LYRICS**

"Something written by one of my favorite radio guys, who is also a songwriter: 'If there was no change, there would be no butterflies.' He once sent me a thank-you note and quoted that at the bottom, writing, 'I'm sure everyone is telling you *Don't change*. But I think

the right thing to say is to always embrace change gracefully.' That's a beautiful line."

**FUNNIEST COUNTRY & WESTERN SONG TITLE**

"She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy" has got to take the cake on that one!"

**BEST ADVICE FROM HER DAD**

"He is the king of one-liners, so he

has about 50 million pieces of advice. He'll say, "Buy bonds!" instead of "bye-bye!" Because he's a stockbroker.

**WEIRDEST THING IN HER FRIDGE**

"Apple butter from Cracker Barrel. I also carry my own salad dressing. It's raspberry-walnut vinaigrette from the grocery store."

**WHO SHE'D LIKE TO BE STUCK IN AN ELEVATOR WITH**

"Ellen DeGeneres. That situation would panic a lot of people, but she'd be like, 'Hey, whatever!' and make a joke. Then we'd laugh and dance."

**HOW MANY TEXTS SHE SENDS ON AN AVERAGE DAY**

"Ten. It's funny, I thought the contact list in

my phone would grow if I was in the music industry. But I had more people in my phone book when I was in high school!"

**BEST MOM ADVICE**

"Don't ever call a guy first. The thing they want the most is whatever they can't have. It sounds really juvenile, but it works."

This is exactly how Taylor Swift processes her emotions at a concert at the Palace of Auburn Hills, just outside Detroit. She takes a several-minute break from belting out "Should've Said No"—her angry ode to a real-life cheatin' ex—to shimmy around in a sparkly minidress and beat the crap out of a big ol' metal drum. When she's done hammering, she struts to the front of the stage looking flush and exhilarated—pink-cheeked, wild-haired—and just for a split second, exhausted.

Looking a wee bit tired can be forgiven, though, since Swift has been in seemingly perpetual motion for about three years. When other performers moan to her about an eight-week radio tour, Swift has to laugh. "I once went on the most grueling radio tour. Living in hotel rooms, sleeping in the backs of rental cars as my mom drove to three different cities in one day," recalls the singer, who has mercifully upgraded to a tricked-out custom tour bus complete with a mini chandelier and drop-down treadmill.

These days, the bus is carting the singer around to promote her second album, *Fearless*, released in November. But her country-criss-crossing game of radio-station hopscotch originated way back in the spring of 2006, when she was promoting her first single, "Tim McGraw." She stayed on the road to publicize her debut album, the sleeper hit *Taylor Swift*, released at the end

of 2006 and reissued the following year. It went triple platinum, landing two No. 1 singles on the Billboard country chart and five singles on the Billboard Top 40. Since then, she's been opening for the likes of Brad Paisley, George Strait, Rascal Flatts, and her hero, Tim McGraw, with his wife, Faith Hill.

Swift knows her life is unusual for an 18-year-old, even one teetering on the brink of becoming a one-name (T-Swi?) megastar. But as she describes her high-rev schedule, she sounds not only low-key but also disarmingly practical. "I'll take a red-eye and do an interview, then go to a meet-and-greet, then do an appearance, then get ready for a show, then do a conference call about the album," she rattles off. "My brain does get fried, but I never get tired of this."

Besides, why whine when you're living your dream? For a girl who grew up on a Christmas tree farm (seriously) in a small town just outside Reading, Pennsylvania, this is a charmed life. "I know that a Christmas tree farm in Pennsylvania is about the most random place for a country singer to come from," she says, "but I had an awesome

STYLING: KATE MOODIE; HAIR: LOUISE MOON/THE WALL GROUP; MAKEUP: JENN STREICHER FOR LANCÔME/SOLO ARTISTS; CATHERINE MALANDRINO BLOUSE; OPPOSITE: AUTUMN CASHMERE TANK.



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childhood. We had horses and cats, and my mom stayed home with me [and her brother, Austin, 16]. Our dad would come home from work [he's a stockbroker] and then go outside to make a split-rail fence."

As Currier & Ives as life on the farm was, life at school was more Dickensian. "It was basically a shunning—and that's never a good thing, you know?" Swift says. "A lot of girls thought I was weird. Actually, the word they liked to use was *annoying*. I'd sit down at their lunch table, and they'd move to a different one." Instead of hanging with friends on weekends, Swift entered local karaoke contests and sang at coffee houses. She poured her anguish into writing music. At age 8, Swift started tinkering on the guitar, and after learning three chords, she wrote her first song. "It's my way of coping," she says. "I write when I'm frustrated, angry, or confused. I've figured out a way to filter all of that into something good." As it turns out, very good.

SWIFT SHOWED enough promise to motivate her family to relocate to Nashville when she turned 14. Her mother, Andrea, recalls: "It was never about 'I want to be famous.' Taylor never uttered those words. It was about moving to a place where she could write with people she could learn from." Her first after-school job was working on songs in Nashville; she made enough money to buy a Lexus 430 SC convertible. She still drives it, despite a few wrecks, "because I am monogamous when it comes to my car." In a delicious twist, Swift's friend Abigail Anderson says, "she got the same [model] car as the one in the movie *Mean Girls*"—take that, bitchy posse back in PA. Her entire sophomore year, Swift says, "was positively life-changing." Plus, she says, like she's revealing a surprise bonus in the car's option

package, "all of a sudden, I had a lot more friends."

She also met some of the guys who'd end up in her distinctive hell-hath-no-fury-like-an-underclassman-scorned songs. Famously, her songs name names. "I like to encode capital letters in the printed lyrics, so they spell out phrases. I encoded the 'Should've Said No' guy's name over and over. It was only his first name, but everyone figured it out. I'd get texts from him. He was scared out of his mind I'd crucify him on a talk show. All I could think was, 'Well, you *should've* said no. That's what the song is about.'"

"Her lyrics have emotional complexity," says music critic Frank Kogan, who has written for *Spin* and *The Village Voice*. "And her songs are astonishingly skillful and subtle." Little wonder, then, that Swift's albums appeal to more than just people her age. Her songs remind us that the romantic skills we picked up in high school are, for better or worse, the ones we'll use our whole lives. "The drama and the trauma of the relationship you have when you're 16 can mirror the one you have when you're 26," Swift says. "Life repeats itself."

As for whether Swift herself has different versions of her life—say, pre-megastar and post-megastar models—she insists, "I am never going to be that 'Get out of my face!' girl." Living in Nashville offers its own protective layer. "Keith and Nicole live there. Tim and Faith live there. We can all go to the grocery store in our sweatpants because the paparazzi have no idea Nashville exists."

Even if they did, it seems unlikely that Swift could turn into a crash-and-burner like

## Taylor answers some of country music's biggest questions

**"What's Your Mama's Name?"**

BY TAMMY WYNETTE  
"Andrea."

**"Why Haven't I Heard from You?"**

BY REBA McENTIRE  
"Because I'm just not that into you."

**"Do You Know?"**

BY JESSICA SIMPSON  
"Probably not."

**"What Hurts the Most?"**

BY RASCAL FLATTS  
"Really bad headaches."

**"Whose Bed Have Your Boots Been Under?"**

BY SHANIA TWAIN  
"I am not that kind of girl!"

**"Who's Gonna Take the Garbage Out?"**

BY LORETTA LYNN  
"Probably me."

**"Do You Want Fries with That?"**

BY TIM MCGRAW  
"Always. With ketchup. And if I'm at In-N-Out Burger, I'll dip them into the chocolate shake. Yeah, it's good."



Britney or Lindsay. This is a girl who finds bliss pulling into a Cracker Barrel and ordering eggs and biscuits, who professes shock when her iPhone gongs five times in an hour ("I never get text messages. This is exciting!"), and who during a preconcert meet-and-greet welcomes a fan with a love grip so tight it's easy to assume this visitor is a long-lost friend—and not, say, the lucky 93rd caller who won some radio phone-in.

Sometimes, Swift seems almost too normal—even nerdy. One of her favorite T-shirts, for example, has the periodic table of elements printed across the front. And let's face it: The noble gases aren't the controlled substances usually linked to pop starlets. So don't expect photos of her pantiless and slinking out of a limo finding their way onto the Internet anytime soon.

Though, on the subject of underpants: A girl's gotta wear them. And every so often, a girl's gotta buy them. And Swift wouldn't mind being able to purchase her skivvies in peace. One day not long ago, she went shopping at Victoria's Secret: "I look up and there are, like, 15 people looking at me, with camera phones out, waiting to take a picture of which kind of underwear I'm going to buy. *Think she's a small or an extra small?* I wanted to be, like, 'Uh, guys? I can hear you.'"

Swift brings the same good-natured exasperation to another ongoing topic of interest: her love life. More specifically, whether she's dating one-third of the boy band the Jonas Brothers—a question she categorically refuses to answer. At a preshow event at the Palace, a TV reporter had brought his teenage daughter to ask: "Are you seeing Joe Jonas?" The most Swift allows is a pleasant "Anyone would be lucky to be dating him."

No matter. Somewhere down the road, her lyrics will likely give her away. And heaven help Joe Jonas or any other guy (not to mention that 30-gallon steel can) if he ever does her wrong. ■

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