

HOW I BECAME A... VOCAL COACH

JULIE MILES HAS WORKED ON TV'S THE X FACTOR AND AMERICA'S GOT TALENT, YET IT ALL BEGAN WITH AN ANNIVERSARY SURPRISE, AS SHE TELLS METRO...

IF YOU'VE ever enjoyed a night of karaoke in Newcastle and recall seeing a suspiciously good singer, it could well have been Julie Miles. The vocal coach and founder of Vocal Ovation has done a few undercover stints in the past, catching the audience off guard each time.

More recently, Julie has worked with the winning contestants on a vast range of top TV talent shows, including The X Factor, America's Got Talent and The Voice. Julie is also the UK director and mentor for international teaching organisation, Modern Vocal Training, hosting masterclasses for up-and-coming students from across the globe.

Tell us more about those fun karaoke stints...

I love karaoke. Singing is so therapeutic and uplifting, I just love seeing people get the confidence - or enough alcohol - to give it a go. Many years ago, when I was a professional singer, I'd regularly go to Jimmyz Karaoke night at the Quayside in Newcastle and pretend I was really shy and clueless, and then belt out It's Raining Men. I loved the look on people's faces when they realised I could actually sing.

I can blast out Wonderwall in the shower. How do I know if I've got what it takes?

The simple answer is you won't unless you start performing and see how people react. I'd also say choose your audience wisely, as friends and family may not make the most reliable or discerning critics. Enter competitions and seek professional help if it's an option for you.

A good vocal coach will be completely honest with you and if



Multi-faceted: Counselling and advising on health and fitness are all part of Julie's job

there's potential there, they will work with you to bring that out.

When do you first remember singing, then?

I was a big fan of The Osmonds and had a massive crush on Jimmy; I had a giant poster of him above my bed. I knew all the words to Long Haired Lover From Liverpool and used to strut around my bedroom singing it. Whenever he was on Top Of The Pops, I was glued to the TV, almost fainting. I loved him so much.

Did anyone just write the singing off as purely a fad?

The Jimmy bit was, but music had always been part of my life. When I was very young my dad was a full-time musician and singer, but I had no real dreams for myself back then. There are, however, recordings of me singing as young as two, and then as a teenager I used to sing along to Blondie and Chrissie Hynde. I plugged my own mic into a guitar amp to make it sound like it was me singing on the record, so I definitely wanted to be like them. I guess it was more of an interest rather than something I saw myself pursuing as a full-time career.

What did you think you'd end up doing, career-wise?

I grew up with a house full of animals and I remember saying I really wanted to be a vet. It was pretty short-lived. When I found out what was involved academically, I knew I would never have the discipline to see it through. I was always way too distracted to focus on studying, much to my parents' dismay.

So how did you get into professional singing?

After I left school, having not done well in my exams at all, I went to music college and studied performing arts. At the end of the two years, myself and my best friend were asked to join a girl trio and from there I fell straight into being a professional

singer, earning pretty good money. After a year, three was definitely a crowd, so we split up and over the next ten years I was lucky enough to be in some great bands as the lead.

Any regrets at that point?

I guess I wish I'd pursued becoming an original artist rather than a performer/entertainer. Despite requiring a good voice and great performing skills, there is such a clear difference between the two. That's what I try to drive into the singers I work with now, assuming that's their dream. When I was a singer, there didn't seem to be coaches like myself around to provide that sort of guidance and advice.

How did singing turn into voice coaching?

Singing can be an unreliable source of income, so I did various retail and telesales roles on the side, but started to get itchy feet. Then, during that time, my husband booked me a surprise singing lesson for our anniversary with celebrity vocal coach David Grant. On the way to the lesson, my husband suggested vocal coaching could be a great change of career for me. Having no qualifications, I pretty much dismissed the idea. Then to my surprise during the lesson, David also asked me if I'd considered being a vocal coach.

The lesson with David was amazing, and I started travelling to London every month to train with him and, occasionally, vocal coach Carrie Grant.

I opened my studio about ten months later. From that lesson with David 11 years ago, the business has grown from strength to strength to the point I've had a waiting list for years now.

What are the worst traits you see in budding singers....

I would say that a lot of singers, as well as their friends and families, think that simply having a big, powerful voice and belting out a song in sixth gear is impressive. Rather than let them down, though, I like to help them realise that they need to use all the gears to make that final move to sixth gear stand out as being something really special.

What do people not know about your job?

My job is rarely just about singing. I'm definitely a counsellor. Trying to instil a good mindset is so important. You need to give someone the confidence to step on stage and captivate an audience. I'm a health and fitness adviser, too, which is vital for keeping the voice safe from harm. I've had students bring suitcases full of stage outfits to lessons, I guess I can add 'fashion guru' to my CV, too!

Best piece of advice?

You have to be prepared to work your pants off to really get what you want and be ready for the many setbacks along the way.

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INTERVIEW BY OLIVER STALLWOOD



Finding her voice: Julie has had a life-long love affair with music and singing