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Special Talents America Winner Wows 10,000 at Special Olympics Illinois
Summer Games with Her Song, "I Was Born Yesterday"

(Wheaton, IL) – When Breanna Alyssa Bogucki, a 15-year-old high school student with autism, took the stage during the four-state Special Talents America competition last November, she captivated the audience with her rendition of Taylor Swift's "Mean." It was a song that had great personal meaning to this teen with a disability, since she often felt isolated and judged by those around her.

Breanna took first place with her beautiful voice, charming performance, and stage presence. As a result, she won a professional recording session, compliments of Grammy Award-winning singer/songwriter Jim Peterik ("Eye of the Tiger," Survivor, The Ides of March), who was one of the judges of the competition. In fact, Peterik was so impressed with the teen's talent and compelling story that he decided she needed her own original song. Collaborating with Lisa McClowry, emcee of the Special Talents America competition and singer/songwriter with Peterik's World Stage Studio, Jim composed "I Was Born Yesterday."

Breanna wowed an enthusiastic audience again last Friday when her song played during opening ceremonies at Special Olympics Illinois Summer Games at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois. More than 10,000 athletes with intellectual disabilities, their coaches, families, and volunteers rose to their feet and cheered for Breanna, who has become a symbol for them that "ability" is at the heart of "disability." Breanna sang the song live for over 4,000 people at the athlete victory dance the following night in the same stadium.

"Amazing!" is how Breanna's mother, Mary Ellen Bogucki, described the experience. "The minute she took that stage and felt the love of all her peers, she sang that song better than I have ever heard her sing it. She reacted with the audience because these are her people. She has such a connection with them, because they're just like her." She added, "The love that was going back and forth between her and all the people that she considers her friends out there in the audience – that was the most special."

Lisa McClowry, who attended the closing ceremony, added, "I couldn't be more proud of Bree and her performance at the Special Olympics! She is growing as an entertainer and singer right before our eyes. The moment she walked on stage, she connected with the crowd. They loved her!"

A happy Breanna, who also earned five gold medals in the artistic gymnastics competition at the Summer Games, stated modestly, “I always dreamed of performing and reaching out to my fans. I was as excited as they were! It was a lot of fun.”

The song Breanna performed was especially meaningful to her and to the special needs population in the audience. According to Peterik, “Lisa and I had just a really great time writing this song for Breanna. We knew it had to be the right song. We wanted it to be new country, just to stay in the genre of Taylor Swift or Sugarland.”

Peterik continued, “I had the title, ‘I Was Born Yesterday,’ and the melody. But I can’t write from a 15-year-old girl’s perspective, and Lisa can. So Lisa brought a lot to the party in terms of lyrics, making it relatable to Breanna and universal to all teenagers, really. It is all about being a kid in high school. With the whole bullying thing that is so prevalent now, this is especially a great message. ‘Don’t take advantage of me. I’m valuable.’ This isn’t just about potential boyfriends. It is about society. It’s about your peer group.”

Before writing the song, Peterik and McClowry met with Breanna on several occasions and talked with her and her mother at length on the phone. According to McClowry, “What I really wanted to get out of Breanna was vulnerability. Being young and having special challenges, I imagine she is building up all kinds of walls and anger. So this song was a way for her to let go and let the walls down and reveal that she does get hurt. That makes her more human, and I think a lot of young people will identify with that.”

Peterik added, “The concept of ‘I Was Born Yesterday’ can be viewed at a couple of levels. It is a play on the phrase ‘I wasn’t born yesterday’ which people say to let others know ‘You can’t put anything over on me.’ In Breanna’s case, it’s like ‘I WAS born yesterday, so please don’t take advantage of me. Be careful of the things you say. I can break so easily.’ Breanna’s mother had a different take on it, and it is equally valid. Her take is that ‘Every day is the first day of your life. Every day you can push reset. Today is the first day.’ I thought that was terrific. So it works at a number of levels.”

Breanna loved the song the first time she heard it. “The song’s really cool and it’s really catchy,” she said. “The words described me and the things that I experienced.”

Mary Ellen Bogucki, agreed. “It was incredible. For them to write a song for her was amazing. When they sent me the song to hear, they asked me to let them know if there was anything I wanted them to change. There wasn’t one thing I wanted to change. They got her. I’ve been advocating for autism for 15 years, and many people don’t get it. These two people did!”

Two weeks after the song was written, Breanna and her family joined Jim Peterik, Lisa McClowry, and chief engineer Larry Millas at World Stage Studio in Burr Ridge, Illinois, for Breanna’s first-ever recording session. In Peterik’s words, “Recording with Breanna was a blessed day!” She was professional and had memorized the song. After

introducing the young woman to the microphone, headphones, and control room, Peterik asked Breanna to sing the song, fully prepared to begin working with her on her presentation. “She sang it flawlessly!” he said, amazed. Following some brief coaching, Breanna was introduced to the vocal booth where she recorded the song. After two nearly perfect takes, a lesson in harmonies, and the addition of some spoken words, “I Was Born Yesterday” was ready for final mixing. The finished song has many people in the recording industry elated.

“We are really proud of Bree for the growth we have seen in her singing over the past few months and for her very professional recording of this song,” said McClowry. “We are witnessing a talented young girl rise above her fear, move past her disabilities, and shine like a bright star!”

“I Was Born Yesterday” is now available on [iTunes](#) and [Amazon](#) and [CDBaby](#) under Breanna’s stage name, Breanna Alyssa.

“This whole experience has been life changing!” said Mary Ellen Bogucki. “Even to have an opportunity like this for Breanna is something we never dreamed of. It has given her so much confidence and pride. She tends to go through life just blending in, going unnoticed. It has given her an opportunity to shine and be proud of her talents.”

Breanna’s mother shared something that happened at Cary Junior High School a few days after the teen had won the Special Talents America competition. “Her middle school health teacher saw the article in the local newspaper and downloaded Breanna’s videotaped performance. It became a teaching lesson in all the health classes that day. She used it as a bullying lesson and why you shouldn’t judge people. That’s when a lot of other kids began friending Breanna on Facebook and telling her how they feel she helped them and gave them hope.”

Since that time, the teen has sung her first solo in the Cary Grove High School Choir Show, received the “Most Inspirational Participant” at the Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association Awards Night, and performed in several other venues.

Jim Peterik shared his thoughts about the impact of the Special Talents America competition for people with disabilities. “I think it is the statement that there are no boundaries,” he said. “That we all have special talents. And this is kind of saying that we don’t want to hear excuses. We want action. We want every individual, special needs or not, to develop what they have. Breanna is living proof that there are no boundaries. We are all given gifts and share those gifts. Once that message gets around, it will change people’s lives.”

Special Talents America is a competition for talented children and adults who love to perform and who happen to have disabilities. The 2012 four-state talent competition was held at Wentz Concert Hall and Fine Arts Center in Naperville, Illinois, on November 5. Until recently, the Special Talents America group was part of the Western DuPage Special Recreation Association, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

It is now applying for its own nonprofit designation. For more information about Special Talents America, Breanna's song "I Was Born Yesterday," and the 2012 competition, please visit www.specialtalents.org.

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Photo 1- Breanna Alyssa Bogucki competed in the 2012 Special Talents America competition in Naperville last November. She captivated the audience and judges and won 1st place for her performance of Taylor Swift's "Mean." (Photo courtesy of Gene Steinman)



Photo 2- Grammy-Award winning singer/songwriter/record producer Jim Peterik and singer/songwriter Lisa McClowry announce that Breanna has also won the opportunity to record a song at Peterik's World Stage Studio. Peterik and McClowry co-wrote a special song just for Breanna, titled "I Was Born Yesterday." (Photo courtesy of Gene Steinman)



Photo 3- This is the cover for Breanna Alyssa's "I Was Born Yesterday" CD, which is now available on iTunes, Amazon, and CDBaby.



Photo 4- On June 15, Breanna performed “I Was Born Yesterday” on stage during the victory dance of Special Olympics Illinois Summer Games. Over 10,000 athletes, family members, and volunteers cheered her performance and many asked for autographs afterwards.



Photo 5- Breanna, who also competed as an athlete from the Northern Illinois Special Recreation Association, took a few minutes to pose at Special Olympics Illinois Opening Ceremonies with Lisa McClowry, who co-wrote her special song, and Greg Bizzaro, co-founder of Special Talents America.



Photo 6- Breanna competed as an athlete at the Special Olympics Illinois Summer Games in artistic gymnastics. She won five gold medals in the all-around competition.