

[home](#) [best bets](#) [calendar](#) [sections](#) [gazztv](#) [gazzcam](#) [gazz blogs](#) [travel guide](#) [dining guide](#) [newsletter](#)

the **gazz**
what's going on ...
the entertainment guide of The Charleston Gazette



Home
Best Bets
Calendar
Sections

art-exhibits
blogs
events
festivals
film
food
music
stage
television

Gazztv
Gazzcam
Gazz Blogs

artattack
beers to you
there's a blog in
my soup
downtownwv
gatecrasher
karin fuller
mountainword
my west virginia
newsounds
plugged in
popcult
soundcheck
strangeplaces
wineboy
wvfilm

Travel Guide
Dining Guide
Newsletter

Scrapbooking
Supplies
Emirates Airlines
Cellit Mobile
Marketing

[home](#) » [articles](#) » [stories](#)



Traci Ann Stanley hit the recording studio late last year for her debut CD, "Right Here," which she released in April.

MUSIC: Right here with Traci Ann Stanley

Wayne singer wins Chesney opening gig

by **Bill Lynch**
for the Gazette

Traci Ann Stanley is ready to enjoy her latest moment in the spotlight.

Two weeks ago, the 21-year-old from Wayne County won the Charleston leg of Kenny Chesney's "Big Star" contest.

Tonight, she opens for LeAnn Rimes and Kenny Chesney at the Charleston Civic Center. Talking over the phone from her family's home in Pritchard, Stanley admits she's a little overwhelmed by it all.

"But things are awesome," she said. "Things are happening in a really big way."

Story Continued after Advertisement

The "Big Star" contest Stanley won is an official feature of Chesney's "Poets and Pirates" tour. Through most of the tour, at many of the cities, contestants will vie for the chance to be the opening act for the show. The winner of each local contest then opens for Chesney in their city.

All of these opening performances are being recorded. Eventually, these recordings will be reviewed and compared in a competition to pick the grand-prize winner for the entire tour. The grand-prize winner will finish the last few dates of the "Poets and Pirates" tour, get the use of a tour bus, take home \$25,000 and be given the opportunity to audition for Sony/BMG records.

"Yeah, it's super duper," Stanley said.

Stanley learned of the contest accidentally. Lately, she's been focused on finishing up her debut album, "Right Here," but stumbled upon the contest through word of mouth.

"It was really kind of a friend-of-a-friend thing," she said. "A local radio station, WQBE, was partnered on it with Sony/BMG and the tour. You had to send a video to even be considered and whatever song you sent had to be an original."

Stanley has been a regular on the fair and tour circuit for the past couple of years. She's been recorded on video many times. She also has the album filled with songs she'd written. It sounded like a great opportunity, but the "Big Star" contest wanted only a few minutes — five at most. She'd have to edit it down.

"And I'm not what you call 'digitally savvy.'"

She decided to take a very bare, almost basic approach.

"It was so last minute and random," she laughed. "I literally sat the camera on my dresser, hit the button, then ran around and grabbed my guitar. 'I've got it up on YouTube. It's pretty humorous.'"

Wearing a pink Johnny Cash T-shirt and jeans and apologizing for leaving her band behind, Stanley ran through her song, "One Day of Heaven."



West Virginia singer Traci Ann Stanley shares the state with stars Kenny Chesney and LeAnn Rimes tonight at the Charleston Civic Center.

The contest was a hit, according to Ed Roberts, afternoon drive-time host for WQBE. The station received nearly 100 videos of singers and bands.

"Not all 100 or so were qualified, of course," Roberts said. "But it was a really good response. Sony/BMG and WQBE selected the best four and, I'll tell you, each of those four had a really, really good chance, we thought."

Stanley was among the four finalists picked to do a showcase at the Southridge Quaker Steak and Lube. The best-judged performance took the opening slot for Chesney and Rimes.

"We went, we played and we killed it," Stanley said.

Winning the contest is the culmination of a lot of work and determination. Stanley has been pursuing country music full time steadily for more than two years. Right after graduating from Spring Valley High School in 2004, she went to Marshall University to study biology.

It didn't take.

"I bounced around a little bit, then finally withdrew. It just wasn't for me."

Leaving school was sad, but hopeful. She knew what she wanted to do. Stanley is a true-believer country fan. Singing and playing music was her life. Doing anything else seemed like settling. Stanley's family wasn't particularly musical, but she'd grown up singing in church and taking piano lessons. At 16, she got her first guitar. She learned a few chords.

"I wrote my first song right after that. It was really, really bad."

After she dropped out of school, she put her energy into music, sang at county fairs and festivals and just about anywhere else. She says her family and friends have been very supportive. Lately, she's been enjoying the support of local country music stations.

"Local radio has been really good to me," Stanley said. "We've been getting some airplay with the first single, "Red Light Kiss.""

She's riding pretty high from the win and looking forward to performing tonight at the Civic Center. Her biggest worry is "remembering to breathe." It's not her first high-profile show. Last summer she opened for American Idol Kellie Pickler and for singer Josh Grobin.

"It was a good year for that. I've opened for some really good people."

And this summer is already starting out as a repeat of last summer. On June 26, she opens for Daryle Singletary during the St. Albans Riverfest. The opening slots in front of major and well-known artists are good, but she's not counting on instant success from playing ahead of two bona fide country superstars.

"It would be great to make some connections and get my music out there. I just finished my first album. I spent the better part of the winter working on it. I'm looking forward to letting people listen to it."

To contact staff writer Bill Lynch, use e-mail or call 348-5195.

If you go

Kenny Chesney and LeAnn Rimes with special guest Traci Ann Stanley, 7:30 p.m. today. Tickets \$57.50 to \$67.50. Available through Ticketmaster.com or at the box office. Call 345-1500.