

JENNIFER MCGILL

“THE ALL-NEW MICKEY MOUSE CLUB” STAR IS *UNBREAKABLE*

Technically speaking, Jennifer McGill is making her official worldwide debut as a singer/songwriter with the abundantly anticipated album *Unbreakable*. But even though she’s being tagged a “new artist” for the very first time knocking unashamedly at the door of 40 while insisting you’re “never past your prime of purpose,” this is far from her first foray into entertainment.

What started as almost a clean sweep of nearly 50 pageant victories from age seven in a small Texas town quickly evolved into seven seasons in Orlando on the Disney Channel’s wildly popular “The All-New Mickey Mouse Club” in the late ‘80s well into the ‘90s, which she describes as a sort of “‘Saturday Night Live’ for kids” featuring interviews, skits, variety show-styled razzle dazzle, and of course, loads of singing. A quick internet search shows her performing alongside a slew of internationally renowned stars, and throughout a real time conversation, she just as casually mentions how Michael Jackson used to visit the set as a major fan of *their* show or the time when Celine Dion helped calm her nerves prior to an inauguration performance for President Bill Clinton at the Kennedy Center.

Indeed, McGill’s experiences of sharing stages with New Kids On The Block, Boyz II Men and Brian McKnight (and that’s just a few of the guys with ‘b’s’ in their names) more than speaks for itself. Yet in spite of the spotlight burning bright for so long, the transition to instantaneous adult fame didn’t happen quite like she had hoped, let alone to the stratospheric degrees of fellow Mouseketeers Justin Timberlake, Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Ryan Gosling, Keri Russell and JC Chasez.

“Most of the kids who stayed in the limelight went to New York or L.A. to pursue their careers wholeheartedly and I wound up going to college,” recalls McGill, who studied acting at NYU and also maintained a steady roster of burgeoning talent as a vocal coach. “By the time I was 21 or 22 with a pending Capitol Records deal, I was told I sounded ‘too old’ or that I spoke ‘too well’ or didn’t resonate with the bubblegum pop movement that was going on at the time. No one ever said I was bad at singing, just that I didn’t look right or fit into categories that were completely out of my control. But I believe I am going to be a better artist now than I would’ve been then. I was an empty vessel who didn’t know who I was. I was talented, but my character wasn’t developed yet.”

Though McGill can now look back with the perspective of experience and strength found from reclaiming her childhood faith, which she so eloquently expresses throughout the spine-chilling “What I Know Now” on *Unbreakable*, such an empowering approach took much of her twenties and into her early thirties to navigate. Sure, she was always thrilled when one of her friends blew up into a superstar, but it only made her want a personal taste of the pie all the more. Those feelings of insecurity and inadequacy

multiplied after her unconditionally supportive mother suddenly died of a heart attack when she and McGill were having lunch (on Father's Day no less!) sending her increasingly fractured life into an absolute tailspin.

"My mother passed away when I was 24, and when she was gone, I was super lost," admits McGill. "I became even more lost, angry and isolated to the point where I didn't feel like anything mattered anymore without her being there. I lost my motivation, and by 30, I had dug myself into a really painful spiritual hole with bad relationships and lots of the typical 'rock star' trappings, only without the fame."

In an unexpected twist of fate, or more realistically, a dose of divine intervention, Orlando came calling once again. McGill started performing in the Walt Disney World live show "American VYBE" at Epcot Center – under the direction of famed "Pitch Perfect" arranger Deke Sharon. She also was hired to perform at "The Holy Land Experience" theme park, only this time it was for a show centered around faith. Her time there served as the catalyst for helping McGill get back on course, even going so far as to become a worship leader at a local church.

"Hardly anyone at 'The Holy Land Experience' started their career as a child and I had a much further start on singing, dancing and acting, but those were not the most important things for the audience," McGill ponders. "We were there to present the message of God through music and dramatic ministry. Sure, I had sung for offertories, weddings and funerals at church, but this was a whole different type of situation of acting out scenes from the Bible and I quickly got wise enough in the spirit to understand it was an honor and responsibility."

After her time there wrapped, McGill bounced between Nashville and New York, eventually settling in Music City and landing an equally unique role as a lead teacher and cast member in a live event called "Bravehearted Boys: The Superhero Experience" (geared toward pre-teen boys and their families. It was there where she met future manager Ann-Riley Caldwell of Lifetime Impact Management (lifetimeimpactgroup.com) who asked the entertainer to write a script (another career first) for the companion program "Bravehearted Girls: the Warrior Princess Quest," which naturally led to the pair's collaboration on "Freedom Fighters: Live Fearless" (www.jointhefreedomfighters.com) geared towards the entire family.

Gleaning inspiration from her many previous projects (and not all that different from the "MMC"), Freedom Fighters is a variety-styled show stacked with action, entertainment and personal anecdotes meant to encourage pretty much all ages in matters of faith. It's also slated to be the subject of a companion book by McGill at the tip of 2018, but before fully embarking upon that adventure, it's time to share the somewhat unexpected *Unbreakable* album with the world.

"Originally I was writing songs for the show with themes of encouragement, inspiration and strength, but the songs started shaping up to be a cohesive solo album, even though that wasn't the intention," she asserts. "*Unbreakable* is more of its own powerful

message, identifying a true extension of me than what we thought it was going to be in the beginning and I can definitely see God as part of this progression. I never thought I'd have a chance to make a full-length album after it didn't work out the first time around, let alone have it drop right after I turn 40!

Continues McGill: "So many of us put borders on ourselves and I think for women especially there's this idea that you're past your expiration date when you hit a certain age, which in my case was only compounded with the celebrity comparisons I used to put on myself. This album paints a picture of old hurts and old mistakes, but also coming out on the other side and not just surviving but thriving. Hopefully I'll be able to inspire and encourage others because there's an element in every song that reminds us we're not battling alone."

Perhaps it's only fitting that the powerhouse title track serves as the lead single with its figurative setting right at the end of a battle as a valiant McGill stands as the ultimate victor. That very mentality is further illustrated in an epic, larger-than-life music video filmed over 14 hours in a blazing hot desert where the singer battles a real life, completely unscripted sandstorm with grace and poise.

Fans of Kelly Clarkson, Pink, classic Mariah Carey and really any soulful pop diva with a mighty voice will be quick to gravitate towards *Unbreakable*, which also includes production from GRAMMY Award winning producer Jeff Savage, Jeff Bohannon and Michael Whitaker, plus mixing by multiple GRAMMY Award winner Paul Salveson. In an additional example of redemption (albeit also completely unplanned) in the relationship department, McGill and Bohannon (former high school pals) recently tied the knot and settled into a scenic apartment with an accompanying studio and even a little "fur baby"!

"This is definitely the story of a girl who slipped through the cracks on so many levels, but after so much pain and rejection from a multitude of situations in my life, I'm finally at a place where I'm 'Fearless,'" as one of the bold songs on the current collection so proudly proclaims. "Setting those situations to cool, fun pop songs is the best way I know to help others and hopefully I can save other people the time so they don't have to learn what all that is like on their own. I am the embodiment of a warrior princess. I come from pageant royalty and now I'm this 'Freedom Fighter' who found that when I finally gave up any dreams or need for fame is when those opportunities starting coming back to me. After I let it all go and started a period of growth and rebuilding, I got another chance and now it's the right time to get that message across."

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