

Cadence Canada

Country Music's Newest Sensation Has the Biggest Heart

By

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Most people might equate turning 18 with high school graduation, newfound freedom, or anticipation about college. For Tenille, it also marked the culmination of a series of events and circumstances that led to her being crowned country music's latest sensation, with her debut album *Real* landing her a nomination for Female Artist of the Year 2011 from Canadian Country Music Association Awards—the youngest ever nominee—and a 2012 Alberta Country Music Association Award, also for Female Artist of the Year, to seal the deal.

“That was so insane! I will never forget that phone call last year, hearing that my name was among four other ladies that I've been looking up to for so long,” she says in a phone interview with Cadence.

“Some of these ladies are Canadian female icons I grew up being immensely inspired by, and being next to those names was a really huge honour. It's an incredible family feel that the Canadian country music has and I'm so proud and honoured to be a part of it.”

But Tenille's passion for music is almost overshadowed by an even greater passion . . . for people. This young woman is also the force behind “Big Hearts for Big Kids,” an annual music fundraiser targeted at [raising money](#) for Sunrise House, a youth [emergency shelter](#) in her native Grande Prairie, Alberta.

“I had heard of Sunrise House when I was thirteen,” she says. “And I remember hearing about these kids that were the same age as me, in my own community, that didn't have safe places or homes, and how many of them needed sheltering. And I really wanted to be able to do something about it. Now, with the passion for music, I was able to go around asking for supporters for this project, and we brought in some incredible musicians for a music fundraiser and made a huge difference for the shelter. It was a huge, life-changing experience watching that community come together like that.”

That first concert in 2010 raised enough to effectively [save](#) Sunrise House, the only emergency youth shelter north of Edmonton, from closing. Over the past three years, the annual concerts have collectively raised over \$194,000 to support the continued existence of Sunrise House. Her efforts were recently rewarded, as she was selected to receive the CCMA 2012 Slaughter Music Humanitarian Award, at a ceremony on September 8 in Saskatoon.

This is not the only charitable cause dear to her heart, however. She has been involved in fundraising efforts for Slave Lake, Haiti, Canadian Cancer Relays, and Wounded Warriors Foundation. She also spent much of her summer this year at the Tim Horton's Children's Ranch in Kananaskis, Alberta.

“That was something I heard about this summer, so I just wrote them a letter and asked if there was anything they needed help with, that I could maybe be a part of it,” she says. “They ended up having us come out for, I think, ten-week sessions, and being with the kids from the very beginning to the end of their stay. It's so inspiring watching them grow and change over the weeks. The kids are really phenomenal here, so inspiring.”

This is not her only source of inspiration. Tenille credits her big extended family as a support system that allows her to pursue her dreams of music and giving back to the community.

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“My family is amazing. I really couldn’t do it without their support. They mean so much to me and have always been behind this musical crazy journey from the very beginning,” she says. “Their support and strength and love is definitely what keeps me real, and I’m so grateful I have all my grandparents, and aunts and uncles and cousins, and especially my parents that are always there, on the road or coming out to shows, rain or shine. They’re an extremely supportive family and I’m really grateful.”

Family also serves as direct influence on her music and songwriting. Case in point: with her latest single, “Starts With You,” Tenille says was inspired by the strong bonds of love she saw in couples around her, from her parents and grandparents, to aunts, cousins, and friends.

“I’m really excited about it, had a blast recording that in Nashville, and . . . it’s one of the first new tracks off my new album. It’s kind of me being inspired by people in my life, couples I admire in my life.”

When it comes to her songwriting and growth as an artist, she says the people she works with at Royalty Records, where she was signed at the age of 17, also inspire her.

“It’s been amazing. [They are] huge mentors and really, really involved, with tons of opinions and words of advice, and I really trust and admire them. It’s so wonderful working with them.”

With everything that’s happened, it might be expected that Tenille might want to slow down and reflect, but she says she is just getting started.

“In the next year I’m planning on heading out on a school tour. I’m really excited about it,” she says. The rest of the summer, she plans to finish off with more visits to the Kananaskis ranch, as well as perform at a number of fall music festivals. She also plans to head back to Nashville to finish off her next album and work on preparing to tour for that album, not to mention the continual growth and discovery on the musical path she finds herself.

“I’m really excited about it,” she says. “It’s been an amazing couple of years, and I’m really looking forward to the next little while.”

If the positive response to her music from her fans and the industry itself are any indication, then so are they. about film on her blog and more recently at NextProjection.com. When not listening to music, she is most likely humming it under her breath. She also reads way too much.