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INSIDE

Singer Goes From Online To on Tour

- The music of Ingrid Michaelson, a Staten Island singer-songwriter, started out on MySpace and went on to be played on "Grey's Anatomy." Now, she is selling out concerts in the city. Page B2.



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On the Internet, Singing Her Way From Obscurity to Fame

By DEVAN SIPHER

Cinderella is alive and well and living on Staten Island.

Ingrid Michaelson, a 28-year-old singer-songwriter whose self-produced album "Girls and Boys" reached No. 2 on the iTunes pop chart, is enjoying an enchanted transformation as a recording artist.

Ms. Michaelson's climb out of obscurity started, as is so often the case these days, on the Internet. Now she is known to many "Grey's Anatomy" fans for her quirky, heartfelt songs that were featured over the past year on the ABC television series. After a cross-country music tour, she is performing on Wednesday at the Bowery Ballroom in Manhattan, and she pointed out that the concert sold out a month ago without any advertising. (She has added a concert on Feb. 15 at Webster Hall.)

Not bad for someone who, until May, was teaching in an after-school theater program in the Stapleton neighborhood of Staten Island, where she still lives with her parents, a dog and a pet rabbit in the house she has inhabited since she was born.

"It's so uncool, it's cool," said her mother, Elizabeth Egbert, the executive director of the Staten Island Museum.



BRENDAN MCDERMID/REUTERS

Ingrid Michaelson, 28, who has lived in the same house all her life, is playing a sold-out concert in Manhattan on Wednesday.

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Ms. Michaelson has inherited her mother's dry wit, which she combines with youthful enthusiasm and a penchant for funky eyeglasses. "Apparently my glasses make me sound just like Lisa Loeb," she deadpanned, alluding to articles that compared her to Ms. Loeb, a well-known singer.

Ms. Michaelson began her music career in 2002 as a barista at the Muddy Cup, a coffee bar and performance space in Stapleton, where she performed weekly. By 2003, she had produced her first album, "Slow the Rain," and was playing at the Bitter End in Manhattan.

She called those shows a sobering experience. "I learned pretty quickly that just because you're playing at a good venue doesn't mean people are going to come see you," she said.

So she decided to throw caution to the wind, or, more specifically, to the Internet. She com-

A Staten Islander on tour and writing for 'Grey's Anatomy.'

pleted "Girls and Boys" in 2006 and loaded the music onto a MySpace page, where it caught the attention of Lynn Grossman, the owner of Secret Road, a music licensing and artist management company in Los Angeles.

"I listened to her song 'Breakable' about 40 times in a row, and I completely fell in love with the song," Ms. Grossman said, referring to a surprisingly buoyant song about human fragility.

Ms. Grossman's visceral reaction to the material astonished her. After years in the music in-

dustry, she said, she had considered herself desensitized. "It's really rare when something pierces through," she said.

So she immediately contacted Ms. Michaelson, pledging to get a song on "Grey's Anatomy," which was Ms. Michaelson's dream.

Yet Ms. Michaelson remained skeptical. "You get so many false promises from people that you don't expect anything to happen," she said.

But things did happen. And fast. Old Navy chose her song, "The Way I Am," for a sweater commercial. VH1 selected her for its artist discovery program, making her the first unsigned artist to appear on the channel. And radio stations, including WPLJ-FM (95.5) in Manhattan, added her songs to their play-

lists.

"I had a three-year plan, and we achieved all those goals in 10 months," Ms. Grossman said. As for "Grey's Anatomy," the series used not one but three of the songs from Ms. Michaelson's album. Then the producers took the unusual step of asking her to try writing something specifically for the show.

She grabbed the opportunity and created "Keep Breathing," a song that juxtaposes a plaintive melody with deceptively simple lyrics. "I like to say a lot in a very small amount of words," Ms. Michaelson said.

The song played through the closing minutes of the season finale in May, with the last line, "All we can do is keep breathing," repeating incessantly over layers of reverberating percus-

sion and instrumentation.

"I love songs that have tension, tension, tension, and then release," Ms. Michaelson said. "We feel it in our bodies. We hold in the tension, and then we release and exhale."

After a whirlwind year, this might be a good time for Ms. Michaelson to exhale. But that's easier said than done. The music business is notoriously unpredictable, and she is all too aware that her fairy tale success story did not happen by the book.

"I worry this is all going to disappear in a few months, and I'll have to wait tables again," she said. "I get anxiety-ridden, and I can't relax."

She took a breath and added, "I should sing my own songs to myself."