

## Taylor Swift: Superstar Songwriter

Taylor Swift has sold albums by the millions, filled stadiums with clamoring fans, and harvested bushels of awards and honors. She has become such a celebrity that it's easy to forget that her initial success was based on her talent as a songwriter.

Swift doesn't forget. "Songwriting is my favorite part of my job," she said. "I would not be a singer if I wasn't a songwriter. I wouldn't want to stand on a stage and sing something someone else wrote."

Born December 13, 1989, in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania, Swift is the daughter of a stockbroker dad and a stay-at-home mom who once worked as a marketing executive. Swift showed an early gift for writing, recording her thoughts in journals and discovering a love for poetry as she tried "to figure out the perfect combination of words, with the perfect amount of syllables, and the perfect rhyme to make it completely pop off the page."

Aspiring to be a country artist, Swift, at age eleven, persuaded her parents to bring her to Nashville, where she tried unsuccessfully to attract the interest of music producers. She returned home and realized, "I need to figure out a way to be different." She took up the guitar and put her poetry skills to work writing songs.

Her family moved to the Nashville area when Swift was fourteen, and within six months, she became the youngest songwriter at industry giant Sony/ATV's Nashville office, where she found herself collaborating with top songwriters.

"I didn't want anyone to walk out of the meeting thinking, 'I wrote a song for a kid today,'" she recalled. "So, I would walk in with ten or fifteen almost-finished songs. Or with developed ideas—finished melodies or choruses."

In 2005, Swift signed a recording contract with Big Machine, and a year later, she released her self-titled debut album. Her first five albums would go multi-platinum. She has won multiple Grammys, and both the Country Music Association and the Academy of Country Music have voted her Entertainer of the Year.



Swift's songs have been praised by critics and by the songwriting community as well. "Swift has already written enough great songs for two or three careers," *Rolling Stone* wrote when her fifth album, *1989*, debuted in 2014. By the time she turned twenty-three, Swift had been named Songwriter/Artist of the Year a record six times by the prestigious Nashville Songwriters Association International.

Swift's intensely personal lyrics—mostly about love, found and lost—are the basis for much of her songs' appeal. "The number one priority in my life," she said, "is figuring out how to process what I'm feeling and translate it into musical form."

Though she first staked her claim with pop-infused country music, Swift crossed over into pop with *1989*. Some critics consider her work original enough to transcend genres.

As Swift sits on the crest of a tidal wave of popularity, she knows superstardom rarely lasts a lifetime. She's not worried: "When I'm forty and nobody wants to see me in a sparkly dress anymore, I'll be, like: 'Cool, I'll just go in the studio and write songs for kids.' It's looking like a good pension plan."

**Sources:** *American Songwriter*, *Encyclopedia of Country Music*, *Marie Claire*, *New York Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Scholastic.com*, *The Washington Post*

### LISTEN:

"Love Story"	"Our Song"
"Mean"	"Shake It Off"
"Mine"	"You Belong with Me"

### READ:

*Taylor Swift: The Whole Story* by Chas Newkey-Burden (HarperCollins Publishers, 2013): For ages 11 and older, the book traces Swift's rise to fame.