

TAYLOR SWIFT: SUPERSTAR SONGWRITER

Taylor Swift is an international superstar who 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 success is based on her talent as a songwriter.

Swift hasn't forgotten. "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 displayed an early talent 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, eleven-year-old Swift persuaded her parents to bring her to Nashville, where she tried, unsuccessfully, to attract the interest of music producers. She returned home, but the experience taught her a valuable lesson. "I need to figure out a way to be different," she realized. So, she learned to play 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 first of nine multi-platinum studio albums. She has won multiple Grammys and been named Entertainer of the Year by both the Country Music Association and the Academy of Country Music. Swift's songs have been praised by both critics and fellow songwriters. "Swift has already written enough great songs for two or three careers," observed *Rolling Stone* when her fifth album, *1989*, debuted in 2014. By the time she turned twenty-three, Swift had been

Continued on back

LISTEN

"Love Story," "Our Song," "Shake It Off," "Invisible String," "Would've, Could've, Should've," "New Romantics"

TAYLOR SWIFT: SUPERSTAR SONGWRITER (CONTINUED)

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 is figuring out how to process what I’m feeling and translate it into musical form,” she said. Though she first staked her claim with pop-infused country music, Swift crossed over into pop with *1989*, even as some critics consider her work original enough to transcend genres.

In 2019, the company that had released Swift’s first six albums was sold, along with her master recordings. The following year, Swift began re-recording all of those albums, giving her ownership of the new versions of her songs and the power

to decide how the music is shared with the world. These “Taylor’s Version” albums include previously unreleased “From the Vault” tracks that feature collaborators like Chris Stapleton, Maren Morris, and Phoebe Bridgers. Between 2020 to 2022, Swift released three albums (*Folklore*, *Evermore*, and *Midnights*) and produced and directed six music videos. She has also ventured into other creative projects beyond music. She has acted in several movies, including *The Lorax*, *Valentine’s Day*, and *Cats*, and in 2021, she wrote and directed a short film set to the ten-minute version of “All Too Well.” As Swift sits at the crest of a tidal wave of popularity, she still 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.”

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Circle the phrase “harvested bushels of awards” in the first paragraph. Underline the clue words that help you understand the meaning of that phrase. Then, define it in your own words.

2. How was Swift’s first visit to Nashville at age eleven significant? Explain how this event marked a turning point in her life.

3. In your own words, describe Swift’s greatest impact on music. Highlight the evidence in the text that supports your claim.
