

Eye on the Island

By Mike Barry

Long Island's Taylor Dayne Sings Her Way Home

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To get a sense of Taylor Dayne's abundant vocal talent, and her ability to navigate the vagaries of show business, a quick visit to YouTube is in order.

You'll immediately see the music video from her first breakout hit, "Tell It to My Heart," and, digging deeper, an interview from Arsenio Hall's original talk show where Dayne, a Baldwin High School graduate, sat alongside actor Judd Nelson. Dayne would go on over the next quarter-century to produce 17 other Billboard Top 10 hits, earn three Grammy nominations, and remains to this day a compelling performer with a loyal fan base.

"You have to nurture it, you have to keep at it," Dayne said, when asked how she's survived in an industry that forced most of her contemporaries into other professions. "This was my dream."

Inducted last year into the Long Island Music Hall of Fame, Dayne is returning to the region on Sunday, Oct. 13, for a 7 p.m. concert at Hecksher Park, Huntington's Chapin Rainbow Stage. Her show comes on the Sunday evening of the Long Island Fall Festival (LIFF), and admission to Dayne's performance is free due to municipal and corporate sponsorship of the event. More on the LIFF can be found at www.lifallfestival.com.

"I'll be playing my hits," Dayne added, offering a preview of Oct. 13's playlist, and her voluminous catalog includes the ballad, "I'll Always Love You," a staple of wedding receptions, and "Love Will Lead You Back," a song which always gets significant play on FM radio stations.

"Tell It to My Heart," the song which launched her career in the late 1980s, also led Dayne to becoming the opening act for Michael Jackson's Bad tour when Jackson was at the height of his legendary career. The dance-pop music at which Dayne and Jackson excelled fell somewhat out of favor in the 1990s as so-called grunge rock bands, such as Nirvana, rose to prominence.

"You've got to ride certain things out," Dayne said, matter-of-factly. "I was always out there."

When discussing artists who influenced her, Dayne cites the late Karen Carpenter as well as Gloria Estefan and Joni Mitchell. Blood, Sweat and Tears, and Chicago were bands that had an impact on the rising star, whose natural vocal skills benefitted from classical training in her youth.

Now residing in southern California and the mother of 11-year-old twins, Levi and Astaria, Dayne is reaching a new generation of fans not only through live performances and radio, but also high-profile cable television appearances. Dayne, for example, was a judge earlier this year on The Food Network's "Cupcake Wars." The network asked her to fill that role after Dayne participated in The Food Network's "Celebrity Cook-Off" show in 2012 with Rachael Ray and Guy Fieri. Dayne's Team Rachael ended up winning the cook-off competition, and she believes there are parallels between the culinary and musical fields.

"I really started looking at food like I do music," she observed. "Ingredients are like song lyrics."

Television music show judgeships may be in Dayne's future, too. Rolling Stone magazine's readers, for instance, voted to have Dayne succeed Paula Abdul on "American Idol" when Abdul left that show a few years ago.

While that opportunity didn't materialize, Hollywood has used, and recognized, Dayne's talents in other ways. In 2011, she was given a Hollywood Music in Media Award (HMMA) for "Change the World." The song won Best Original Song/Score — Movie Trailer. It was used to promote the film adaptation of *The Help* and, yes, you can also check it out on YouTube.

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