

ENTERTAINMENT

Young singing sensation's star rising fast

By Deborah Kohen
Sentinel-Voice

At 15, local performing artist Serena Henry has racked up a veteran-like list of professional achievements, ranging from media appearances to winning awards and amassing other honors.

She sings, dances, acts and plays the piano, but her voice has been her ticket.

Having sung since age 2, she scored a coup when she was selected to tour the country as a special guest vocalist with R & B diva Gladys Knight. The high point of her trip: A White House performance for the First couple which aired on PBS last fall. Currently, she is performing nightly with Knight at the MGM Grand Hotel.

While living in New Jersey, Henry earned her first paycheck at age 10 for her role in the off-Broadway play "Come Down Burning." Though now a Las Vegas resident, she maintains her ties with her New York agent and treks back East often for auditions and performances. She also has an agent in Los Angeles.

Henry's voice has been a boon to her in other ways. It landed her a starring role in an animated HBO special, "White Wash," leading to a nomination for a Youth in Film Award, and has led to performances in television dramas and feature films including "NYPD Blue," "New York Undercover," "Clockers" and "Crooklyn."

Henry has dominated talent shows on both sides of the Mississippi, including winning over the notoriously critical crowd at Harlem's Apollo Theatre. She recently competed in the world-class International Modeling and Talent Association convention in Hollywood, Calif. and won this year's Omega Psi Phi Western Region Talent Hunt at the Riviera Hotel, which earned her the right to represent the region in the national showcase in New Orleans in July.

Henry has visited New Orleans twice before, with Knight, singing solos that garnered standing ovations in the 1995 and 1997 Essence Jazz Festivals.

All this, and she's only finishing her freshman year at the Las Vegas Academy of International Studies and Performing Arts.

Schoolwork has also opened avenues — when the academy did a one-night fund raiser earlier this year at the New York New York Hotel, she sang the lead and was given a television interview — and allowed her to broaden her artistic horizons. Singing with the academy's Madrigal choir, she has performed classical,



SERENA HENRY

renaissance and pop music. She supplements her singing regimen with instruction in ballet, modern dance and jazz dance.

Henry is an equally gifted student, earning induction into the National Honor Society. She hopes to attend Julliard, the nation's top music conservatory.

Henry's musical stylings will be on display through May 27 at the MGM, where she has solo spots in Knight's show.

She said she has had wonderful experiences traveling with the famous songstress and appreciates "everything she's done."

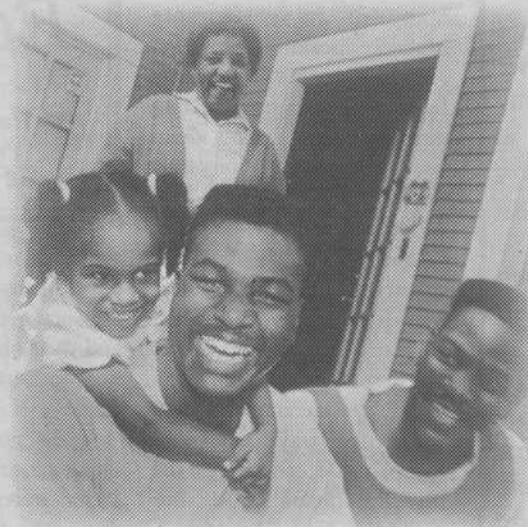
Henry encouraged other teens to "Always follow your dreams, stay positive, and stay away from drugs, gangs and violence."



When the opportunity arises to perform at outdoor special events, Serena Henry, left, enjoys sharing the spotlight with her brother, Brian Wiltshire and sister, Shanelle Henry. Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard

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