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## RISE OF AN ICON

Celebrating Taylor's sensational career, from her country debut to the chart-dominating, record-breaking superstar she has become.

Taylor Swift is an artist unlike any other. Over the past two decades she has forged her own path in the music industry, honing her skills to become one of the greatest songwriters and performers of all time. The Eras Tour is both a celebration of her musical evolution, and a reminder of how far she has come from that girl with a guitar and a dream, writing songs in her bedroom.

In this book, you can relive Taylor's inspiring story so far. Delve into her albums, track by track, and see how she became the cultural icon and force for good that we know today.



RISE OF AN ICON

FUTURE BOOKS

## RISE OF AN ICON





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CHAPTER 1

# BECOMING MISS AMERICANA







# BECOMING MISS AMERICANA

From a Christmas tree farm to the country music capital,  
discover Taylor's journey to break into the business



**B**orn on 13 December 1989 in Reading, Pennsylvania, Taylor Alison Swift came into the world destined for greatness. Her parents gave her the androgynous name Taylor (after the American singer-songwriter James Taylor) in the hope that it might further her chances of success. Even as a tiny newborn, a bright future was already in the works...

Taylor spent much of her childhood in Wyomissing, Pennsylvania. She lived with her parents, Scott and Andrea, and her younger brother, Austin, at the family Christmas tree farm. "I had the most magical childhood," Taylor told *Rolling Stone* in 2009, "Running free and going anywhere I wanted to in my head." The family had horses too, which Taylor rode competitively, but she, like many other little kids, was also obsessed with fairytales, Disney songs, and – of course, inevitably – with music.

Taylor's maternal grandmother, Marjorie Finlay, was an opera singer. The Swift family have said that Taylor shared many qualities with her, and it was Marjorie who inspired her granddaughter to become a singer, something Taylor reflected upon on *evermore*. During a 2014 interview with *Esquire*, Taylor described her grandmother as beautiful and graceful – "She'd get up and sing, and, of course, it was the perfect, beautiful operatic voice. Gorgeous soprano."

The Swifts are a very close family. Taylor describes her mother, Andrea Swift, as her "favourite person in the

world" and praises her for raising Taylor to be logical and practical in addition to shooting for the stars. Formerly a marketing executive, Andrea played a pivotal role in supporting her daughter as her career and fame snowballed, and helped to set up her daughter's MySpace page and website when Taylor's career was in its infancy. Taylor's former manager, Rick Barker, told *Entertainment Weekly* in 2008: "[Taylor's] mom and dad both have great marketing minds. I don't want to say fake it until you make it, but when you looked at her stuff, it was very professional even before she got her deal."

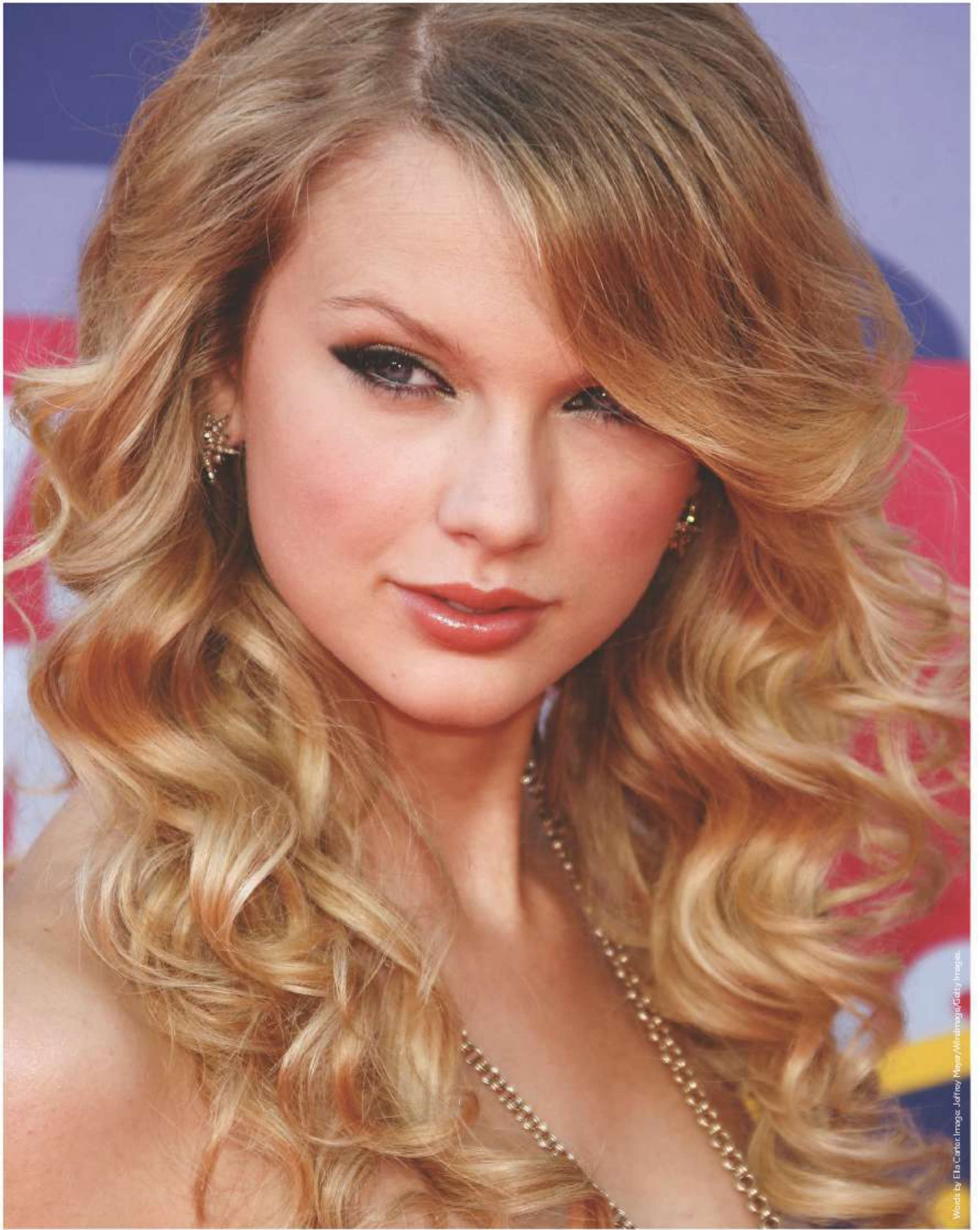
Taylor describes her father, Scott Swift, as "just a big teddy bear who tells me everything I do is perfect," also adding, "business-wise, he's brilliant." Yet when asked what it was like to manage their daughter's career, the Swifts are reported to have said that it was "just like soccer practice."

Supported by her family, as a youngster Taylor took to performing early. Andrea took her on regular trips to New York to see Broadway productions and she attended musical theatre classes. But it was singing that really became her passion. By the age of ten, she was singing at



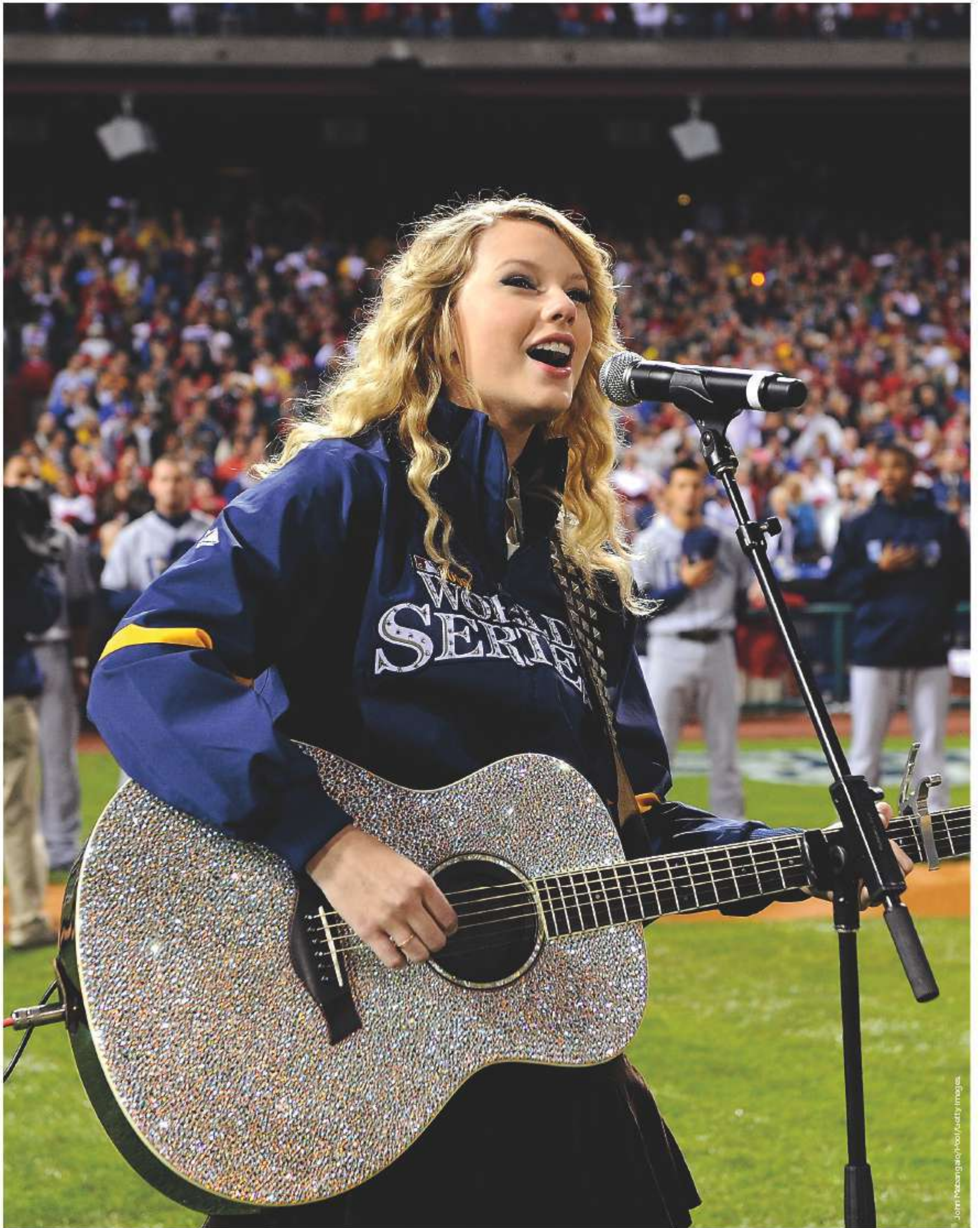
**RIGHT** An 18-year-old Taylor on the red carpet at the 2008 MTV Video Music Awards in Los Angeles, California.





Words by Ella Carter. Image by Jeffrey Mayer/WireImage/Getty Images.









local fairs and events. At the age of just 11, she performed 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at a Philadelphia 76ers basketball game, receiving a standing ovation at the end.

At first, Taylor and her mother would make regular trips to Nashville so that Taylor could put her work in front of the labels and producers of Nashville's Music Row. "I took my demo CDs of karaoke songs, where I sound like a chipmunk," Taylor recalled in her interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, "And my mom waited in the car with my little brother while I knocked on doors up and down Music Row. I would say, 'Hi, I'm Taylor. I'm 11; I want a record deal. Call me.'"

But when the phone wasn't ringing for her demos of cover songs, Taylor quickly realised that the way to make her mark would be to start writing original material.



**ABOVE** Taylor's childhood home in Wyomissing, PA, where the Swift family lived before moving to Tennessee.

**LEFT** A young Taylor performing the national anthem at a World Series game in 2008.

In the same *Entertainment Weekly* interview from 2008, Andrea Swift described the first time her 12-year-old daughter came across a 12-string guitar: "She thought it was the coolest thing." Taylor is famously stubborn and driven, and so even then this became a project to overcome and to prove that she was worthy of stardom. Her mother continued, "Of course we immediately said, 'Oh no, your fingers are too small.' Well, that was all it took. Don't ever say 'never' or 'can't do' to Taylor. She started playing it four hours a day."

Netflix's 2020 documentary, *Miss Americana*, explores Taylor's journey to stardom and offers a rare glimpse into her and her family's day-to-day lives. Footage of a young tween Taylor shows her performing at various events with the confidence of a seasoned pro, while other clips show her performing original songs at home on her guitar.

During one of these home video performances, a young Taylor introduces one original song by describing it as "about a girl who's just... different." She began writing songs by telling stories about her experiences and emotions, and it's a tradition that has continued throughout her expansive career. "I never felt like the kids in school were





“When Taylor was 14, the entire family made the pivotal decision to leave Pennsylvania and made a new life in Tennessee”



right about me when they’d say, ‘She’s weird. She’s annoying. I don’t want to hang out with her,’” Taylor explained in an interview with *Esquire* in 2014. “I always remember writing in my journal, saying, I just have to keep writing songs. I just have to keep doing this and someday, maybe, this will be different for me. I just have to keep working.”

A fiercely determined kid and a self-confessed perfectionist, this mantra would indeed become a reality. Taylor’s main inspiration for songwriting is rooted in country music, and her love for the genre was sparked when her parents took her to see LeAnn Rimes in concert at six years old.

From there, Taylor looked up to classic country singers such as Dolly Parton and Patsy Cline. She has said she was greatly influenced by “the great female country artists of the 90s”. Shania Twain was a huge source of inspiration, Faith Hill was her idol for everything, from music to fashion, and she admired The Chicks for their sheer attitude and their ability to play their own instruments. A whole host of other artists contributed to her melting pot of inspiration (she was and still is a huge Britney Spears fan), but it was through country that Taylor chose to make her mark on the music industry.

“Country music teaches you to work,” Taylor explained in the *Esquire* interview. “I’ve never been more proud to have come from a community that’s so rooted in songwriting, so rooted in hard work and in treating people well. It was the best kind of training.”

And hard work is precisely what Taylor and her family put in. At age 13, Taylor landed a spot on an artist development programme with RCA Records in Nashville, but this only lasted for a year. She decided to opt out of renewing the deal, as she was laser-focused on her dream of writing and recording her own material.

“It’s not a really popular thing to do in Nashville, to walk away from a major record deal,” Taylor admitted in an interview with *Entertainment Weekly* in 2007, “But that’s what I did, because I wanted to find some place that would really put a lot of time and care into this.” She continued, “I didn’t want to just be another girl singer. I wanted there to

be something that set me apart. And I knew that had to be my writing.”

It was this desire to write and perform original material that led her to become the youngest person to ever sign as a songwriter with Sony/ATV Publishing at the age of 14.

Spurred on by her ultra-determined goal, it became apparent to the Swift family that Taylor’s career needed more than just regular trips to the renowned Music City, a hub for artists and record labels, also known as ‘The Songwriting Capital of the World’. Her parents were adamant that they should support their daughter in her goal of becoming a recording artist, while at the same time offering her as ‘normal’ a life as possible. So when Taylor was 14, the entire family made the pivotal decision to leave their home on the Christmas tree farm in Pennsylvania and made a new life in Hendersonville, Tennessee – a town about 20 minutes north of Nashville.

Once fully immersed in the Nashville music scene, Taylor began working even harder to showcase her talent. At a writers’ round, where songwriters get together to perform their material, she met Liz Rose – one of Nashville’s songwriting heavyweights. Rose would go on to become Taylor’s co-writer for her early albums, and in an interview with *The Washington Post* in 2016, she described their collaborative sessions as “the easiest, funnest thing I [did] all week”. Such was Taylor’s flair for songwriting, Rose added, “The first time we wrote, I walked out and said, ‘I don’t know what I was doing there,’ she really didn’t need me.”

Nashville life afforded Taylor many of these crucial introductions into the industry that she loved. In addition to her songwriting collaborations, she continued to make CDs and demos and sent them out to labels in order to find the right platform to launch what would turn into an exceptional, award-winning career.



**RIGHT** “This is definitely the highlight of my senior year!” Taylor exclaimed when receiving the CMA Horizon Award in 2007.





Erin H. Boedley/Cosby Images

COUNTRY MUSIC ASSOCIATION AWARDS | TENNESSEE | 07 NOV 2007





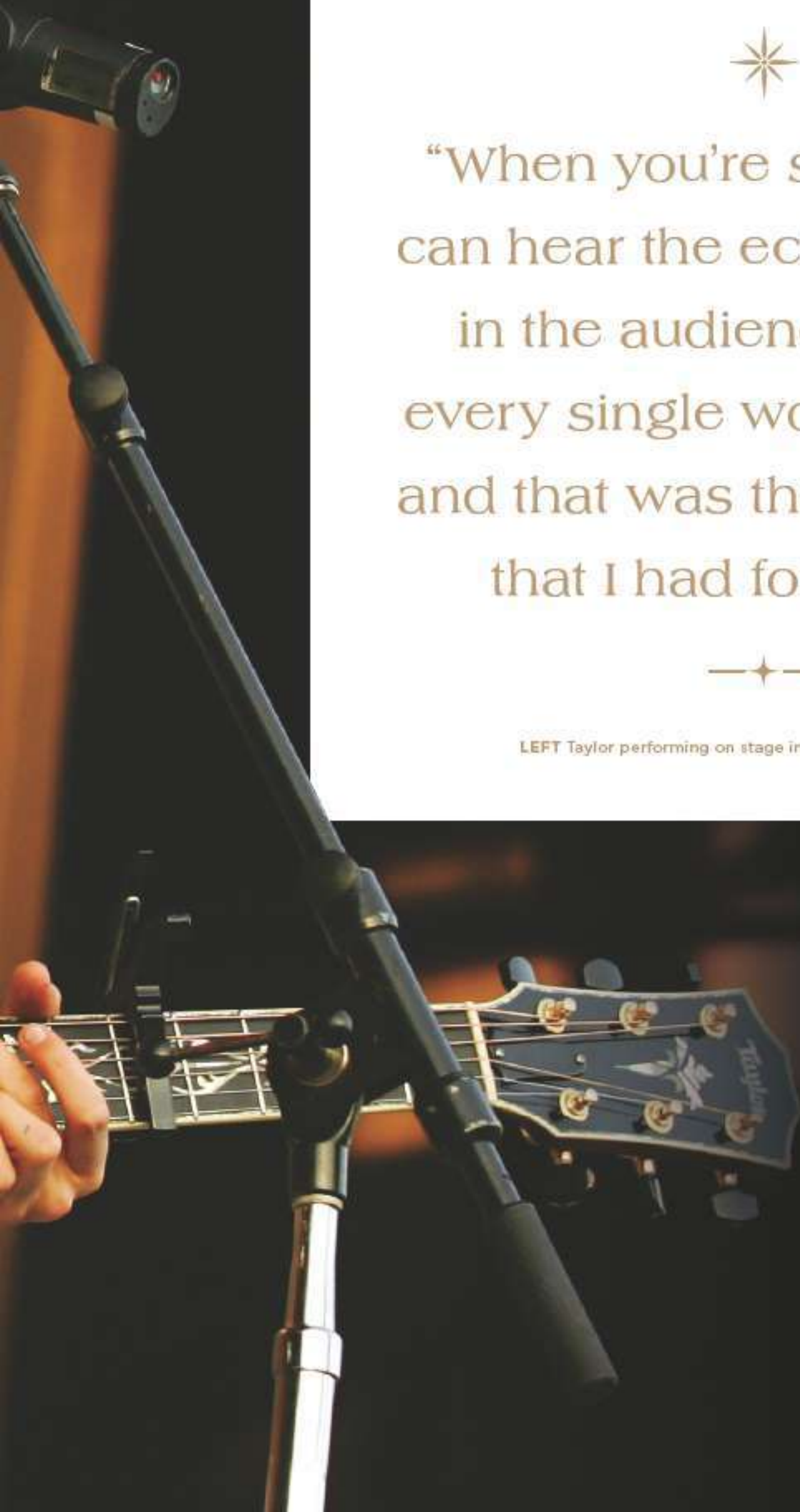




“When you’re singing, you can hear the echo of people in the audience singing every single word with you, and that was that big dream that I had for myself.”



LEFT Taylor performing on stage in Kansas City, 11 May 2007.





One such package landed on the desk of Scott Borchetta, a record executive who at the time was working for Universal Records. Talking on *Larry King Now*, Borchetta revealed how he went to see her perform at the Bluebird Cafe. An unassuming venue set in a strip mall outside downtown Nashville, the Bluebird Cafe is a music industry institution, where the 90 seats are filled night after night with people eager to hear artists perform original work. In November 2014, a 15-year-old Taylor Swift was one of these performers, and after her set, Borchetta met with her and her family.

They got on well, and despite offering to provide an intro to Universal Records, Taylor put her faith in Borchetta as he set up his own label – Big Machine Records. “I felt like I needed my own direction and the kind of attention that a little label will give you,” Taylor told *Entertainment Weekly* in 2007, “I wanted a record label that needed me, that absolutely was counting on me to succeed. I love that pressure.” The label would go on to support her through six albums, before a huge battle over Taylor’s master recording rights would eventually turn the relationship sour.

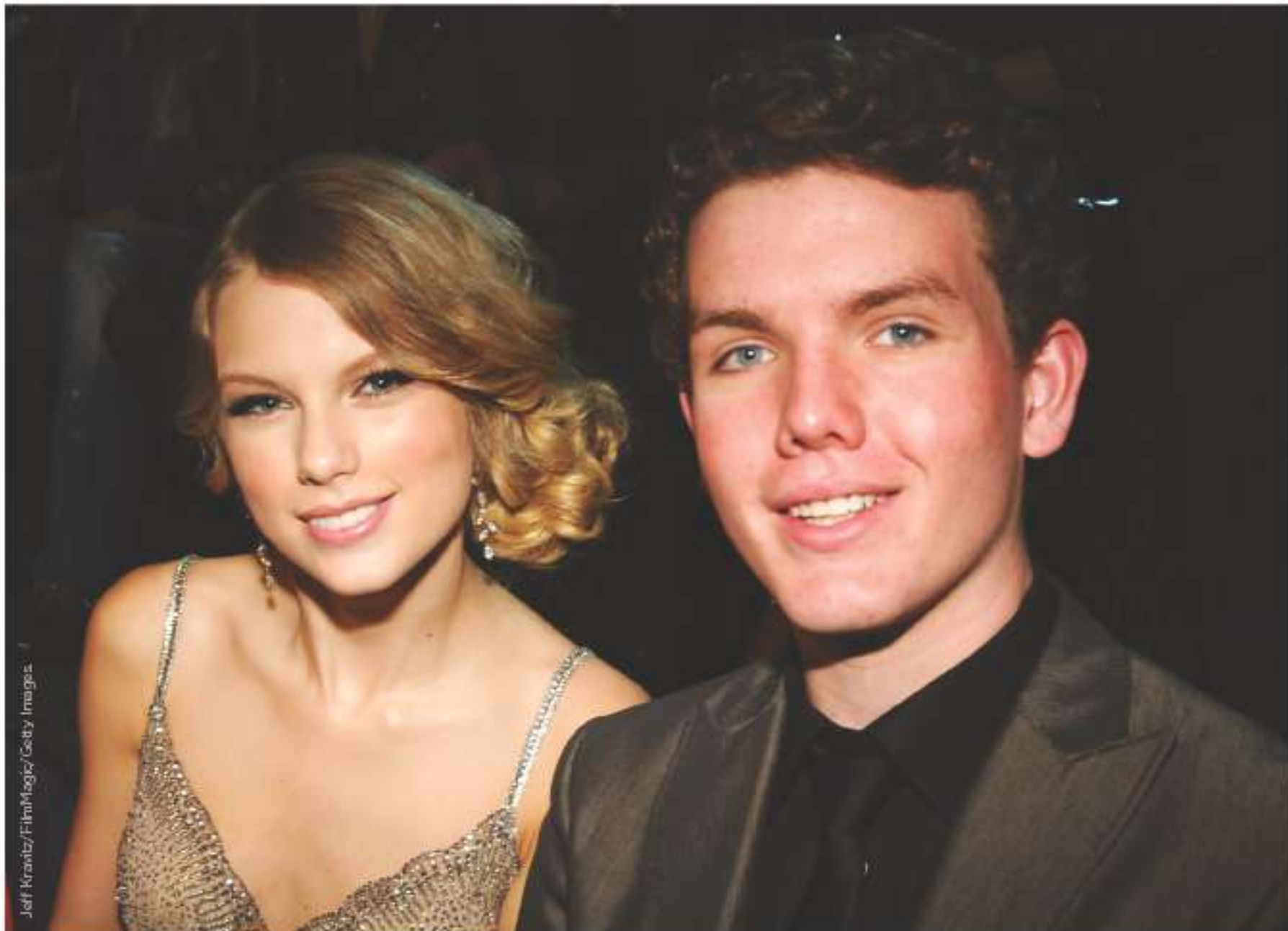
Under Big Machine, Taylor recorded her debut self-titled album, which launched on 24 October 2006. With 11 original tracks that she had either self-penned or co-written, five were released as singles – the first of which was ‘Tim McGraw’. Named after and inspired by the songs of one of her favourite country musicians, this first single was a great example of Taylor’s personal songwriting style. She confesses that she wrote it while thinking about her feelings for a boy she was dating at the time. Of the writing process, she admitted later that “the idea for this song came to me in math class. I just started singing to myself.”

Catchy and quintessentially Taylor, ‘Tim McGraw’ peaked at number six on the Country Charts and reached number 33 in the *Billboard* Hot 100, firmly rooting Taylor

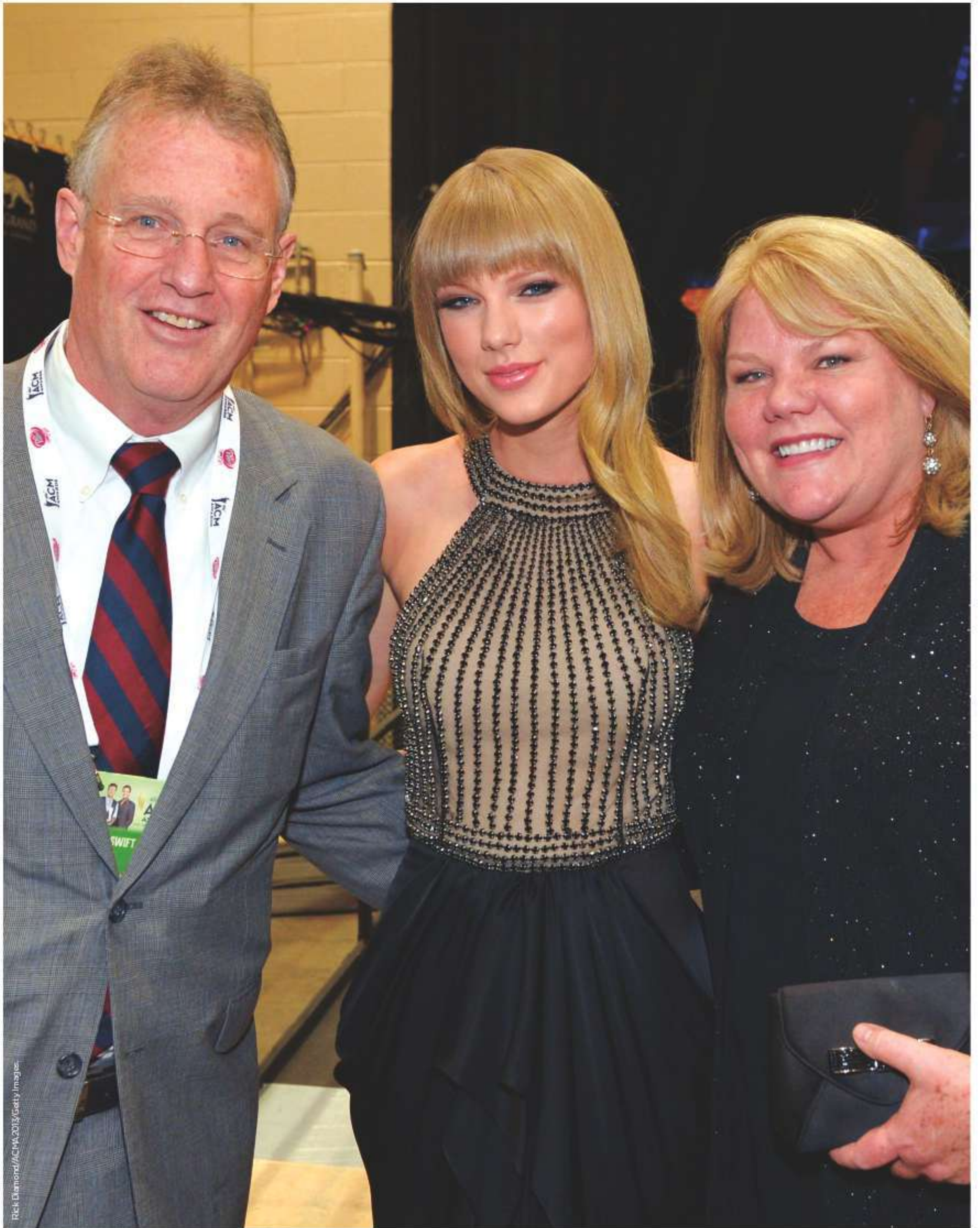


**RIGHT** Taylor pictured backstage with her mother and father in 2013. “My parents moved across the country so I could pursue a dream,” she reflected in a 2008 interview with *Blender*.

**BELOW** Taylor with her younger brother, Austin, in 2009.



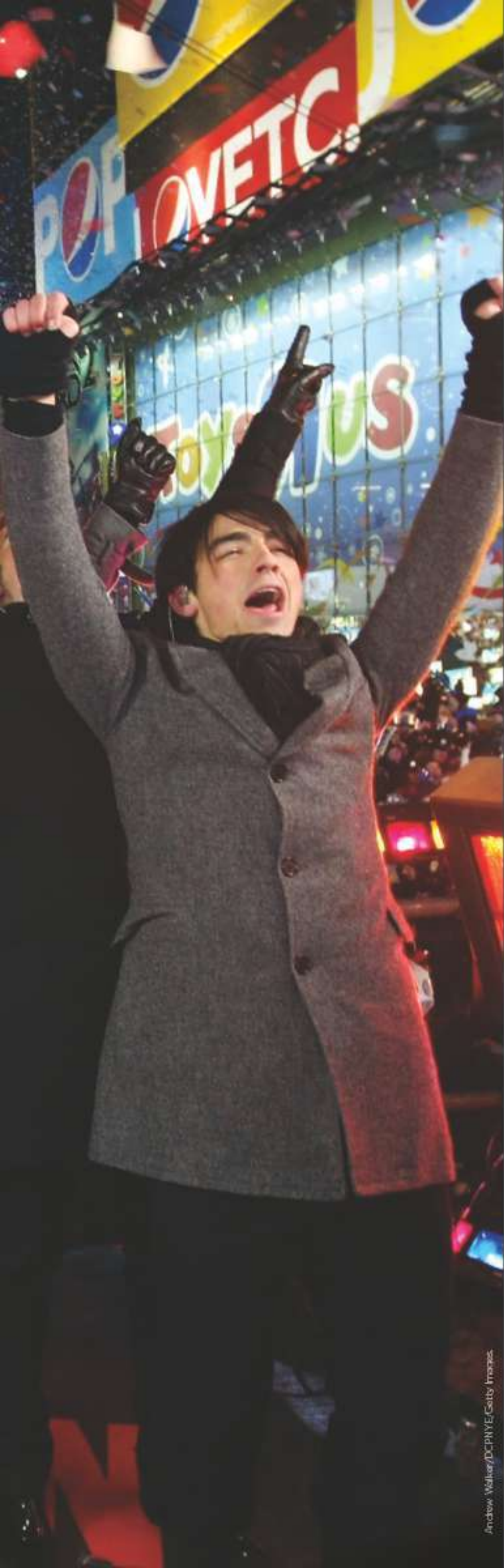












Andrew Walker/DCP/VE/Getty Images



“Throughout her early success, Taylor was capturing fans with her down-to-earth and occasionally goofy teenage realness”



as a promising young artist to watch. Effortlessly bridging the gap between country music and mainstream pop, by the end of 2007 Taylor’s eponymous debut record had gone platinum, selling over 1 million copies in the United States alone. She had the 19th best-selling album of the year and became the 10th best-selling female artist of the year – all without even having finished high school. After taking home the Horizon Award at the Country Music Association Awards in November 2007, Taylor famously exclaimed, “This is definitely the highlight of my senior year!”

Throughout all of this early success, Taylor was capturing fans with her down-to-earth and occasionally goofy teenage realness. With literally millions and millions of MySpace song streams, she was being herself online at a time when social media was in its infancy, and to her fans she was both accessible and relatable. “I’m just a teenager, you know?” she told *The Washington Post* in 2008. “I’m not going to try to act like some adult who has it all together and isn’t fazed at all by that.”

With the success of her debut album, Taylor began a huge touring schedule, opening the show for top country artists Faith Hill and Tim McGraw on their Soul2Soul II tour in 2007. While juggling performances and school work on the road, she was also writing new material, ideas already flowing for her next album. By the time she was 18, Taylor was making a living from music just like she’d always dreamed, and yet that was only the beginning of her incredible career to come.



**LEFT** Taylor celebrating with fellow celebrity guests on *Dick Clark’s New Year’s Rockin’ Eve 2009* with Ryan Seacrest.





“A lot of people ask me, ‘How did you have the courage to walk up to record labels when you were 12 or 13 and jump right into the music industry?’

It’s because I knew I could never feel the kind of rejection that I felt in middle school. Because in the music industry, if they’re gonna say no to you, at least they’re gonna be polite about it.”



RIGHT Taylor was determined from a young age and transformed her passion for music into a remarkably successful career – all while still just a teenager.







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