



Violin with a High

A violinist takes a funky dance step away from classical music.



A small crowd in sequined, painted, and feathered masks waits behind worn velvet-rope dividers at Provo's Velour Live Music Gallery. On the nearby stage sits a drummer, an electric guitarist, and a concert harpist. Stage left, a five-piece orchestra is also poised to play. Cameras are ready to roll.

The room erupts as Lindsey Stirling ('13) enters from stage right in Cleopatra eye makeup, leather corset, velvet bustle, and rhinestone belt, a purple electric violin strapped across her shoulder. Is she a medieval pirate, glam-rock Raggedy Ann princess? Stirling calls herself "a nerd with center-stage syndrome," but in front of this screaming crowd, she's a violin-sawing rock star.

Velour is one of several sets for Stirling's newest music video, a cover of *The Phantom of the Opera* theme. And if this video is anything like her previous ones, it is bound for millions of YouTube views. In just one year, Stirling's videos—more than a dozen original songs and several self-arranged covers—accumulated more than 60 million views. Her video *Crystallize* received more than 3 million hits within four days of its posting and became the most-watched video of the day in YouTube's music category.

The therapeutic recreation senior is unique enough as a dancing violinist, but her appeal goes deeper. Her videos show her rocking electronic and world music in New Zealand, Africa, and Provo. Sometimes she's costumed as a character



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from *Zelda*, sometimes she's sporting mismatched knee socks and her signature spiky "peacock" hairdo. Her dance moves—effortless moonwalk, backbends, and leg lifts—complement her wailing violin arpeggios and steep runs. There's nobody quite like her.

But Stirling almost missed out on learning the violin. Money was tight when she was little. When her older sister wanted to learn an instrument, their dad dragged his dusty trumpet out of the attic, saying, "If you want to play an instrument, this is all we've got."

Still, at 5, Stirling begged for violin lessons. Her parents could afford only a half-lesson. As Stirling recalls, "The teachers were like, 'I'm sorry, but a child isn't going to learn how to play... in 15 minutes a week.'" Luckily, they found a young teacher to take little Lindsey on.

In high school Stirling pushed the limits of her instrument. Playing in a rock band, she says, "was my first step away from classical music." In 2005 her self-composed violin-rock number won second in the national junior miss talent competition. Newspapers called her the first punk rock junior miss.

Then in 2010, after serving a mission to New York City, Stirling made the top 48 contestants on NBC's *America's Got Talent*. Sales of her subsequent debut iTunes album were feeble, but after posting her first music video on YouTube in 2011, Stirling says, "my music quadrupled in sales overnight." She was shocked. "YouTube did more for me than *America's Got Talent*. I realized there's something to this." People started paying attention to YouTube's "Epic Violin Girl"—many of her videos filmed by her boyfriend, media arts major Devin M. Graham ('10).

But Stirling isn't driven by millions of YouTube views and Facebook fans. She takes satisfaction in showing people that "there aren't limits... if you're not afraid to accept yourself for who you are."

"A lot of people have told me along the way that my style and the music I do... is unmarketable," says Stirling. "But the only reason I'm successful is because I have stayed true to myself."●

By Jacob F. Frandsen (BA '09)

Various pictures of Lindsey Stirling taken during her several music videos. To watch her videos, visit her YouTube channel: Lindsey Stirling

