

'American Idol' Carrie Underwood had a huge year

By Jon Bream
McClatchy-Tribune News

MINNEAPOLIS — Carrie Underwood spent last New Year's Eve hanging out with friends in her college town of Tahlequah, Okla. This New Year's Eve, a sold-out crowd of Minnesotans will pay as much as \$75 to hear her sing at a booze-free casino.

Talk about a meteoric rise. Underwood has had the fastest, and most consistent, start of any "American Idol" winner. In a year and a half, she went from small-town girl finishing her college degree in journalism to Billboard's No. 1 album of 2006 and the Country Music Association (CMA) female vocalist of the year.

Moreover, she chose the right format — country — where other Idols have focused on pop, rock or R&B. Not only is country her natural style, but it's a less crowded field that's starved for fresh female voices.

"The country music community has been so great to me," Underwood said with the congeniality you'd expect of a pageant winner. "They were glad to have someone representing country music to such a wide audience on 'American Idol.'"

Typically, the CMA's top female prize, like the Oscar for best director, goes to someone who has paid her dues.

"I've heard a lot of 'You deserve it' and I've heard a lot of (questioning) that I haven't paid my dues," the 23-year-old newcomer said by phone earlier this month. "It kind of hurts my feelings a little bit because nobody in the business went through what the contestants on 'American Idol' went through. That's a whole 'nother kind of dues-payin' right there."

"Being under that much stress when you're just a nobody — you don't even know what you're doing. It's very, very tough. You take your normal, everyday person who would like to sing and then you put them in such a high-pressure situation

where you're allowed to be critiqued in front of millions of people."

When her name was announced as the CMA winner, rival nominee Faith Hill was shown on camera mouthing "What?" The new champ wasn't aware of the flap until after the program ended. But feathers were quickly smoothed that night when Hill phoned Underwood to apologize in a 5- to 10-minute conversation.

"I felt so bad because Faith Hill is such a wonderful person and it was just a joke gone bad," Underwood said. "I know she's taken a lot of heat for it. I know she would never disrespect anybody like that."

She has won five Billboard Awards, including album of the year; was named best newcomer at the CMAs and breakthrough artist at the American Music Awards, and is up for best new artist at the Grammys on Feb. 11. But her biggest surprise is selling more than 4 million copies of her debut disc, "Some Hearts," released in November 2005.

"I just wanted my first album to do well enough where I could make a second one," she said with a giggle. "It definitely exceeded all my expectations."

Her debut single, "Jesus, Take the Wheel," went to No. 1, and is a Grammy finalist for song of the year. Underwood didn't write the tune, but its religious theme was a good fit for her image as wholesome, small-town sweetheart.

Then she threw a curveball with her third single, "Before He Cheats," an unexpectedly violent song about smashing the headlights and slashing the tires on the vehicle of her philandering boyfriend.

"When I first heard it, I wasn't sure if it would fit on the album, but I loved the song," said Underwood, who watched the sassily-sung track spend five weeks atop Billboard's country chart this fall. "It's fun to do something that's outside your box and play a character that's not like you. It's the most fun to perform onstage because there's just this vibe that people get and sing along,



Chris Carlson/AP

Carrie Underwood won five Billboard Music Awards in December. The newcomer also won the Country Music Association's female vocalist of the year award and is nominated for a best new artist Grammy.

And guys sing along."

The rookie has spent the year touring with Kenny Chesney and Brad Paisley and headlining a few of her own shows at fairs. She also managed to squeeze in one last college class at Northeastern State in Oklahoma — she was three credits short of her mass-communications degree, which she received in the spring.

If she wrote the story of Carrie Underwood, she said, her angle would be: "Small-town girl makes it big." Although she now lives (alone) in Nashville, she still sounds like an awestruck Okie, peppering her

conversation with "geez" and "awesome."

She describes herself as silly, talented, intelligent and hard-working. "I think I'm pretty boring," she said. "I don't have a glamorous lifestyle."

Unlike many previous "Idol" singers who have built recording careers, she's in no hurry to distance herself from the TV franchise. "They can call me 'American Idol' winner as long as they want to," she said.

Underwood stays in touch with "Al," in part because she is managed by 19 Entertainment, which also produces the show.

Shreveport director to shoot first feature

By Alexandyr Kent
akent@gannett.com

Shreveport native Jeffrey Goodman soon will begin shooting his first feature film after a year of fundraising and years of planning.

"The Last Lullaby" begins a 22-day shoot in Shreveport on Jan. 22. Its production budget is \$1.5 million.

Goodman remains tight-lipped about the cast, but he has hired producer David Koplan and a creative team.

Koplan produced "Chrystal," starring Billy Bob Thornton, and "Winter Passing," starring Ed Harris, Zooey Deschanel and Will Ferrell.

"Dave produced two movies at our exact budget level, and two movies in the South. He was able to attract A-level talent to these very small films and actually get them out there," Goodman said. "I can't think of a more perfect candidate."

Other hires include cinematographer Richard Rutkowski, production designer Elizabeth Mickle, costume designer Erika Munro, first assistant director Yann Sobezynski and line producer Matt Leonetti Jr.

Goodman is confident the team can create a film that measures up to their hopes. Many have worked together on other movies.

"I'm trying to create as much of a team atmosphere as I can," Goodman said. He later added, "What my job right now is to get all of these people into my head and let them

On the Web

For more information about movies shot locally, log on to Alexandyr Kent's Louisiana Movies blog at <http://louisianamovies.blogspot.com>.

know what it is I'm seeing, what it is I'm thinking. ..."

While Goodman looks forward to focusing on the creative side of making the feature, he still works long days to make sure all the details are in place.

"The process of selling never ends," he said. "You're selling to raise the money, you're selling to get people to let you use their locations, you're selling to crew members to get them to work on your film, and you're selling to get actors to work on the project. And, once again, you're selling it to a distributor to get them to buy it."

"The Last Lullaby" is co-written and based on a short story by Max Allan Collins. Collins wrote the graphic novel, "Road to Perdition," which was turned into a major movie starring Tom Hanks, Paul Newman and Jude Law.

The screenplay for "The Last Lullaby" is co-written by Peter Biegen.

Goodman has raised funds from more than 40 Shreveport-area investors and one in Texas.

TODAY'S CALENDAR

ICE: A RED RIVER REVEL HOLIDAY EVENT
When: 10 a.m.-8 p.m.
Where: Pavilion at Festival Plaza, Spring and Crockett streets, Shreveport.
Featuring: ice skating.
Admission: \$8, per person for two hours, including skates; \$6 each for groups of 10 or more.
Info: (318) 424-4000 or www.redriverrevel.com.

FESTIVAL OF TREES
When: 10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Where: Ark-La-Tex Antique & Classic Vehicle Museum, 601 Spring St., Shreveport.
Featuring: 18 various Christmas trees, vintage costumes, antique and classic vehicles and an 1800s sleigh; historic building decked out

for the holidays; 8-foot Santa and featuring a "Louisiana Holidays — A Time to Celebrate" theme. Closed Sundays, Christmas and New Years.
Admission: \$6, adults; \$5, seniors and military; \$4, youth; free, children 5 and younger; group discounts available.
Info: (318) 222-0227 or www.carmuseum.org.

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS SUPPORT GROUP
When: 6 p.m.
Where: Willis-Knighton Hospital Steen Hall Kerlin Memorial Conference Center, 2611 Greenwood Road, Shreveport.
Featuring: Brenda Humphries will talk about massage therapy.
Admission: free; reservations requested.
Info: (318) 212-8225.

BRIEFS

Karpeles will open two new exhibits

The Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum is opening two new exhibits in January. "Einstein," which features Einstein's notes and documents on his Theory of Relativity, as well as the original publication and translation of his equation E=mc², will be on display through March. An opening reception will be held from 1-3 p.m. Saturday.

The January artist at Karpeles will be Dr. Hank Stoer, a retired pathologist, who became a full-time artist after his retirement in 1985. A reception honoring Stoer will be held from 1-3 p.m. Jan. 13.

The museum, located at 3201 Centenary Blvd., Shreveport, is part of a national chain specializing in the preservation and display of original historically significant documents and manuscripts. Hours are 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday.

Elvis' Angels Fan Club to mark singer's birthday

Elvis' Angels Fan Club will hold its third annual birthday party for Elvis from 2-4 p.m. Sunday at the Municipal Auditorium, 705 Elvis Presley Ave., Shreveport.

Admission is free and cake and punch will be served.

Tours of the auditorium will be held from 1-4 p.m. at a charge of \$5 each and the gift shop will be open.

Elvis' Angels, the largest licensed fan club in Louisiana, is celebrating its 10th year.

Film industry will be topic of talk

A program titled "Fantasy, Fun &

Editor and paparazzo dig deep in 'Dirt'

By Bill Keveney
Gannett News Service



FX/AP

Courtney Cox stars as Lucy Spiller, tabloid editor, in "Dirt."

LOS ANGELES — She blackmails stars with sex tapes and photos. He'll shoot their close-ups in the ICU or even the morgue.

"Dirt" (FX, Tuesdays, 9 p.m.) describes what tabloid editor Lucy Spiller (Courteney Cox) and paparazzo Don Konkey (Ian Hart) dig up. Perhaps surprisingly, they're not entirely covered in mud.

"At the time this project came up, it was hard for me to imagine writing a sympathetic paparazzo," creator Matthew Carnahan says.

As the drama developed, however, Carnahan and his fellow writers realized that much of Hollywood, not just the tabloids, is complicit in today's celebrity frenzy. And Konkey and Spiller evolved as "dysfunctional human beings," the former dealing with schizophrenia and guilt and the latter "this perfect porcelain object with the tiniest hairline crack."

That crack will widen as Spiller oversees two magazines, the tabloid Dirt (an actual publication has the Dirt name) and a more established and upscale publication, Now.

"Lucy is a strong woman," Cox says of a character who talks and acts macho, even throwing a lover out of bed after sex. "She uses people left and right."

Konkey's hallucinogenic departures provide "a great way to hold a crazy mirror up to celebrity culture," Carnahan says. The character's vulnerability also reveals the humanity in Spiller, an otherwise

hard-boiled, hard-charging Type A.

"She does have a heart. It's in there somewhere," Cox says during a break from shooting at the Paramount Studios set. Konkey is "the best photographer out there, and he's the most loyal person to her. They really do need each other."

The character bond is evident during a scene in Spiller's office where Konkey spills details of a youthful trauma and Spiller calms him, holding his hands. After the scene ends, Hart kisses Cox on the forehead, and she leans her head on his shoulder.

"I love her," says Hart, who expertly disguises a strong English accent. "I come here from Liverpool, and this can be a very lonely town. She's made me feel welcome."

That welcome has included visits to the home of Cox and her husband, David Arquette, both of whom are executive producers of "Dirt." Hart and other cast and crewmembers also have gotten to know Cox and Arquette's 2½-year-old daughter, Coco, a frequent visitor who walks onto the office set just before shooting. Cox plans to have dinner with her during a break.

Although Cox describes "Dirt" as world as "apocalyptic," the episode being shot, which focuses on Spiller's attempt to put out a sex edition, shows that producers want to keep it from getting too heavy.

"It all sounds very serious, but for the most part, it's a salacious, naughty, weird ride," Carnahan says.

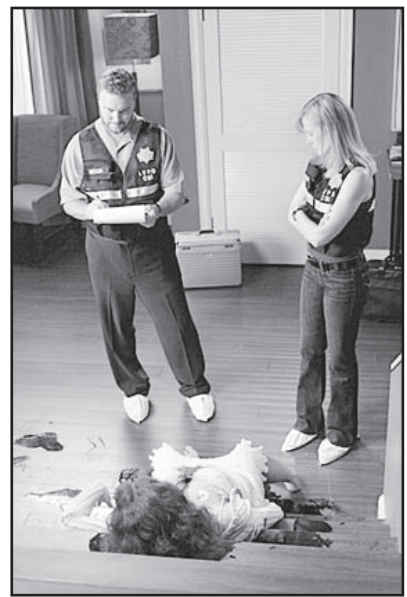
"Dirt" is a mix of bloodlust and plain old lust is expressed visually by the vibrant reds of Spiller's office and an adjacent set that houses the home of the editor, whose only other close relationship is with her brother, Leo (Will McCormack). Cox, who has redesigned her homes, approves of the design touches.

In Spiller's office vault, which contains tapes, photos and other scandalous evidence, "there's a picture of 'Dante's Inferno.' It's pretty wild," says Cox, who consulted with Janice Min of Us Weekly and Rebecca Wade of The Sun in London to get a feel for a magazine editor's duties.

"I love the office. It feels like a Los Angeles-based magazine," she says. "I love the deco feel. And I love that the conference-room desk is shaped like a coffin."

Poll: We love our TV — just not the same shows

By Jocelyn Noveck
The Associated Press



File/The Times

William Petersen and Marg Helgenberger star in "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation." "CSI" proves to be a popular show across the board.

NEW YORK — As you sink into your couch to watch a favorite TV show, take comfort in the knowledge you're not alone. Nationally speaking, at least. Unity within your own home is another matter entirely.

A majority of Americans got hooked on a TV show this year, an AP-AOL News poll shows. But some say they watch their favorite shows alone: Their spouse or partner is into much different fare.

Is it nature, or nurture? All Betty Cave knows is while she's into those attractive young doctors on "Grey's Anatomy," with their interweaving social and professional lives, her husband likes "Star Trek," "Battlestar Galactica" and some other things that I've never heard tell of. "She often watches her shows, which she TiVos, at 5 a.m."

The same goes for films. Cave, 43, a real estate agent in Myrtle Beach, S.C., and her husband go out to a movie four or five times a year. While he likes science fiction, she prefers romances like "Walk the Line," the Johnny Cash biopic.

"He's off in his own little world," Cave says with a laugh, tracing the divide to the time she took him

to a theater this year, and the average was about five movies. Young adults went more often than older adults, and those in the West saw more movies on average — seven — than in other regions.

As for TV, most Americans felt there was nothing special about the shows out this year — yet 58 percent said they got hooked on one. For women, the top show was "Grey's Anatomy," which often tops the weekly Nielsen ratings. For men, it was "House," with the curmudgeonly Hugh Laurie, on Fox. High on the overall list were "CSI: Crime Scene Investigation" and "CSI: Miami."

That doesn't surprise Joe Vescera, of San Francisco, a huge CSI fan — "I've seen 'em all," he says. His wife, Monica, prefers comedies. He likes horror; she doesn't. "I tried getting her to watch 'Saw,'" he says. "She wouldn't." Instead, she watches ABC's "Ugly Betty," a hit of the new season. Vescera clearly doesn't love the show. "It's OK," he says, "but to me, it seems senseless, in a way." Luckily, he has a different work schedule from his wife, so their tastes can coexist easily.

That's not an issue for Deborah Martin, 23, of Lovingson, Va. and her partner, Joshua. "We like the same stuff," she says. After work,

the two will often turn on "Heroes," NBC's new hit, or "Day Break," the Tye Diggs drama ABC has now pulled from its schedule. "We enjoy sitting down, eating together and watching," she says.

Tim Peterson, a chiropractor in Amarillo, Texas, is partial to serial suspense dramas — especially Fox's "24" — but, he says, "I have to pay attention to make sure it doesn't rule my life." Peterson, 37, also watches "Prison Break" and "Survivor," and tapes "The Office" and "My Name is Earl."

His wife, Shonda, doesn't watch a lot, he says, but when she does, it's not "24" — "she's just not into that action and suspense at all." The couple has three children, so a movie outing is usually a family double-feature at the drive-in.

Most respondents interviewed said the differing tastes don't disturb the flow of the household — it's just a matter of trading off. For Cave, the South Carolina real estate agent, it's also a matter of being generous.

"I pay more attention to his movies than he does to mine," she says.

The telephone poll of 1,000 adults was conducted Dec. 12-14 by Ipsos, an international polling firm. The margin of sampling error was plus or minus 3 percentage points.

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