

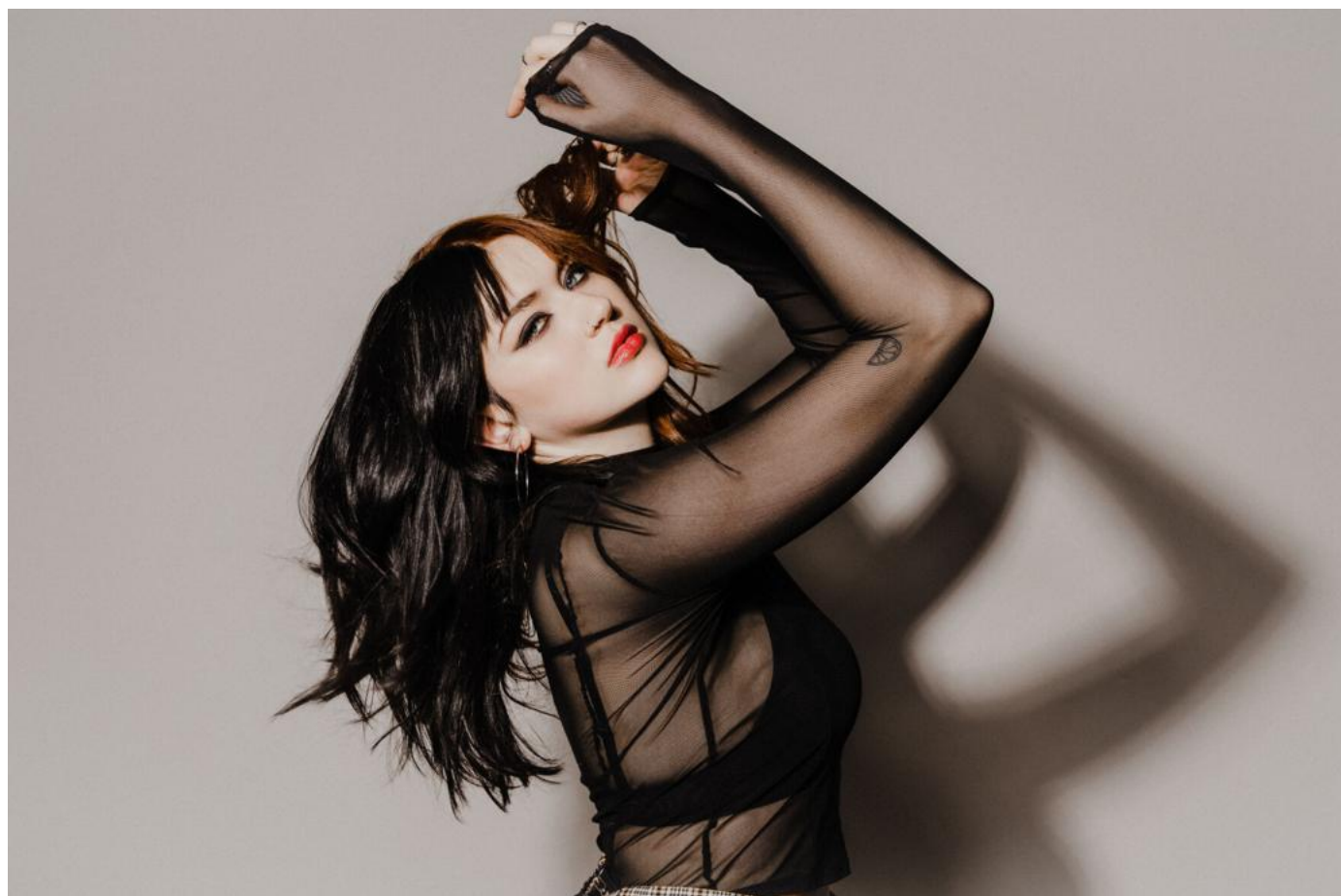
https://www.mainstreet-nashville.com/music/nashvilles-newest-pop-chart-topper-gayle-lets-go-on-hit-song/article_9b5f3c4e-98a3-11ec-a163-67a23102f91c.html

TOP STORY

Nashville's newest pop chart-topper Gayle lets go on hit song

By [Josh Ewers](#) [Main Street Nashville](#)

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At just 17 years old, Nashville's Gayle has achieved a top five Billboard hit in the U.S. and a No. 1 in the U.K.

Acacia Evans

Pop is no longer the happy-go-lucky wrapper of bubbly songs it once was. Take it from Nashville's newest resident breakout pop chart-topper 'GAYLE,' who represents the idea that nothing is safe from a new generation of female pop artists with unfiltered punk rock mindsets, not even the alphabet.

“One of my biggest pet peeves is when somebody tells me how I’m feeling. That’s gonna piss me off,” Gayle said. “With writing songs, I know exactly how I’m feeling. I am completely controlling the narrative of my emotion when I’m telling people how I’m feeling.”

At just 17, armed with a post-Billie Eilish sense of angsty breakup bombast and her soulful croon, Gayle's “abcdefu” delivered her a top five Billboard hit in the U.S. and a No. 1 hit in the U.K.

While tackling the charts so early might put some artists ahead of schedule, that wasn’t the case for Gayle, who’s been making music since she was 7 years old.

“By 10-year-old standards of me, I’m way behind,” Gayle explained with a laugh. “I was supposed to be a famous, world-renowned singer at 11, the lead in a movie star at 12, and then I was supposed to be the best dancer in the world at 13. ... I had those exact typed-out goals on my wall when I was little for quite a long time.”

Though her hit rose to relevance via TikTok, Gayle first discovered her love of music through a crash course in jazz at school focused on Ella Fitzgerald and scat singing.

“That just lit something in my brain, the fact that somebody can make something up on the fly and it sounded good with instruments,” Gayle said.

She had gone to school for career day that same morning dressed as a “puppy rescuer,” but she went home a 7-year-old obsessed instead with an expressive art form.

“I came home scat singing. And I kept doing it,” Gayle said with a laugh. “I would scat for strangers, and so my mom finally said, ‘OK, I need you to know some

other type of music so you're not just scatting for people all the time.' "

She introduced her to the music of Aretha Franklin.

"I don't know how to put it. I just felt something, and I wasn't hungry, I wasn't tired, I didn't think about anything else other than the thing I was listening to and what I was feeling," Gayle said. "And I remember in that moment, I decided I wanted to be Aretha Franklin when I grow up. That's what I want to do."

Fully in sync with her daughter's musical ambitions, Gayle's mother began driving her back and forth from Nashville once a month when she was 10.

There they stayed at a small motel in search of instructional time with songwriters who had enough patience to work with a young writer. They also went to writers rounds.

The hustle didn't stop even when Gayle wasn't performing.

"Eventually I would start talking to people that were on stage, not while they were singing, but they would have a break and I'd go up to them and be like, 'Hey, do you want me to play like two or three songs and you can go, like, to the bathroom?' " Gayle explained. " 'You can get yourself another drink, or I can pass the tip bucket around while you're singing for you.'"

Back in Texas, she'd play restaurants, rodeos, farmers markets and parking lots, anywhere that would let her while her mom encouraged her the whole way.

"It was never my mother's dream to have a musician as a daughter. It was just something that I'd loved at such a young age and she always supported me," Gayle said. "She always gave me little goals to make sure I still wanted to do what I did."

There were also trips to LA, which helped the fledgling artist realize a few not-so-nice things about the industry of which she wanted so badly to be a part.

“I found that when I was in LA, everybody told me who I was,” Gayle said. “I always got the same thing. They’d say ‘You are this Mother Nature Bohemian girl.’ And I was sitting there in faux leather pants being like ‘Huh?’ “

She found things were somewhat different in Nashville.

“In Nashville people asked me who I was,” Gayle said. “The big challenge was finding out who I was so I could tell people.”

At 12, at the young hopeful’s request, her family relocated to Music City full time to focus in on her musical ambitions.

“I mastered the art of nagging,” Gayle said with a laugh. “She’d ask ‘What do you want for Christmas?’ and I’d answer ‘To move to Nashville.’ ‘What do you want for Easter?’ ‘To move to Nashville.’ “

The routine then became mall shows and Broadway sets, with writers rounds three to five times a week, all while being home-schooled.

In 2014, Gayle was discovered by songwriter, producer and former “American Idol” judge Kara DioGuardi and signed to Arthouse.

Though admittedly a fan of country, Gayle made a point of shifting her focus to pop, diverging from the paths of some of her local friends.

“Being a woman in country music, there’s different rules for you compared to anything else. There’s just more rules inside of country music,” Gayle said.

“There’s things you can’t say and ways you can’t say them. ‘ABC’ wouldn’t have

necessarily worked in country music whatsoever. Maybe the melodies with different production, but lyrically, that would not have flown on country radio whatsoever. ... I wanted to do this edgier side of pop.”

These days, she reels off a few influences as disparate as Kid Cudi, Donna Missal, Mom Jeans, the Strokes, Delacey, Labrinth, Bjork and Joni Mitchell, leaving little wonder why the country music box wasn't a fit.

Gayle spoke on why keeping her songwriting honest and open is important to her.

“I can have a hard time accepting my emotions, even when I'm happy,” she said. “I think, for me, writing is acknowledging my emotions and just processing them, really giving myself a look at all of my behaviors, my life and the way that I choose to live it, who I am as a person.”

Despite the in-your-face sentiments expressed on “abcdefu,” the singer says it was drawn from excusing her boyfriend's trauma-fueled behaviors for too long, and it was meant to allow herself an expressive moment one year removed from their breakup.

“He made me feel like (expletive) for so long and I let him just to make him happy. And I got nothing in return,” Gayle said. “And I just got so pissed about it because I never let myself get pissed about it.”

As she tells it, the song did what it was supposed to do.

“I like to think of songwriting to like moments of time,” Gayle said. “I got over it, you know. I got angry, and then I let go of it.”

Gayle will perform at Exit/In on March 9.



GAYLE - 'abcdefu' (nicer)

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