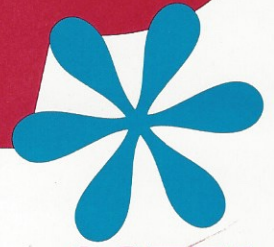


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How Sweet It Is

By Alexa Joy Sherman

This blond bombshell has scored herself a No. 1 single *and* a boyfriend in a top boy band. But *Jessica Simpson* insists she's more than just a teen pop princess. From the powerful pipes showcased on her album *Sweet Kisses* to her perseverance, principles and positive messages, she kinda makes us wonder: Is this girl too good to be true?

Okay,

let's get it out of the way, Jessica Simpson is not just some girl who was churned out on the bubblegum pop assembly line. Yeah, she's a young, blond songstress with a No. 1 single under her belt, but for each attribute that might score a "Britney wanna-be" or "Christina clone" shout-out, Jessica has plenty to separate her from the lengthy list of new teen sensations. So much, in fact, that we won't even harass her for dating one-quarter of a boy band (Nick Lachey of 98°, to be exact).

First off, the girl can sing—we're talking a five-octave range that would rival dazzling divas of any age (think Mariah Carey or Celine Dion). And it's not something she squanders, either. She started out singing in church and has been taking vocal lessons since age 12.

She's also intent upon using that talent for something more noble than mere fame and fortune. "I don't care how high I get on the charts. I want my music to inspire people and [I want] to be a positive role model," she says. "I know that a lot of girls go through so much, but you can't let this world weigh you down. It's easy to be swept away by what's popular or to try to please everybody. But you have to know who you are and persevere."

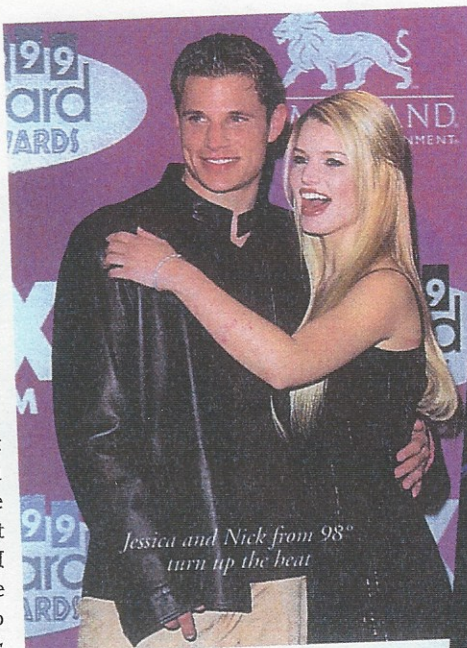
So what does Jessica know about peer pressure and trying to please others? Well, for starters, high school wasn't exactly a picnic. Sure, she was head cheerleader and had plenty of boyfriends, but, as she recalls, "A lot of girls hated me. They spread bad rumors, and then my family's cars would be keyed. Kids egged my house, put shaving cream all over it and threw flowerpots against my door."

She's a preacher's daughter, but these personal dramas were what really turned Jessica toward her faith. "At that time in life, you're especially insecure," she says. "I felt like God

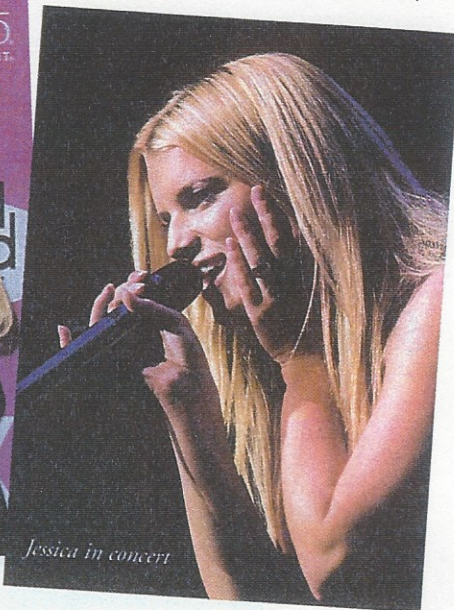
was my only friend, so I started writing in a prayer journal. I rose above it and got through it."

More than that, Jessica developed a strong sense of self. In an industry known for sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll, she gets vocal on her own virginity in a song she wrote "to her future

Her younger sister is one of her dancers, Dad's her manager and Mom hangs out backstage—which was a good thing on the night she opened for Ricky Martin at Madison Square Garden. She says, laughing, "When I sing a big note, I gotta get down. But when I did, my pants split and the whole butt fell out. I ran backstage and my mom took off her jeans so I could put them on. There she was,



Jessica and Nick from 98° turn up the heat



Jessica in concert

husband," called "Heart of Innocence." Although she acknowledges she's "no saint," staying chaste is hardly a question. "I know who I am, and I've always promised [myself that] nothing will make me change."

Not even dating a boy band stud like Nick Lachey of 98°? "No," Jessica smiles, "our biggest challenge is being together when we're touring in different places." Although Jessica gushes that it was "love at first sight," she says that, when together, she and Nick just "like to do normal things, like go to the movies. In this business, you just want to get away from the industry when you have free time."

Having her family on the road with her also keeps this Texas native balanced and her hormones in check.

practically naked, while I went out to sing 'I Wanna Love You Forever.' I got a standing ovation."

Other moments haven't been so funny. Last summer, Jessica had emergency surgery when doctors found a cyst the size of a volleyball on her fallopian tube. But she was back onstage three days later. "I just performed sitting on a stool. It was very painful." Luckily, choreography wasn't a problem. "I try to cut back on that as much as possible anyway, 'cause my vocals are more important. I'm not much of a dancer, but I do some to add to the energy of the show." Well, go figure: a teen singing sensation who actually puts the emphasis on singing.

Win!

GRAND PRIZE: an all-expense paid trip for three and a chance to hobnob with stars at the March 23, 2000, New York movie premiere of *Here on Earth*, starring Leelee Sobieski, Chris Klein and Josh Hartnett and featuring Jessica and Nick's duet, "Where You Are." **2nd PRIZE:** 50 winners will score killer movie memorabilia. **3rd PRIZE:** 500 people will receive the hot single "Where You Are." **TO SCORE:** send a postcard with your name, age, address and phone number by March 13, 2000, to "Here on Earth," c/o JUMP, 21100 Erwin St., Woodland Hills, CA 91367.