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Interview: Candice Night discusses 'Starlight Starbright' and the influence of her children on her songs



Candice Night/YouTube

Most people know [Candice Night](#) as the lead vocalist for the prolific Renaissance rock band [Blackmore's Night](#), which she co-founded with her husband, guitarist Ritchie Blackmore. But Night's most recent solo effort is of a much more personal nature, an album of children's songs titled *Starlight Starbright*. Originally written for Night and Blackmore's two children, the album's soothing calm has been found to be of use in other applications, such as helping to calm children with sensory issues in schools. AXS caught up with Candice Night by phone to discuss her

concept for the album, the surprising uses fans have found for it, and how recording *Starlight Starbright* became a family affair.

AXS: You've had a long and successful career working with Blackmore's Night, Rainbow and as a solo artist. What made you want to take on a children's album?

Candice Night: Well, I was pregnant with my first child and I was just trying to get as prepared as I could because I know once a child is born you lose all that control! (laughs) You roll with the punches and hope for the best. To be prepared, I put down some demos for vocal tracks and simple melody lines behind it that I thought had this incredible positive energy, just in case I was too tired to sing my children to sleep or sing them awake. Because I always wanted my children's first sound they hear in the morning or the last sound they heard at night to be the sound of their mom. Childhood is such an important period, I feel like even in their newborn stages to give them that comfort, that feeling of security and peace. It's just such an amazing and magical time. My idea was if I could sing to my children and ease them off to the land of dreams at night, it would be the most peaceful place for them to be. Because you never feel that safe and secure again.

So I decided to do some simple demo tracks just in case I was too exhausted to sing to them. But when I got pregnant with my second child some friends got pregnant around the same time and I remember saying to them "isn't it amazing those times when you sing to your child and it's so magical and quiet and peaceful." And my friends looked at me like I was completely insane and said to me "I would never sing to my child because my singing voice is so terrible it would scare them!" It never really hit me that parents could feel that way. I was so wrapped up in the moment and it didn't matter to me if you were pitch perfect or in tune or your tone is proper. All that child knows is that's the child of mommy or the sound of daddy. And it resonates deeply into their soul. It never occurred to me that it could be too much of an insecurity for a parent to sing to their children. A little bit of my heart broke off. So I thought, since there might be other people out there in the same mindset as my friends, that it would be a good idea to put these songs out there for people to play for their children if they don't feel secure in their own voices and hold that child in their arms and rock them to sleep. That was the original idea of it.

AXS: These songs have really taken on a life of their own with uses you didn't anticipate, right?

CN: I've heard that from other people. For instance, I heard from someone the other day that he rescues dogs, from these horrible dog fights. And he had one dog he couldn't get into the car to take to the vet because it was so skittish but he put the CD in and the dog laid down in the back seat and settled down. A friend of mine told me her daughter had sensitivity issues and they could never sit down at the dinner table because the child was usually up and running around but she put the CD on at the dinner table and it was the first time she'd been able to sit with her child and her family for a family dinner. For some reason, that CD worked for her. The audio worked for her to relax and sit through a meal. Or

another person wrote me that her mother was in hospice and she wanted her mother on the last days of her life to have positive feelings and memories, so they'd play it for her during her last days. It's interesting the way other people translate it to their own situations, not just to a lullaby but to a positive energy. For me that's the greatest gift, to have something that was a labor of love and from the heart taken by other people and used for their own good purposes. That's the greatest gift an artist can receive.

AXS: You spoke of recording the album from a deeply personal place. This album was a family affair. Your husband, Ritchie Blackmore, co-wrote some of the songs and contributed guitar work but also, it was your daughter's first songwriting credit!

CN: Yes! She was one and a half. I was folding laundry and she was in the big rocking chair I used to rock her to sleep. She had her dollies and she decided she was going to be mommy and she was rocking her baby to sleep. And I hear her from the hallway singing this song to her baby, this beautiful, innocent, pure song. And it was really simple but she had the melody line and the words all worked out. And I hovered in the hallway with a camera like all good "mamarazzi" do and videotaped her singing this song. It was such a beautiful moment. So filled with love.

Then my producer came to town, we have a studio in our basement, or in our dungeon. You can't be married to Ritchie Blackmore without a dungeon! (laughs) We were working on a Blackmore's Night CD and the lullaby project was something I was working on the side. And we both decided we had to do this song. I wrote down the words that she came up with and we worked up a backing track around it. I think it's one of the most beautiful songs on the album, "Lullaby in the Night." And [we did a video to it](#). My daughter is in it. I figured she wrote it, she gets to star in the video!

AXS: One thing I came out of listening to this CD with is, anyone who ever had to ride with a children's CD in the car knows it can be a painful experience, but this album is one that adults can listen to as well and not feel like they're being tortured. Was that your intent?

CN: Well, I didn't specifically write it with the intention of not annoying people (laughs). It's just what feels right to me. I was invested in every aspect of this CD. Every sound, every arrangement, every vocal take. It was so reflective of how the feeling translated to me of what the songs should be. It's interesting it came out like that because I've actually heard from people who play this on the way home from work because they're stuck in traffic and gridlock and they just let the music take them away. That's what music should be. It should be a great escape from the stress and pressures of this world.

AXS: One thing that will seem immediately familiar to many adults listening to this is your choice of covers. You pulled from John Denver, Kenny Loggins, a song from *Cinderella*. How did you decide which covers to include?

CN: For me a lot of it was nostalgia. You have that wonderful feeling that brings you back to that place in time. Most of us don't walk around singing Disney songs in our heads, but most of us watched those movies as we were growing up and that was our safe place, our sanctuary, our secure time. It's such a great

nostalgic point. I did tweak some of them. For example, the John Denver song, "Annie's Song." That brings me back to such a great place growing up, but there's a line "let me die in your arms." And I was like "nope! Gotta change that!" For him that was to give yourself completely to someone. But "let me lie in your arms" works just as well and that's where you are as a child, lying in your parents' arms.

It's funny with that song specifically. When Ritchie and I got married, I arranged everything in our wedding. I loved the creative process of it. I said to Ritchie, "I'm so overwhelmed. I'll arrange everything but all I need you to do is pick our wedding song. Pick the song for our first dance. And he picked "Annie's Song." It was perfect. It made that whole moment. To me the idea of a moment matched together with music just takes things to the next level. So anytime I hear that song, it reminds me of that first dance at our wedding and how much love there was in the room. And I still sing that song to our kids to get them to sleep, except now my daughter sings harmony parts and won't go to sleep! (laughs)

AXS: Your vocal style is very unique. Who influenced you as a vocalist?

CN: Hmm... I was actually enrolled in singing lessons from 4-12 years old and then in chorus in high school, but I never had the confidence to think I could be front and center. But I had to be around music because music for me was everything. It was my great escape. It understood me. It was my world, it was my religion, it was my breath. My books were just covered with lyrics from songs that captured my feelings at that moment in time. I went to school for communications hoping I would be around music but never thinking I would be singing.

So growing up my influences were my mom having show tunes around the house and then my dad being into big band. And a lot of melodic stuff. Karen Carpenter was big then. When I was a teenager I got heavily into Stevie Nicks, still am, I never really escaped that world. I must have been her every year for Halloween for 10 years in a row. But I'm a child of the '80s, so I listened to a lot of hair bands. And a lot of the classic stuff. I was a big fan of Ritchie's music long before I met him. When I started traveling around the world with Ritchie, I heard a lot of great singers like Maggie Reilly, who was the original singer on "Moonlight Shadow" with Michael Oldfield, which inspired *Shadow of the Moon*, Blackmore's Night's first album. Sarah Brightman I was exposed to over there, that beautiful mix of pop and opera. We were lucky enough to have her come to one of our shows in Germany and they had to lie to me and tell me she wasn't in the audience to get me on stage because I was so scared to sing in front of her!

But I don't think I base my sound on those people as much as I love listening to them. If you are going to walk down the pathway of someone else, you're going to end up being a second rate version of what they're doing. You have to be true to you and have your own identity. Channel it from another world. A lot of times I close my eyes and just let those songs take me somewhere else. The best thing you can have in this industry, or in this world, is your own identity.

Candice Night's *Starlight Starbright* is available now. You can keep up with Night on tour with her band, [Blackmore's Night](#), right here on AXS.