

THAT LOVIN' FEELING

***Bill Medley and daughter, McKenna, share
the gift of music.***

By Lynn Armitage



McKenna Medley comes by her musical talent righteously. She is the 15-year-old daughter of Bill Medley—the sultry, velvety-voiced singer of the legendary duo “The Righteous Brothers,” whose timeless songs, such as “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling,” and “Unchained Melody,” belong to everyone’s past and continue to be loved by a whole new generation.

Bill, at a very young 62 years old, still wows audiences with on-stage performances around the country, and even has a new blues album in the works. McKenna is making a name for her highly talented self as the lead singer of “Street Wise,” an oldies/doo wop band she put together with four guys from Orange County High School of the Arts, where she studied until recently.

While it does not seem fair that so much musical talent has been dished out into one family, with a name like Medley, would you expect anything else?

McKenna lives in Newport Beach with her dad and mother, Paula. Bill has a son, Darrin, 37, from a previous marriage, who owns Medley Communications.

Q: Let's get the hero worship out of the way, first thing . . . I LOVE your music!

Bill: Thank you.

Q: You recorded many of your best-loved hits more than 25 years ago, and they're still being played on the radio. How does that make you feel?

Bill: To have those songs still be meaningful almost 40 years later is pretty remarkable. "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" is the most played record in the history of American radio, recorded over 500 times. You could record just that one song and have a career, which we almost did.

Q: When your songs come on the radio, do you turn them up or off?

Bill: I'm usually glad they're playing, then I change the channel. I'm not a big fan of listening to my music when people are around.

Q: Music's in your blood. Your father was a bandleader and played sax, your mother played piano and sang. When did you first discover that McKenna was musically gifted?

Bill: She was about five. I remember her mother saying, "Do you think she could be a singer?" And when she sang, there was this really good voice for a couple of seconds.

Q: I'll bet nighttime lullabies were pretty incredible.

Bill: I sang to her a lot. In fact, I wrote a song for her when she was an infant, but never finished it.

(Something amazing happens. They sing this very same lullaby for me that nobody has ever heard before, in perfect harmony. How cool is THAT?)

Q: Does having Bill Medley as your father make life easy or difficult?

McKenna: It's good and bad. I've had trouble with some people wanting to come over and meet him. But it's also helped me become friends with lots of musical people who are doing exactly what I want to do.

Q: Did McKenna develop a love for music on her own, or was this your idea?

Bill: Completely her idea. I would never push anyone into this business because it can be so hurtful. Performers want to be loved, and when you're on stage, you're opening yourself up for huge rejection.

Q: Any words of wisdom for McKenna?

Bill: Follow your heart, work as hard as possible, and be as crazy as you can be because you're trying to capture lightning in a bottle. There's no way in and once you're in, there's no way out. You have to believe in dreams coming true and know in your heart and soul this is absolutely what you want to do.

Q: Every parent fears their kids will get into drugs. That must be a huge concern for you.

Bill: Sex, drugs and rock 'n roll are a real deal in our business. But I've told McKenna you'd better be clean and sober because you're not going to be successful drunk or loaded. Too many guys have already proven that. If you're really into the art of it, you need to stay straight.

Q: McKenna, tell me about your band.

McKenna: We're called "Street Wise," and we do mostly doo wop and oldies. We've been together a year, four guys and me. I do most of the singing.

Q: Where do you perform?

McKenna: We started working at Villa Nova restaurant and then we got a gig in Las Vegas.

Q: You went from Villa Nova to Vegas? Isn't there something missing in between, like a struggling career?

McKenna: Last summer, we opened for the Smothers Brothers. This past August we headlined at the Suncoast. My dad was performing at the Hilton at the exact same time!



Q: Do you write and perform together?

McKenna: The first time I sang on stage with him, I was seven or eight. The last time was about a year ago. Me, my dad and my brother had this group called Medley. We'd sing five songs together during my dad's show, and do some great harmony.

Bill: We've only written one song together. She needs to write with younger people. It's a different energy.

Q: Why did you attend Orange County High School of the Arts rather than a school in your own district?

McKenna: The people are amazing, they're all focused on music. They sit on the sidewalks and play incredible original songs. I've made some of the best friends I'll ever have there.

Q: But now you're going to home study?

McKenna: I want to push my music career as far as I can in the next year. If I do home studies, I'll have more time to work at this goal.

Q: How does dad feel about that?

Bill: She's lucky I'm her dad! If she's willing to get her schoolwork done, I think it would be great to get all the experience she can in the industry right now. The downside is, she won't be going to the prom.

Q: No, but she may be performing at it!

Bill: True.

Q: Where would you like to see your career go?

McKenna: As far as it can. I want to show people there's real music somewhere in the business. And I'm hoping I can share that with them.

Q: Bill, will you always be performing?

Bill: Until they come with a shotgun to tell me I'm an old man and need to leave the stage (laughs).

Q: What have you learned from your father's experience?

McKenna: One thing he's always said, "God's gift to you is your singing voice. But the gift you give to God is sharing it with the world." I plan on doing that.

Q: Last burning question: Bill, how did you come up with the name, "Righteous Brothers?"

Bill: We had some black friends who were always saying, "righteous car or righteous shirt" if they thought something was cool. So they started calling Bobby and I "Righteous Brothers," which really meant "good friends." And it stuck. We always wish they'd called us The Beatles, though.

Lynn Armitage is a freelance writer and mother of two girls, who constantly beg her NOT to sing.