

# Geneva Renée

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## LONG BIOGRAPHY

May 2012

*“Go ... go ... go! This little town is not the place for you!”*

Still today, **Geneva Renée (born Cheryl Geneva Renée Gilbreath)** can hear her mother’s words. Spoken during a moment when the singer was at the crossroad of deciding whether to pursue her dreams or to stay home for her ailing, single parent, the “Go ... go ... go!” instilled courage and provided the direction and motivation Geneva Renée needed to heed the call of her heart ... to sing.

Today, an adult contemporary vocalist, Geneva Renée hopes that through her music, she can do for others what her mom did for her. Presently in the studio working on her debut project *Beautiful Wonder* with producer **Dinky Bingham** (known for his work with New Edition, Kylie Minogue, Jay-Z and several others), Geneva Renée’s music encourages perseverance and respect for the potential dwelling in our hopes and dreams. She also reminds listeners of the conquering power in loving others, trusting God, and believing in yourself.

Most recently, Geneva Renée was named the winner in NBC4/WRC Television’s singing competition, “Be a Voice V.I.P.” The local competition aired in the Washington DC area on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012, at 7pm on NBC Channel 4 and the grand prize is a guaranteed **VIP Audition on the 4<sup>th</sup> season of NBC’s The VOICE.**

The versatile soprano, influenced by the likes of Whitney Houston, Kathleen Battle, Yolanda Adams, and Celine Dion, shares her musical gift throughout the metropolitan Washington, D.C. region. Geneva Renée is an active soloist with nationally celebrated gospel choir **Patrick Lundy and the Ministers of Music** (Gospel) and leads “Lord, You’re Holy” on the group’s 2010 CD release, *Determined*. She is also a background vocalist with **Guilty Pleasures** (R&B) and **Maysa Leak** (Jazz). Geneva Renée can be seen several nights each week on Washington’s Odyssey Dinner Cruise with the **Chane Link Band** (Easy Listening and Oldies) as both a soloist and background vocalist.

It was a winding path, however, that brought Geneva Renée to her current confidence and maturity as a singer. When her mom first put her in front of a Karaoke machine at age three, no one knew there was anything special about the voice of the enthusiastic toddler that always had a tune. By age nine, however, a church choir director began to see potential in Geneva Renée’s voice and prepared a bluesy arrangement of “Jesus Loves Me” as her first solo. The church was mesmerized and touched by her clear and beautiful soprano, and suddenly, singing lead with the church choir became a norm, which led to requests for engagements throughout her hometown of Oxnard, CA.

At the tender age of 12, Geneva Renée added jazz music to her repertoire, performing capable background and solo vocals with jazz vocalist **Jeanne Tatum** and saxophonist **Del Franklin and Raw Silk** (both local favorites in Ventura County) for the next six years. Performances throughout the region at events and clubs allowed Geneva Renée to develop a confident stage presence, and she landed in the Top Ten for Miss Teen California during high school. Inside, however, the young Geneva Renée was still “just a latch-key kid,” nervous and unsure. Her godmother told her she hadn’t found her true “voice” yet because she hadn’t experienced anything. Little did she know how much Geneva Renée would grow as both a singer and a woman in the coming years.

Shortly before Geneva Renée was to leave for study at Howard University, her mother survived a hit-and-run car crash—suffering permanent damage to her kidneys. Not wanting her child to be burdened, however, Geneva Renée’s mother pressed her to still move across the country to the District of Columbia. Hesitantly, she went, but unlike most students, her attention was divided between her studies and an ailing mother that was “pressing on” to see her graduate.

She achieved multiple degrees from Howard University (including her doctorate) and she eventually became a regular soprano soloist with both the **Howard Gospel Choir** and the **Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel Choir**

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under the direction of the late **Arphelius Paul Gatling III**. In the early days of her college career, however, Geneva Renée hung quietly in the background of the fine arts department with the university chorus. Still, her voice had been heard and a peer pushed her saying, “Girl, you can sing. You better stand up and ask for those solos.”

In spite of her insecurities, Geneva Renée began to volunteer for *every* solo, whether it was appropriate for her voice or not. “I decided to let the director tell me ‘no’ if I wasn’t the right fit, instead of me always telling myself ‘no.’ ” Through her work with Mr. Gatling and the Howard choirs, Geneva Renée was afforded opportunities to sing to wider audiences, including a solo—“Harlem Blues”—to honor Spike Lee at the university’s Black Face Awards in **Cramton Auditorium** and the black national anthem—“Lift Every Voice and Sing”—for Howard’s 2004 Homecoming Step Show at the D.C. Armory (seating approximately 4,000).

During the summer of 2001, Geneva Renée was an intern in Chicago. Continuing on a transplant, her mother came to visit, and they went to the legendary **Cotton Club**, where an exceptional saxophonist, **Ray Silkman**, was playing that evening. While Geneva Renée was away from her table, Silkman began making rounds during intermission, greeting the night’s attendees. He eventually reached her mother—whom he quickly learned was a naturally gifted publicist when it came to her child. When Geneva Renée returned, she was surprised to learn she was now on the program. After her rendition of Whitney Houston’s *Saving All My Love for You*, the audience swooned, and all Silkman could say was “Cheryl is just too good...” It was the start to a long-term relationship with Ray’s band. Geneva Renée sang with them every weekend throughout Chicago that summer and other occasions in the years that followed.

Geneva Renée also continued to perform in Washington, D.C. while pursuing her education. Memorable moments include singing the “**Star Spangled Banner**” for a nationally broadcasted gala honoring former U.S. President **William Clinton**. Only three months after Geneva Renée’s graduation, her mother died due to permanent kidney failure. The grateful singer, however, could still hear her mother saying, “Go ... go ... go!” Geneva Renée went on to join **Patrick Lundy and the Ministers of Music**, which afforded opportunities for her to sing at AllState’s **Gospel Superfest**, the **Inauguration of President Barack Obama** and other nationally televised events, including a solo in the choir’s rendition of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” at the dedication services of the national memorial celebrating civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Geneva Renée is a former praise and worship leader at the Emory United Methodist Church, a former member of Performing Artists Under the Lord (Gospel), and she has sung on many occasions at Florida Avenue Baptist Church for “Mo’ Than Jazz” and other programs. She has studied and performed with gospel artist Daniel Austin and joined Marc Williams and Higher Calling, a contemporary gospel ensemble, for their live recording session in 2003. She has been a “sit-in” lead for bands such as Just Us (R&B), HeavenSong Project (Jazz), the Marcus Mitchell Project (Jazz) and The Secret Band (R&B/Go-Go). She has performed as a soloist in many well-known venues, including the Kennedy Center, and has shared the stage with musical friends at Blues Alley, Constitution Hall, The Cotton Club, the Isaac Hayes Club, and numerous outlets throughout Washington’s U Street/Adams Morgan corridor. Her voice has soared in the District of Columbia, Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Jamaica, and St. Thomas of the Virgin Islands. She has also appeared on national television and sung in choruses supporting notable national recording artists including Vanessa L. Williams, Beyoncé, Mariah Carey, Yolanda Adams, Jessie Norman, Darius Rucker, Bruce Springsteen, Shakira, Jonathan Nelson, Donnie McClurkin, Twinkie Clark and Tremaine Hawkins just to name a few...

“Music offers a space where people can be free,” said Geneva Renée. “It transports us without leaving a physical space ... Singing different styles allows me to free different people in different ways, allowing them to escape to wherever they need to go ... I’m so grateful to be blessed with the ability to offer such versatile and creative freedom.”