

# From Sigma to stardom

*Alumna competes for final spot on 'The NEXT' reality show, enlists fan votes from alma mater*

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The long line of hopefuls waiting for hours to audition for "American Idol" has become synonymous with an average citizen's attempt at stardom. But for Elon alumna Jenny Leigh Freeman, fame came knocking at her door.

The creators of CW's "The NEXT," a singing competition TV show that holds a nationwide search for undiscovered artists, sought Freeman out when scouts were sent to Baltimore, one of six cities to which "The NEXT" traveled.

And Freeman was an ideal candidate for the show, because she has been steadily working on a country music singing career in Baltimore since graduating from Elon in 2006.

"The point is to find people who are already on the brink of stardom and give them the platform to get over the hump," Freeman said. "I've been booking my own shows, seeing my own manager and writing my own music, so (the talent scouts) recognized the hard work I'm doing and the show is helping me out by providing national exposure."

On top of television publicity, each contestant is given a celebrity mentor that visits the contestant at their home and coaches them throughout the show. Luckily for Freeman, she was given the chance to work with John Rich of the country band Big & Rich, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for an aspiring country star.

"I've been a fan (of Big & Rich) ever since I heard of them in college when they did 'Save a Horse (Ride a Cowboy)," she said. "It was a great honor to work with John. He can write songs out of the blue, plus he's really creative, witty and has so much star power."

Freeman performed on the Baltimore episode of "The NEXT" that aired on Aug. 23, and will now compete against contestants from Los Angeles, Orlando, New York, Dallas and Chicago for a spot in the finals. A fan vote episode on Sept. 20 will determine who advances, so Elon alumna Cindy Tew, Class of 1977, has been working dili-

gently to get the word out about Freeman's TV success.

"Seeing Jenny's performance on the show blew my mind," Tew said. "That's why I've gotten behind this thing — anyone should be motivated and excited about this opportunity."

Tew and Freeman are both sisters of Sigma Sigma Sigma in addition to being Elon alumni, so Tew said it's only natural for Elon and its Greek organizations to want to help Freeman succeed and gain publicity for Elon.

"Jenny is an inspiration to all aspiring artists," Tew said. "She has already made her peers, sorority sisters and Elon proud of her. We should all support her by voting for her and help push her to the finals. She is living proof that dreams do come true."

And Freeman hasn't forgotten about her time at Elon — in addition to being in a sorority and playing on the club women's rugby team, Freeman was a member of the co-ed a cappella group Twisted Measure for three years, which she credits for teaching her a lot of what she knows about music.

"Twisted Measure taught me a ton about music, especially since I was with people from all different states and backgrounds coming together for a shared love of music," she said. "And being in Tri-Sigma gave me a great support system, so I feel like I had a really well-rounded college experience."

Freeman said Tew's effort in spreading the word about the fan vote is a prime example of the power of an Elon support system.

As for Freeman's plans after the show, she wants to continue pursuing music, whether she wins or not. And since the show has allowed her to make great connections, Freeman feels confident about her future as a professional artist.

"My ultimate goal is to tour the world and have singing be my one and only job," Freeman said. "I'm juggling a lot like everyone else my age, but I don't really care about having a ton of money. I just want to be supported financially while doing what I love."



PHOTO SUBMITTED

Alumna Jenny Leigh Freeman currently works full time in marketing for the athletic wear company Under Armour, but she's been pursuing a career in country music since graduating Elon University with a degree in psychology in 2006.



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Freeman is featured in the Baltimore episode of "The Next" which airs at 9 p.m. Thursdays on the CW.