



Hermalee Webb will be appearing with her aunt, Loretta Lynn, at the Meadow Brook Music Festival Friday night.

With country music in her veins, Hermalee Webb aims for the top

By Dan Klepp
staff writer

WHEN YOU ARE trying to establish yourself as a country/western singer, it doesn't hurt to have aunts Loretta Lynn and Chrysalis Gayle showing you the finer points of the business.

Hermalee Webb knows the value of having two of country music's most successful stars as relatives. But she is also aware that she has to make a name for herself to avoid getting lost in the family shadow.

Webb, who resembles Gayle more than Lynn, candidly admits being billed as "Loretta Lynn's Niece" can open many doors that are usually locked to new performers. The opportunity she has to tour the country with Lynn during the year is something most aspiring musicians would trade their favorite guitars for.

In fact, she has been performing with her aunt — off and on — for more than four years.

Country western fans can hear Webb and Lynn perform Friday at Meadow Brook in Rochester, Saturday afternoon during Ypsilanti's downtown sidewalk sale, and at a Sunday benefit for the Humane Society at the Urban Cowboy on Ford in Westland.

It wasn't until she started touring with her aunt, however, that she got to

know her.

"When I was little, my dad would take us to see her when she was in the area, but that's all I really ever saw her," she said.

But it didn't take long for the two to become acquainted, and now Webb fits in with the entire crew.

"I've learned so much from being with Loretta," she said. "She's taught me things like how to put a show together that you just can't learn anywhere else."

AT THIS point in her career, Webb knows she has to take advantage of every opportunity afforded her. There are thousands of unknowns for every superstar in the music business, she acknowledged.

Although she is proud of her aunts and what they have accomplished, and thankful for the fame their success has given her, Webb sometimes finds herself trapped in a stereotype of Lynn and Gayle.

"I'm sure a lot of people come to hear me because they want to hear a cheap version of Loretta Lynn," she said shrugging her shoulders in acceptance.

Her concerts may be less costly than those of her aunt, but Webb figures that she will have to accept the preconceptions people are going to have if she is going to capitalize on the family name.

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— Hermalee Webb
country singer

"One night I was in a club and the people kept yelling 'You Ain't Woman Enough' and 'Don't Come Home A Drinkin' (the titles of two of Lynn's most popular songs). When that happened, I told the people that I loved and respected my aunt very much, but I told them that I have to establish an image of my own. I think they respected what I said."

Her own image is very important, but that doesn't stop her from including a few Lynn classics in her shows. After all, she says, "They're great songs."

NEVERTHELESS, all the relatives in the world are not enough to replace talent and hard work. Webb knows she has to sell albums to people who are not relatives or even friends.

"Some day, I want to be a nationally known star," she said in a somewhat matter-of-fact tone. "I know it takes a lot of time and a lot of hard work, but I'm ready for it."

At 25, she has been singing professionally for nine years.

"I was always around music," she said. "My dad would be playing his guitar around the house, and he'd have me sing with him."

Her father, Herman, who is not a coal miner, is Lynn and Gayle's brother. He was a musician who traveled the club circuit in Indiana, Ohio and Michigan. He first got Webb on stage with his group when she was 16. From that point, Webb began making her own club appearances.

Her biggest thrill as a performer came in 1979 when she was named as one of the most promising country female vocalists during the Music City Awards.

Her single, "Bits and Pieces" and "Nobody's an Angel" was released last year. She is working with two other writers on songs that can be packaged as an album.

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