

Named one of Kings of A&R's "Top 8 Emerging Artists", Jillian O is a fresh, new face in the national pop music scene.

The young singer-songwriter who's been singing since she could talk, has been making the short trek from her home in the music hotbed of Atlanta to Music City every month or two the last few years to meet with a stellar production team headed by Keith Follesé, an esteemed American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) Songwriter of the Year award honoree thanks to hits for the likes of country superstars including Tim McGraw, Faith Hill and Martina McBride.

The result is a debut album, "Dancing With My Eyes Closed", that introduces Jillian O not only as a forceful singer of infectious pop tunes but a lyricist with a potent message.

A case in point is her new single "A Girl Like Me."

"Usually I go to Nashville and bring full songs or ideas, and we fix and tweak them and then do the track," says Jillian. "But for 'A Girl Like Me,' we started from scratch, with a little guitar riff that we built everything around. It's catchy and fun, and hard for me to listen to without dancing. But what makes it important is that it says girls need to feel more self-confident and worthy and sure of themselves."

Jillian reveals that the song comes out of personal but universal experience for teenage girls—being treated badly by a boy.

"But I'm totally over it--and got a good song out of it--so in my mind it's a win!" she says. "As long as I get a good song out of it, we're all good."

Another prime example of the positive lessons imparted in Jillian's songs is one of her favorites, "Mannequin."

"Mannequin's message is very important to me," she says. "I know a lot of girls—and boys—who go through feelings of being alone, and try to change themselves for somebody else. From my own experience, I don't think anyone should ever have to feel like that. Whenever I perform 'Mannequin,' people come up and say that it really touches them, and that's really incredible because I want to help people with my music—even when the subject matter is darker and maybe some people don't want to hear about it. But kids really have to hear about it."

Indeed, music is an outlet for Jillian herself, to "make myself feel better—even if it's not particularly happy content." And music has been the most important part of her life from the beginning. By the time she was 10, she had told her parents that she wanted to seriously pursue a music career.

By then she had already joined a rock band and formed another with her brother. She had also started writing songs.

"We did a lot of rock covers, though, like AC/DC's "Thunderstruck," she recalls. "I was also a big fan of Stevie Nicks, and I love, love, *love* Hayley Williams of Paramore, and always wanted to be able to write and sing like her--and even had vibrant red hair like her! "

Also when she was 12, Jillian participated in an acting/modeling competition in Orlando, and made a connection that eventually brought her to the attention of Follesé when she was 13. With his guidance as one of his first pop projects (though his sons, Ryan and Jamie, are members of 2011 American Music Awards New Artist of the Year Hot Chelle Rae), she honed her songwriting skills over the next three years. Now, having just turned 17, she's recorded 30 songs in Nashville, and has culled them down to fit into her debut album.

"The way I like to describe my sound is, if Katy Perry, Imagine Dragons and Paramore had a baby, it would be me!" Jillian says.

Among the other standout tracks on her debut is "Freak Show."

"It's a metaphor about high school, but I think it's very relatable," Jillian says. "I got fed up one day with the scene and drama and sat down and wrote it. Everyone is crazy—judging everyone

else for who they are and who they are not--when everyone is really trying to figure out who they are.”

One of her favorite songs, “Underwater” was written for one of her best friends.

“I’ve known her since I was three-years-old,” she relates. “She grew up with a mom who was alcoholic, and it was hard for me seeing her suffer like that because she couldn’t do anything about it. I asked if I could write a song for her, and it’s really powerful and deep and written from her perspective in speaking to her mom--and it was a breakthrough for me because I realized I could do something like that. It’s very emotional, and wasn’t intended to go on the album, but it was very important to me and her—she cries every time she hears it.”

“Marilyn Monroe” is both a tribute to the legendary star and to what she represents for a young woman today.

“I actually did a project on Marilyn Monroe in middle school,” Jillian says. “After doing so much research, I came to admire her--and wrote a song using all of her movie titles as the lyrics. I revisited it later when I brought it to Nashville. I really like the idea, that we’re not all Marilyn Monroe—blonde and perfect with an ideal body type. But the ideal body image was completely different during her time, and now it’s so unrealistic and stupid for society to want you to look like a Victoria’s Secret model! If you were born that way, more power to you—but I wasn’t born like that!”

While Jillian has emphasized the songwriting and recording aspects of her career, she has also been a featured performer at the March, 2013 *Playlist Live* gathering in Orlando, and has performed for the New York Racing Association, including singing the National Anthem several times at Saratoga Springs, including the Travers Stakes, before thousands of people. She is also actively involved in CURE Childhood Cancer, having organized the CureFest benefit in 2014. Giving back is something Jillian is committed to and wants to use her music as a way to do so. She performed last year at Seacrest Studios at Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta, where she met pediatric patients and learned about cutting edge research.

She looks forward now to continuing her philanthropic efforts while supporting her new album debut.

“I just want to make people happy.” Jillian says. “I love doing this and have so much fun—and want everyone to have fun when they listen to my music.”