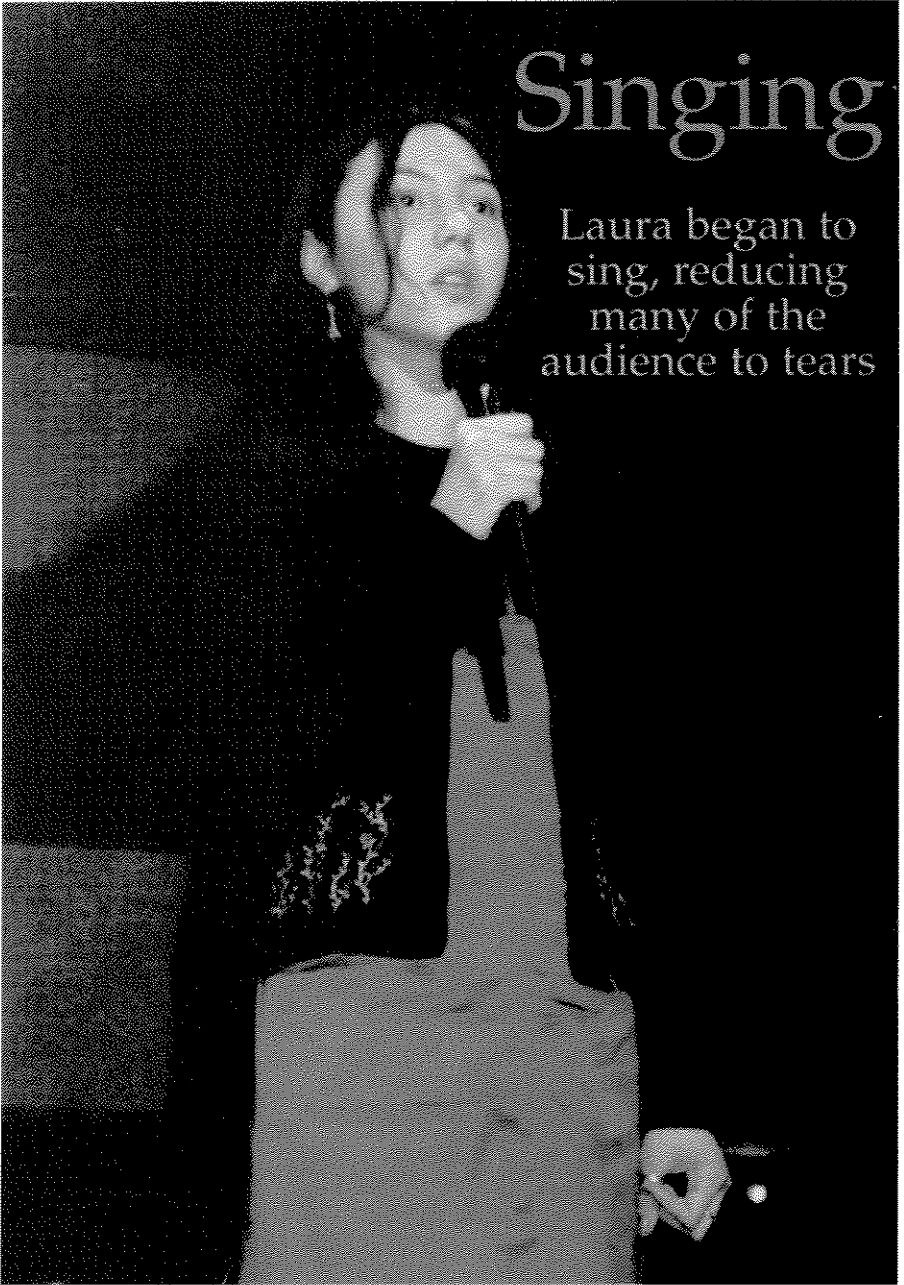


# Singing

Laura began to sing, reducing many of the audience to tears



Laura sings for Variety.

# SHOWTIME

## Laura's Song

It was the season of gifts and miracles . . . Our life was filled with both . . . Martin Lucas, a talented producer and script writer for Thames Television, presented John and I with a heart warming Christmas gift . . . three outstanding television scripts that we desperately needed for the first ever Gold Heart Day.

Next, we needed to find three well known celebrities, who would all be willing to give up their precious time on the same day during the holidays, to visit The Variety Children's Hospital. This needed to happen in the week between Christmas and New Years Day.

The first miracle . . . Variety's Dennis Selinger called to say Michael Caine, Suzi Quatro and Patricia Hodge had all agreed to the visit!

The next miracle was a call to say that a Thames television crew would donate their time on the day; unbelievable!

Two days later we were all at the hospital, studying the scripts and preparing the shoot. That was the magic moment when Shane and dear Laura entered my life. There they were, sitting on the top of their beds. Shane was grinning all over. Four-year-old Laura shyly smiled through her fingers as she tried to cover her gorgeous little face, which was shaped like a perfect heart.

They were the sweetest little cherubs you could ever hope to see. I would have believed it, if I had been told, they had just jumped out from a painting by one of the great masters. They were both real stars and truly moved everyone who saw them, not only at the hospital but glowing brightly on the television screen.

While speaking later to Anita, Laura's mother, I learned how Laura "died" twice when her heart stopped beating after her second liver transplant. The doctors had given her only hours to live, and she had completely lost her ability to speak. It was a miracle of miracles that she had survived! Each time I saw the wonderful commercials that had been created by so many people genuinely giving from their heart, I thanked God for making sweet Laura's heart beat again and for choosing her to help us to help even more children, through Gold Heart Day.

In December 1999, some nine years later, I received a Christmas card from Anita with the wonderful news that Laura not only had her voice back completely, but also she loved to sing.

We were deeply involved with the incoming Chief Barker Pip Burley, Tony Hatch, and Stephen Morley in organizing the celebration of

Variety Club's 50th Anniversary and ninth Gold Heart Day launch, which would be attended by TRH Prince and Princess Michael of Kent.

We invited Laura to sing at this event not knowing for sure how she might be able to handle it. She had never properly held a microphone before, and we would have only minutes to try to rehearse. We also invited Patricia Hodge as a surprise to them both.

I had the great honour of telling Laura's story to the guests on the evening and invited Patricia to the stage. Filled with emotion, I could hardly speak; as I introduced Laura, tears ran down my cheeks. I choked when I asked her to enter the stage and sing her favourite song, "MY HEART WILL GO ON", the song most perfect for us all that evening! Laura was so brave. She sang with all of her heart! Marvellous!

The audience was all in tears, including our new Gold Heart Day Patron Princess Michael and her husband Prince Michael of Kent. We all applauded until our hands throbbed as much as our hearts.

I have always wondered why we cry when we are so ecstatically happy?

For Gold Heart Day 2000 Laura came to Belfast to sing with 200 other young people during the Rosie Rags concert, which Shane came to see.

It was at that time Shane's parents presented me with the photo of Laura and Shane that appears on the front cover of this book. I believe just looking at it speaks of love and tells the story of two special souls that are placed inside those two dear youngsters.

They will always hold a very special place in my heart.

Laura is older now, though no longer a child, and she is still enduring operations. The following is a letter from her mother to my husband John and me, which I think truly expresses the deep compassion one, who has experienced so many trials with their child, feels for others enduring the same sorts of problems.

"Hi Marsha & John,

"Hope all is well.

"Just to let you know that Laura is at home now after having her tummy scar revised. She is quite sore but is coping well.

"We were at the hospital for four days . . . and I have to admit I found it difficult to deal with . . . It brought it all back to me, seeing all those sick babies, children and parents in torment.

"Naturally, I did not show this outwardly, but had moments alone where I became overwhelmed with sadness . . . not just because it took me back to everything we and Laura went through, but, also because I felt the pain of the other parents and children, now going through a similar experience . . .

"I really wished I could wave a magic wand and make everything better for them . . .

"My strength, (although she does not know it), came from Laura . . . She, being one of the oldest children there, seemed to give hope, and lift spirits all around her.



**YOUNG STAR:** Laura with actress Patricia Hodge, left, was a hit on stage. At four, she was in a TV appeal with Michael Caine

Star picture MARK HENKIN



BY SIMON BIRD

AS A toddler she was desperately ill and unable to speak after two liver transplant operations.

Now Laura Hamilton is poised for a singing career after making an amazing recovery.

She was slowly nursed back to health at the Variety Club Children's Hospital in London, and has never forgotten the charity which helped save her life.

At the age of four she appeared with Michael Caine in an advertisement that helped raise millions of pounds.

And last week she made her stage debut at a Variety Club charity event and showed the celebrity audience she is a star in the making.

For Laura, now 12, reduced the audience to tears with a remarkable rendition of Celine Dion's hit, My Heart Will Go On, at the launch of the Variety Club's annual Gold Heart Appeal. She met guests including Prince Michael of Kent and EastEnders star Wendy Richard.

Laura, from Hove, East Sussex, said: "I couldn't make any noise for about three weeks as a side effect of the operations, but over the years I have been in and out of hospital and recovered."

"Singing for the charity is my way of saying thank you for what they did for me and hopefully encouraging people to support the Variety Club." Laura had her transplant operations at Addenbrooke's Hospital

# Laura's debut as voice of hope for sick children

in Cambridge, but was nursed at the charity-funded Variety Club hospital in Dulwich.

Her mother Anita said: "It is wonderful to see how well Laura is now, and I hope she gives hope to other parents who have ill children."

"They should look at her and believe there is a light at the end of the tunnel."

The Variety Club can

be supported by buying gold-coloured heart-shaped badges from Tesco, Mothercare, Wil Smith, Dorothy Perkins, British Telecom, T-Mobile and Birthdays.

The organisation's Gold Heart Day, on February 14, has raised £20 million for sick and disadvantaged children since it was launched in 1991.



The Express on Sunday tells Laura's story. INSET: Laura's band are Unity.

“I watched children and parents admiring her success . . . I could see the hope in their eyes . . . Yes!!! It is all worth the pain!!!!

“The doctors and nursing staff, who work tirelessly to save these young lives were also so proud of one of their successes. Some of them actually said to me that seeing children like Laura really drives them on in their continual quest to save these young lives.

“So, ultimately, in a place where I initially felt such pain and pity, I was able to regain strength from the positive presence of my own beautiful daughter Laura.

“We are ever thankful that The Variety Club Children’s Hospital was, and is, there.

“ . . . I will speak with you soon.

“Take Care  
Much Love to you both  
Anita xxx”

Laura is now in a girl pop band called Unity. The band has spent a month (2003) entertaining at schools to raise funds and awareness for Gold Heart Day.

Laura says “Variety helped a lot when I was young, Without them, I simply wouldn’t be alive! I also want to give the audience hope and inspiration, especially the children; to show them what they can achieve, and that they can overcome any obstacles”.

*MarshaRae Ratcliff - Tent 36: Great Britain  
Past Chief Barker*

