

AUDREY PROULX,
DAUGHTER OF
INTUIT CO-FOUNDER
TOM PROULX,
IS SEEKING A
SPOTLIGHT OF
HER OWN. THE
DYNAMIC STANFORD
STUDENT IS A
POP SINGER WITH
A DECIDEDLY
SILICON VALLEY
ENTREPRENEURIAL
EDGE.

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GENERA



TION

STORY
BY
CHRISTINA
DONG



udrey Proulx plays six instruments, sings, and writes her own music. But the pop singer believes it will be her entrepreneurial skills that propel her career.

“A big challenge in the music industry is how you differentiate yourself, because there are millions of great singers out there,” Audrey says. “I had to think, ‘What sets me apart?’”

The 20-something entrepreneur has combined three of her passions—music, business, and tech—to approach her music career like a startup. Pursuing a joint master’s degree in computer science and an MBA at the Stanford Graduate School of Business, she draws upon her business and tech knowledge to promote her music and manage her brand.

Using her first name—Audrey—she launched her brand in July with her debut album, *Colors*, available on iTunes, Spotify, and Pandora. Its five songs highlight the “colors and aspects of my life,” Audrey says, while sending a positive message to teen girls, her target audience. She describes her songwriting style as “pop with a splash of Broadway and Disney.”

With *Colors* came a summer of working full time as her own agent and brand manager. Singlehandedly, Audrey took on promotional tasks ranging from market research through interviews with teenage girls to advertising through Facebook ads targeting listeners of similar artists, to PR through lyric videos and dynamic social media presences. She also secured a partnership with the interactive fitness tech company, Netpulse, through which she became the new “featured artist” for the month of August on cardio machines in fitness centers worldwide.

Audrey pushes herself to handle everything she can on her own, but also knows when it makes sense to hire professionals with years of experience in music production and graphic design. “You can’t sacrifice quality,” she says.

After trying a couple of less-experienced producers initially, she found a crucial quality increase by hiring top producers in Los Angeles: Juan Covarrubias and Chris Seefried, the latter having worked with big-name artists like Lana Del Rey and Fitz and The Tantrums.

Seeking a strong brand identity, Audrey also wanted a memorable logo and a website (audreymusic.com) that reflected her bright, upbeat style. She hired designer Chelsea Nobbs to head the collaborative process that led to Audrey’s distinctive sequin album art and paintbrush “A” logo. “Chelsea is a terrific musician herself,” Audrey notes, “so she had a unique perspective on designing for a musician in particular.”

When it came to promotion, though, Audrey turned to her Stanford education. In a course she’s taken on customer acquisition, she’s learned how to more effectively run an online advertising campaign and strategically attract new listeners. With that knowledge, she held focus groups with high school girls to learn how they discover new music and what engages them on her website.

Through a course on negotiating contracts, Audrey has also learned to approach negotiation like solving a problem, rather than fighting a battle. When she wanted to shoot a professionally-produced music video for her song, “Try,” but needed something to offset production costs, she struck a deal with the producer: she would barter her own movie editing skills to help his company with other projects.





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Audrey has kept her computer science background central to her career, both behind the scenes and as part of her brand identity. For one, she still studies computer science: in a Stanford d.school (Institute of Design) course, Human-Computer Interaction Design, she's applied design thinking and "need finding" to her music career, and worked with a team on creating a music-sharing app designed for singer/songwriters.

But she also uses computer science to differentiate herself as a pop artist. When creating her lyric video for "In a Dream," she wove a computer science puzzle into the graphics and offered a prize to the first listener to solve it (youtube.com/audreyismusic).

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Audrey has been singing since age 6 and passionate about music since she could articulate it. It all started when she was 2 and begged her mom to let her take violin lessons after falling in love with Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. When she turned 3, her mom finally gave in, driving 25 minutes each way to two 15-minute lessons each week. Twenty years later, Audrey still studies with her original violin and viola teacher, Carol Kutsch.

After 20 years of violin, 17 years of piano, 11 years of viola, and more recently, guitar and drums, her voice remains her favorite instrument. "It's the best way to express yourself because your voice is part of you," Audrey says. She studies voice with Janet Campbell, who has trained her in classical, musical theatre, and pop styles.

As a college freshman, Audrey began songwriting and collaborating with fellow students to form her pop band, Audrey and the Boys. Each member is a good friend of hers and a gifted musician in his own right: "At the end of each performance, rather than just commenting on my singing, audience members regularly note and appreciate the high quality and talent of the band," Audrey says. "I'm very fortunate to have such talent to work with." She still performs with the Boys on campus and at her own gigs in the Bay Area.

When Audrey graduated from Stanford in 2014 with a BS in computer science, she had a choice: she could enter Silicon Valley's

world of tech and venture capital, or she could turn her lifelong passion into a career by focusing on music and entrepreneurship as she entered business school.

Audrey chose to follow her heart—the title of one of her songs in *Colors*.

Audrey knew that beginning a career in music would be potentially risky, and certainly not easy, but this only motivated her to take her music even more seriously and arm herself with a solid business background. The summer after graduation, she wrote songs every day, began searching for a producer, and received advice from Grammy-winning composer Christopher Tin, her mentor from the Stanford Alumni Mentoring (SAM) program.

"I needed to do everything in my power to increase my chance of succeeding," Audrey says. "Instead of just hoping it works out, I need to be a go-getter."

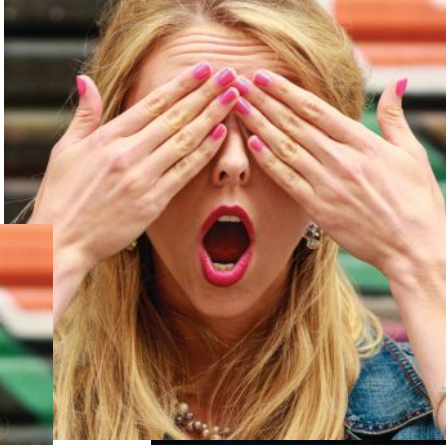
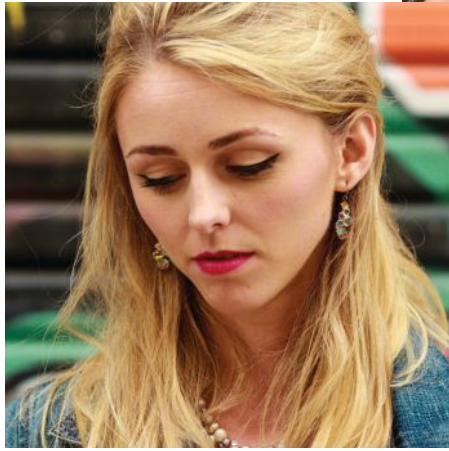
After devoting two summers to launching her music career and completing her first year of business school, she celebrated her album launch with a performance at the graduation ceremony for Draper University, an entrepreneurship program founded by Tim Draper. It was a full-circle moment for the artist and entrepreneur.

"I loved being able to go back and show them my startup, because Draper U really sparked my interest in entrepreneurship," relates Audrey, a 2012 graduate of the program.

Launching her music career has meant nonstop promotional work, long phone calls, and relentless negotiation, but, "at the end of the day, it all comes back to music," Audrey says. "There's all this branding and trying to be a superstar. But why am I doing this? It's for the music."

She continues to write songs almost daily, a key piece of advice she received from Tin. "It's not enough to have just 20 songs," she stresses. "You need hundreds—a huge body of work to pick from." Also key to her songwriting process, she says, is the honest feedback she receives from band mates, friends, and family.

Albert Tomasso, her pianist and computer science classmate, has performed with Audrey since the two met at Stanford five years ago. "We've been playing together for so long that we have music telepathy," she jokes. "We know what the other is going to do when we're playing. He truly brings out the best in my music."



A classically trained pianist since age 6, and, more recently, a Disneyland “Cast Member,” Tomasso brings both musical expertise and familiarity with Audrey’s stylistic inspirations.

He notes that Audrey’s songwriting combines a natural ear for pop music with “the sparkle of her Broadway influences,” and, likewise, her stage presence radiates energy and enthusiasm.

The rest of Audrey’s band members are Stanford physics students. Tucker Leavitt, whom Audrey first met in a music class, adds depth to their performances beyond the generic background drumming typically heard in pop music. Her band also features Duncan Wood on guitar and the band’s newest member, Roger Romani, on bass.

Audrey’s faculty mentor, world-class jazz pianist and Stanford music professor Mark Applebaum, lends advice on her music and experience in the industry. “It’s rare to find a professor who cares so much about developing a relationship with students and wanting to see them succeed,” Audrey notes.

She first met Applebaum as a student in his music course, “Rock, Sex, and Rebellion,” and began collaborating with him when she took his songwriting course last winter. According to Applebaum, Audrey has what he calls “Big ears: She’s listened to a lot of music over the past few years and figured out what’s most meaningful to her,” he says.

Together, they’ve spent hours—often hours at a time—at the piano workshoping her music. They’ll zero in on one section, one line, or even one word of a song, and rework it over and over until it’s just right. “From Mark, I learned to be critical and not settle for good—make it great,” Audrey says.

Her songwriting abilities have deepened considerably in the time he’s known her, Applebaum says, specifically in terms of her stylistic vocabulary and expressive range. “She’s incredibly teachable in that she has an open mind to all sorts of advice and feed-

back, whether it’s critical or laudatory, and then does what she believes in,” he says.

He added that Audrey is unusual among his students in her choice to take on a mainstream identity. For him, she represents a foray into working with students interested in pop genres.

“The convention at Stanford is to be unconventional,” Applebaum says, “and therefore Audrey’s interest in mainstream popular culture makes her fiercely independent,” as well as a pioneer for other pop songwriters at Stanford.

In the fall, Audrey performed with her band at San Francisco’s Milk Bar and Redwood City’s Club Fox, two gigs that transpired from her most immediate goal of taking her live performances to larger crowds.

Her future goals include performing as an opener on a tour and licensing her music for use in movies. Ultimately, her dream is to headline her own major tour.

As records have been replaced by CDs, and again by digital downloads, the music industry is changing, and Audrey knows that success will not come by moving to Hollywood and waiting for a stroke of luck. Instead, she plans to stay in the Silicon Valley and get ahead.

While she pursues her graduate degrees and promotes her music from her home in Atherton, “rather than hoping luck will find me,” she says, “I’m going to work to create luck for myself.” ♦

Listen to Audrey’s music at audreymusic.com, iTunes, Spotify, or Pandora.