

ENTERTAINMENT Top Stories

You can make your own video: MyStudio at Grapevine Mills

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By DARLA ATLAS / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

Darla Atlas is a Fort Worth freelance writer.

In the old days, getting discovered required a whole lot of luck.

According to showbiz legend, Lana Turner was sitting at a drugstore, sipping a Coke, when the publisher of *The Hollywood Reporter* walked by and stopped in his tracks. The rest is cinematic history.

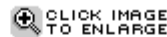
Today, thanks to technology and more opportunity, budding superstars can make their own luck.

One of the newest ways they can get discovered is called MyStudio, which opened in July at the Grapevine Mills mall. For \$20, anybody with a dream can walk into the self-contained, professional-grade studio and record a demo, which is then uploaded to my.studio.net. From there, the user can distribute it however he or she sees fit, from showing it off on Facebook to submitting it for auditions. In seconds, they can be seen by millions.

"We're bridging the gap between Hollywood and mainstream America," says Anna Madrid, vice president of business development for parent company Studio One Media.

In a society in which reality TV stars are created overnight – one day you're just some woman from back East, the next you're Snooki – being seen is often all it takes to change a life. It's happened for some MyStudio users already, Madrid says.

According to Madrid, MyStudio is the first company of its kind to offer a high-quality recording booth in spots across the country. The impetus for the idea came from the first season of *American Idol*, which proved with Burt Reynolds' Kelly Clarkson that talent is out there; it just has to be found.



COURTNEY PERRY/DMN
Ariyana McKeown, 11, of Plano watched herself and younger brother Jason Melendez Jr., 4, on a computer after making a recording at MyStudio.

Idol "demonstrated to our company founder, Larry Ryckman, that there had to be a way for millions of people throughout America to showcase their talents," she adds.

Fast-forward to today, when the next *Idol* winner could possibly emerge from a MyStudio booth. For the first time in its history, the Fox show is allowing online auditions.

MyStudio recently organized auditions for other shows, including *Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?* and MTV's *Bully Beatdown*, among others, while Perez Hilton and Simon Fuller are using the company exclusively for its Next Generation Boy Band search. Local casting calls include a contest for songwriters, in which the winner will see his or her video featured at the Texas Independent Music Expo in Dallas in November.

MyStudio "quickly separates people who are very comfortable in front of the camera and those who aren't," Madrid says.

Cassie Kidder feels at home there. The 16-year-old Flower Mound resident, who shopped at the mall last Friday with friend Taylor McCann, decided to record her version of "You Say I'm No Good," by Amy Winehouse. Standing in front of a green screen, she chose a background that featured various city signs and buildings rushing past.

The Grapevine Mills location is the fourth for the company, which also has studios in Phoenix, Hollywood and Miami.

Why the Dallas area?

"The biggest reason was because it has such a diverse field of genres and musical interests," Madrid says. "You have everything from country to the indie world to hip-hop and rock. It just made a lot of sense to come here. It's a natural fit."

The high traffic at Grapevine Mills was also a draw, "and the majority of customers are getting that it's a recording studio right away."

It didn't take long for Shemyia Taylor of Longview to get it.

"I came by at first and thought, 'Is that what I think it is?' " says the 22-year-old singer, who performed the National Anthem many times when she worked for a school district. "I decided to try it, because what do I have to lose?"

Taylor, who decided to go with Beyoncé's "Listen," plans to enter the demo in contests online. While some customers are using the studio to record greetings to their friends or ham it up for a Facebook clip, others, like Taylor, are shooting for the stars.

Madrid notes that her site is now looking for Dallas-area models and comedians.

"The average person walking in the mall might see this and go, 'I think I'm funny. I'm going to try that,' " she says of the next *Jim Carrey*, just waiting to be discovered. "We get to be part of making people's dreams come true, as cheesy as it sounds."

Darla Atlas is a Fort Worth freelance writer.

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MyStudio details

Location: Near entry 5 at Grapevine Mills mall, 3000 Grapevine Mills Parkway, Grapevine

The cost: \$20 to record one song

Contact: 1-888-771-7191

Online: www.mystudio.net

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