

Helen Welch Biography (revised February 19, 2008)

Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star

Singer, song-writer and actress Helen Welch was born and raised in Norwich, England. She made her television debut at age three on the popular children's program *Romper Room* ("I see Helen!"). Helen began studying the flute at age 11, and soon displayed abundant musical aptitude. While still in high school, she simultaneously earned her flute teaching diploma at the London College of Music; then began a stint as a flute instructor back at her high school.

Feeling that a more traditional career was expected of her, Helen left teaching for a job in business. After several years in the trenches, she realized that singing was her true passion, and has pursued it professionally ever since.

The dizzying rise to Broadway

Helen studied acting and singing before fully embarking on her new career. She landed starring roles in a string of popular musicals including *Hello Dolly!*, *Barnum*, *42nd Street*, *Oliver Twist*, *Calamity Jane*, *Show Boat*, and *Carousel*. She also made her pantomime debut as 'Maid Marion' in *Robin Hood*, a traditional English Christmas show. (Playing Helen's wicked 'uncle' was Colin Baker -- a former 'Doctor Who'!)

During this time, Helen met her late song-writing partner Tim Freebairn, and there began a magical musical partnership. The pair enjoyed immediate success when they represented Britain in the Irish International Song contest and won Best Song and Best Female Vocalist. Afterwards, Helen and Tim developed a one-woman-cabaret show entitled *First Ladies of Song*-- a celebration of the world's legendary vocal divas. *First Ladies* ignited a connection among audiences, and went on to be performed throughout England.

A short time later, Helen decided on a whim to enter a singing competition--- the grand prize of which was a role in the smash-hit Lieber and Stoller musical *Smokey Joe's Café* on Broadway. Eight-hundred girls vied for the opportunity, but it was Helen who most impressed the judges and won. She rehearsed briefly with the London cast before jetting to New York to join the Broadway production. A BBC camera crew accompanied Helen and captured the entire experience on film, which was made into a television documentary for the BBC.

London Calls

After Helen's Broadway contract ended, she was presented with a number of opportunities, one of which was to work with some of the UK's finest big bands including Opus One, Glen Miller Europe and the BBC Big Band. Unable to bypass this invaluable experience, she moved to London, and soon became a fixture in some of the West End's most popular performance spaces, including The Savoy, The Ritz and The Grosvenor House Great Room.

Helen became a regular in London's major recording studios. Her voice can be heard in a veritable library of commercial jingles, films and television productions; and in the background on recordings of well-known international artists. She was tapped to record a 'house' track for the German pop market; and when the producers of the *James Bond* movie franchise were exploring a new theme song, they asked Helen to record the demo.

Helen was thrilled and honored when the directors of the National Youth Jazz Orchestra (NYJO) asked her work with its student members, who are considered to be the cream of Britain's upcoming musical crop. At one point, the NYJO was scheduled to perform with Cleo Laine and Johnny Dankworth at London's prestigious Royal Albert Hall. During rehearsal, Dankworth, doubling as concert director, asked Helen to stand in for Cleo!

Skiing and singing in France lead to love.

Embracing the philosophy, "All work and no play make Jack a dull boy" (or in this case, "Jill a dull girl"), Helen tries to combine work and play whenever possible. On one such occasion, she took a job the French Alps, where she could satisfy her passions for both singing and skiing. On her way to the slopes, she encountered two Americans in the hotel. They exchanged greetings, but nothing more.

The following year, Helen returned to the same hotel, and happened upon the same pair of Americans in the exact location where they first met! Startled at the coincidence, the gentlemen invited her to join them for dinner. Helen fell head over heels for Douglas, a native of Cleveland, Ohio; and he for her. The vacation concluded, and Helen flew home to London thinking she would never see Doug again. Ten weeks and many phone calls later, Doug arrived in London. After a whirlwind courtship involving several more international round-trip flights, Doug proposed, Helen accepted, and in April of 2003, Helen moved to the U.S.

Helen hones her producing and acting skills.

Helen and Doug currently make their home in Northeast Ohio, where Helen regularly performs at celebrated area-establishments including Nighttown, The Carousel Dinner Theatre and Caine Park. Highlights of the last several years include:

- ☒ **November 2003:** Helen's debut performance with the Cleveland Pops Orchestra at Playhouse Square Center's Allen Theatre.
- ☒ **September 2005:** Helen wrote, produced and starred in *Fever* - a salute to legendary female vocalists of the past 50 years including Ella Fitzgerald, Peggy Lee, Sarah Vaughn, Etta James, Aretha Franklin, Bette Midler and more. *Fever* played to sell-out crowd, and led Helen to write, produce and direct four new shows in 2006: *Swingin' on Broadway*, *Movie Magic*, *Fever II* and *Jingle Bell Swing*.
- ☒ **December 2006:** Helen appeared in the film *Christmas at Maxwells*, and co-wrote and sang two songs on the film's sound track. The film was produced by Cleveland-based Laufer Film Productions.
- ☒ **December 2006:** The Playhouse Square Center premiere of *Jingle Bell Swing* received fervent audience reception. The show returns to PSC in late 2007.

One Dream

In September 2006, Helen made her first recording with The Cleveland Jazz Orchestra and her quartet. The CD, entitled *One Dream* is an eclectic compilation of Broadway hits: *Something's Comin' / Somewhere (West Side Story)* and *The Trolley Song (Meet Me in St Louis)*; classic pop tunes: *Walkin' After Midnight* and *This Could Be The Start of Something Big*; and compositions co-written by Helen: *One Dream is Better than None*. It also features Helen's version of *Zing! Went the Strings of My Heart*, arranged by Nelson Riddle. Helen received personal permission from Riddle's daughter, to use the original arrangement of *Zing!* on her recording. Besides Judy Garland, Helen is the only other person to have recorded this arrangement.

A year of 'firsts' for 2007.

In March 2007 Helen made her debut performance at Packard Music Hall with Steinway artist Joe Augustine. April saw her Severance Hall debut with the Cleveland Pops Orchestra and the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra in a concert entitled *Side by Side*. Helen also made her Columbus, Ohio performance debut: first with her quartet on July 11th and then with the Columbus Jazz Orchestra during their summer series entitled *JazZoo!* Held at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, a spectacular outdoor venue perched at the edge of the Scioto River.

On July 28th Helen made her Blossom Music Center Debut with the Blossom Festival Orchestra celebrating the music of Gershwin with conductor Loras Shissel.

November 2nd saw a performance at The Kent Stage headlining with the Kent State University Jazz Band; November 10th Helen joined the Cleveland Jazz Orchestra at Akron's Civic Theatre, and *Jingle Bell Swing* returned with a total of five performances, three in Pennsylvania, one at The Palace Theater in Playhouse Square Center and the final show at the Akron Civic Theater

No time to slow down in 2008.

In February of 2008 Helen made her debut performance at the Stocker Arts Center in Elyria with her Valentine's cabaret entitled 'The Look of Love'. June saw Helen performing once again with the nationally acclaimed Cleveland Jazz Orchestra in a concert benefiting the Montifiore home in Beachwood, Ohio and in July Helen had her debut appearance with the Akron Symphony Orchestra in a wonderful outdoor concert at Akron's Lock Live. This was followed by a performance with the Bemus Pops Symphony Orchestra on the floating stage at Bemus Point and two appearances at Chautauqua in New York State including a concert in the amphitheatre with the Dave Stevens Big Band.

Helen returned to Columbus in July 2008 to sing with the Columbus Jazz Orchestra during the summer jazz festival and again in October when she joined them once again to perform a six night show entitled 'The Roaring 20's'.

Christmas saw the return of Helen's Christmas Big Band show *Jingle Bell Swing!* The show appeared for a total of 7 performances including the Warner Theatre in Erie PA, the Akron Civic Theatre in Akron, Ohio and the Struthers Library Theatre in Warren, PA.

Coming up in 2009.

Helen returns to the Stocker Arts Center in Elyria for two performances of her show 'Divas!' celebrating the first ladies of song. On Feb 27th Helen will headline at Lakeland Jazz Festival at Lakeland Community College, Ohio. April will see her debut appearance with the Packard Concert Band at the Packard Concert Hall and in July she will be traveling to Buffalo to sing with the Buffalo Symphony under the direction of Arie Lipsky.

Helen and her quartet will be traveling to Ashland Ohio to perform the show 'Divas!' at the popular Guy C Myers Memorial Band Shell in August 2009.