

STAR POWER

CASSADEE POPE HAS FOUND HER INVINCIBILITY IN THE FORM OF A NEW SONG.

IF YOU WERE A KID in the last 30 years or so, there's a good chance you came across a generation of the *Super Mario Bros.* video game. In between toppling Koopa Troopa turtles, smushing Goomba mushrooms

and collecting coins—you know, the time-consuming minutiae of Mario's everyday life—there were moments of invincibility, literally, where the music became supercharged and Mario could not be stopped. Those

moments came in the form of a yellow "Invincibility Star" that bounced all over the screen.

Cassadee Pope will be the first person to tell you that the first half of this year didn't go exactly as

the 26-year-old Florida native had planned. As much as she wanted to get new music out there, it just wasn't happening. Too many obstacles were in the way—a turtle here, a mushroom there. But if there is one thing *The Voice* winner has learned since taking the reality show title in 2012 it's that if you want to make it in the music industry you've got to be tough, just like Nintendo's favorite son.

To stay busy, Cassadee did what she does best. She wrote . . . and wrote . . . and wrote, creating a cache of songs in her Nashville home while occasionally playing a live show. And then one day she got an email from Big Machine Records president/CEO Scott Borchetta that cued her energetic music of invincibility.

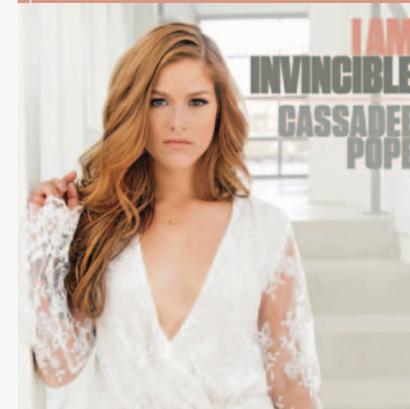
"For the past eight months I was at my home in Nashville just writing five days a week, that was my life—every now and then I'd play a show, but most of the time I was at home," says Cassadee after settling in to an office on the *Nash Country Weekly* campus. Her green eyes open wide as she flashes a pearly smile, continuing, "And then Scott sent me an email with a song in it, and I remember listening to it and thinking, 'This is totally something I want to say, something I want to encourage people to do to get through the tough times,' because that's what I'm kinda doing right now. I would consider the first half of this year to be a little tough for me because I really wanted to be out there with new music but it just wasn't happening for me."

The song in the email was "I Am Invincible," a ballad of empowerment written by Brett Boyett and Nash Overstreet that declares *I am invincible / I am unbreakable / I am a diamond cut to last / I am unstoppable / I am a hero / Like a phoenix from the ash*. While the lyrics could easily come across as clichéd in the wrong hands, the song was anything but that when Cassadee wrapped her soaring vocals around them as she debuted "I Am

CONFIDENCE BOOSTER

Riding the buzz generated by her new single, "I Am Invincible," Cassadee has been working on new music for her sophomore album that she hopes to have finished by early 2016, and she's hinting that the theme of "Invincible" will carry over to other songs on the album.

"For the past eight or nine months, I've written a gazillion songs, so I have a lot of new music to get in the studio and sift through and record. All the songs I've written over the past year are very inspirational, empowering, a little edgier, sassier. I feel that in myself. I feel way more confident than in the past. I'm more in touch with what I want to say as an artist, which was something I never thought was an issue because I wrote songs that came naturally. Now I feel like it's important to know what I want to say as an artist. You can love music and have fun doing it, but it takes you to the next level when you really have a message that you want to get across."



Invincible" at the opening ceremonies of the Special Olympics World Games on July 25.

"Singing at the opening ceremonies was one of the best experiences I've ever had," says Cassadee. "I got to go up onstage and sing in front of all the

people that truly are invincible and defy the odds. They get through life with a smile on their face no matter what's in their way. I couldn't think of a better place to debut it."

It's been almost two years since Cassadee released her debut album, *Frame by Frame*, which reached No. 1 on *Billboard's* Top Country Albums chart. After more than a year without a new single on the radio airwaves, Cassadee's performance of "I Am Invincible" put her back in the spotlight. It marinated in the public psyche for more than a month until it was released to country radio on Sept. 8 and set Cassadee on a whirlwind trek of live performances across the country.

"This single happened so quickly that everything is up in the air right now," says Cassadee. "Details and final tweaks are being figured out the night before I do things, so I'm not quite sure what I'm doing next week, but my calendar dates say 'Promo.' I just get on the bus or plane and go. I'm off and running."

Cassadee is now running with the confidence of an invincible Mario, and she's ready to unleash that swagger onstage. It's something she gleaned from her time on *The Voice* as well as from opening shows for the likes of Tim McGraw, Blake Shelton and Miranda Lambert.

"If you're uncomfortable or unsure of yourself onstage, that will translate to the crowd and they will be unsure of you," she says. "When you get onstage, you really have to sell it, and it's almost like an alter ego. In everyday life I definitely have insecurities, I'm a normal human being. Onstage, it's almost like you have to forget about that realize you're up there for a reason. And now that I have a song like 'Invincible,' I see how important it is to be an artist people turn to for empowerment and inspiration and that's something I really want to hone in on as I grow as an artist."

Game on, Cassadee.

JIM CASEY