

For Immediate Release: January 10th, 2014
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MIRANDA SINGS AT THE LOBERO IN SANTA BARBARA FRIDAY, MARCH 7, 2014 – 7:00PM

(Santa Barbara, CA) Comedian Colleen Ballinger and her YouTube character, Miranda Sings, at the Lobero Theatre on Friday, March 7, at 7:00 pm.

Like so many theater geeks, Colleen Ballinger grew up in Santa Barbara dreaming about performing on stage. As a child, her grandfather took her to a show at the Lobero theatre, leaned over to her and said, "Someday you will be on that stage". Her grandfather's prediction will come true on March 7th, when Colleen Ballinger performs at the Lobero as her hilarious and wildly popular YouTube character, Miranda Sings. However, the path that brought Colleen full circle to the Lobero, is something that no one could have ever predicted.

Having the theater bug firmly implanted at a young age, Colleen Ballinger went on to perform in musical theater as a student at San Marcos High School, in plays such as Les Misarables and the Pirates of Penzance. After graduating high school, Ballinger became a vocal performance major at Azusa Pacific University, and it was there that something unexpected happened that would change the course of her life.

"I started seeing these links from girls who would sit in their bedroom and sing into the camera," Colleen recalled. "I thought it was so stupid, because I didn't think anybody got famous off of YouTube." She filmed her first Miranda video in 2008 while visiting her parent's home in Santa Barbara. Colleen's parents were horrified to hear her purposefully singing off key – especially after all the money spent on voice lessons. Her parents pleaded with her not to post the video on-line, for fear people would think that was how she really sounded. But, Colleen assured them that it was just an inside joke for her friends and that no one would ever see it.

This was true for the first few Miranda videos, garnering only a handful of views from friends and family. But, everything changed when she posted a Miranda video entitled, "Free Voice Lesson" in which Miranda provides all the wrong advice. Even this video laid dormant for over a year, when early in 2009, the video went viral. Her view count on YouTube shot up to nearly 100,000 in a matter of days, leading to some overwhelming attention. "I was terrified when it went viral, because I didn't know what to do with it," Colleen said.

At first, people thought Miranda was a real person and vicious "hate mail" was posted on her YouTube videos criticizing her lack of talent. The free voice lesson video soon began to circulate among the close-knit Broadway community. Once they realized it was an act, Miranda Sings became the toast of Broadway. However, Ballinger had no idea of Miranda's popularity among Broadway performers, until she was contacted by Frankie Grande (brother of pop singer Ariana Grande). At the time, Frankie was performing in Mamma Mia on Broadway. Frankie asked Colleen if she would perform as Miranda with the cast of Mamma Mia in the annual Broadway Cares Easter Bonnet Benefit. At first, Colleen thought it was a practical joke. But, through his persistence, Frankie was able to convince Colleen that it was true. So, she flew to New York and performed as Miranda live for the first time ever, on a Broadway stage no less, with the cast of Mamma Mia as her backup singers and dancers.

This whole experience was surreal to Ballinger. Especially since it had been barely a year earlier when Colleen visited New York for the first time as a tourist and saw her very first Broadway show. Colleen remembers the curtains going up and she began sobbing at the realization that she was actually sitting in the audience of a real Broadway show, in the presence of her idol, Tony Award winning actress, Sutton Foster.

Believing Miranda's fifteen minutes of fame had expired, Ballinger returned to California and went back to work in her job at Disneyland, as a singer and performer. However, a few weeks after Miranda's Broadway debut, Colleen was contacted by producers in London, who wanted Miranda to perform in several shows on London's West End with a star-studded casts. So, Colleen hopped on a plane and discovered, much to her surprise, that Miranda was even more popular in the U.K. than in the US. "For someone who loved musical theater and opera and performing, to have all this thrown in my face was unbelievable ... it was just being handed to me," she said.

Colleen soon realized that Miranda was generating opportunities and industry contacts that she would never have had elsewhere. So, Ballinger made the decision to ride the Miranda Sings wave as far as it would take her. She quit her job at Disneyland and moved to New York. Jim Caruso, host of "Cast Party" a weekly cabaret at the famous Birdland supper club in New York City, had a big influence on Colleen's career. "Jim reached out to me on email shortly after the Miranda videos went viral, and he's now one of my dearest friends," said Ballinger. He was a huge fan of the Miranda character and, thanks to Jim, Miranda began to perform regularly at Birdland.

Then invitations for Miranda to perform at other venues began to trickle in. Ballinger knew that no one wanted to hear Miranda sing off-key for a full hour show, so she decided to create a comedy show based on the Miranda character. To write the show, Colleen enlisted the help of her brother, Christopher Ballinger, a writer and comedian in his own right, as well as a local magician who runs an online store called, Magic Geek. "The fact that I went from making a minute-and-a-half video in my bedroom to doing an hour-and-a-half live show is just crazy," Colleen said.

But, seeing as there is no manual for creating a career out of viral videos, Colleen opted to go it alone, acting as her own manager and booking shows on her own. "I was trying to do contracts, and I was making mistakes and getting screwed over a lot," she admitted.

All the while, Colleen continued to post videos online, as the Miranda character evolved and took on a life of her own. In her early days, Miranda was more toned down than the current level. But, as "Haters" posted comments on YouTube bashing Miranda clothing, makeup, eyebrow twitches and any other detail they fixated upon, it became fodder for Miranda's persona. "Whenever a hater said they hated something about Miranda, I'd do it more," Ballinger said. As she cranked it up, her online traffic exploded.

Out of necessity, Colleen became an expert in social media. She would post videos on YouTube to promote her upcoming shows. She created a fan page on Facebook for Miranda Sings, as well as Twitter and Instagram accounts. To date, Miranda Sings and Colleen Ballinger's YouTube channels have over 100 million views and Ballinger has moved back to Southern California, the Mecca for "YouTubers". She has learned the value of collaborating with other YouTubers, such as her good friend and YouTube superstar, Glozel.

Miranda is more popular than ever, performing in and selling out larger venues all over the world. Colleen now has a manager booking her shows and is pursuing a Miranda-related television project, as well as a Broadway production.

"I feel so lucky to have the career that I have," she said. "I can travel the world and be a goofball and make people laugh.

Tickets for the Miranda Sings show at the Lobero are \$27 and may be purchased at the Lobero Theatre Box Office, 33 East Canon Perdido Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101 or Box Office Phone: 805-963-0761 or Online: <https://checkout.lobero.com/single/SelectSeating.aspx?p=3065>

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