



Sgt. Christiana Ball performs "Til the Last Shot's Fired" by Trace Atkins, en route to winning the title of Army Entertainment's 2013 Rising Star. (Photo by Robert Dozier)

# Drill Sergeant Wins 2013 Operation Rising Star Competition

By Robert Dozier

Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation Programs

**S**gt. Christiana Ball, a drill sergeant from Fort Leonard Wood, Mo., has been voted Army Entertainment's 2013 Rising Star.

Ball was chosen from a field of 12 vocalists from Army garrisons around the world. She edged out family members Joyce Severino, from Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, and Sarah Hopkins, from Joint Base Langley-Eustis, Va., in the final round of the *American Idol*-style competition, held at Joint Base San Antonio, Texas.

"I want to thank everybody who voted for me," Ball said. "I've had just untold amounts of support from my family, people at my installation, my unit, the combat veterans motorcycle association, the VFW — just tons

of people. That is what is overwhelming me: the amount of support and love I've received. And the judges, you all are great. Thank you."

Ball was one of seven finalists from garrisons in the continental U.S. The other six included Hopkins and Severino; as well as family member Charrie Mae Riggs from Fort Campbell, Ky.; 2nd Lt. Derrick Bishop from Fort Irwin, Calif.; Sgt. Scott Harris from the Presidio of Monterey, Calif.; and Pvt. 1st Class Kiari Mhoon from Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash.

Finalists from overseas garrisons included Sgt. Oscar Bugarin from Camp Lomonnier, Djibouti; Spc. Ikilya Davenport from Camp Humphreys, South Korea; 1st Lt.



After being named the 2013 Rising Star, Ball does her first official “meet and greet” with fans at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. (Photo by Robert Dozier)

Matthew Gabriel from Wiesbaden, Germany; and family members Christina Lewis from Kaiserslautern, Germany, and Raquel Sargent from Stuttgart, Germany.

“I am so happy and excited and I appreciate the votes I received from everyone,” Severino said. “The advice we received from the judges about proper breathing, how to perform and connect with the audience was priceless.”

Operation Rising Star gives performers a unique opportunity to entertain their comrades around the world and fulfill their own personal musical ambitions.

The 12 finalists competed against each other in three elimination rounds, first narrowing the field to six finalists: Harris, Ball, Lewis, Severino, Hopkins and Sargent; then the top three: Ball, Severino and Hopkins.

“I’ve been the front man in cover bands, but I’ve never been with a more talented group of performers,” Harris said. “I can’t believe the sprint to the finish line.”

Each round of competition was recorded and was made available online for viewing at <http://risingstar.us.army.mil/page/home/>.

The competitors were mentored and judged by professionals in the industry. Returning this year to Operation Rising Star were vocalist and vocal coach Debra Byrd (from television’s *The Voice*), vocalist and recording

country artist Michael Peterson, and retired Sgt. Maj. of the Army Jack Tilley. The judge’s scores were combined with online votes from fans from around the world to determine who moved ahead in the competition.

“It feels incredible. We are the top 12 singers in the Army,” Harris said. “And the experience to get expert advice from these industry leaders, this is just great.”

“I feel honored and humbled,” Ball said. “Right now, my husband and I are going to celebrate a little. But soon, it will be time to get back to the drill. My team back home needs me.”

Many Soldiers in the competition are hoping their performance at Operation Rising Star will help them secure a position in the 2014 Soldier Show, also sponsored by Army Entertainment, a Morale, Welfare and Recreation program run by the U.S. Army Installation Management Command.

“My new year’s resolution is to join the Army Soldier Show,” said Harris. “I want to live out my dream as a Soldier and a performer.”

Tim Higdon, the Soldier Show executive producer, explained that they’re already one step closer.

“The six Soldiers in the top 12 already have a ‘bye’ straight to the live auditions [for the Soldier Show] in

February,” Higdon said. “The encouraging thing is that talent and success of Season 9 is a direct result of the ongoing continuation of the program and highlights the difference MWR makes in the whole community.”

Thirty garrisons participated in preliminary rounds leading to the top 12 live competition. The 18 not represented in the finals have been contacted to encourage

their active-duty, Guard and Reserve performers to submit audition packages for the Soldier Show.

Operation Rising Star similar to, but not affiliated with the popular television show *American Idol*, and is one of many programs designed to bolster morale among troops and deliver positive reinforcement to Soldiers, military civilians and family members. ■

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