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Just Days After Scandal, The Promise Of an Audience

By David Segal
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Hooking for the Emperors Club and emerging as the Earth's best-known call girl is surely not the career plan [Ashley Alexandra Dupre](#) had in mind when she moved to [New York](#) to make it as a singer. But now that she's achieved fame at the media stakeout level, as "Kristen," a bunch of music biz talent scouts and managers are giving her a listen.

Hello, silver lining!

No, a record deal isn't a sure thing. But look at it this way: She had no chance on Tuesday, before anyone knew her name, and she has a slender chance now that more than 2.3 million people have visited <http://www.myspace.com/ninavenetta> and heard her songs.

"People want to see if there's an opportunity there," says Ted Cohen, a former talent scout for [Warner Bros.](#) and now managing partner at TAG Strategic, which advises start-up music companies on all aspects of digital media. "Is what she's posted a hit? No. But if someone like [Jay-Z](#) or [Danger Mouse](#) or Jimmy Iovine wanted to give her a shot, she'll have a shot."

As any aspiring singer will tell you, the hard part of breaking out is getting noticed, and let's just say Ms. Dupre has that *covered*. Yesterday, a scrum of reporters hunkered down at the apartment building in the Flatiron District where she lives, waiting for just a glimpse of the woman who brought down Gov. [Eliot Spitzer](#). And as news of her life's ambitions spread over the Internet ("I am all about my music," she proclaims on her page, "and my music is all about me") the songs she'd posted online were suddenly getting what they apparently never had before: an audition with some of the more powerful figures in the music biz.

"I read that she's a singer, and so I checked out her stuff on Wednesday evening," says Chad Jensen, an artist manager. Jensen has found platinum online before. He first heard his greatest find -- [Colbie Caillat](#), whose debut album, "Coco," has sold more than 1 million copies since July -- on a [MySpace](#) page. What he heard from Dupre, however, didn't have nearly the same impact.

"It didn't blow me away," he says. "Part of it is that I could barely hear her voice. But here's the thing -- if she has even an ounce of talent, someone is going to take a chance. I mean, they gave [['American Idol'](#) reject] William Hung a shot. And I know for a fact that [Tila Tequila](#)" -- the much page-viewed MySpace phenom turned reality TV star -- "has been in the offices of every major label."

It was the same refrain, time and again, yesterday from the music industry pros. None swooned for Dupre's music, all of it club R&B in the dance-vixen vein of [J-Lo](#) and [Beyonc](#). (Sample lyric: "I know what you want/You got what I want/I know what you need/Can you handle me?") A couple said the tunes are pretty uninspired, a tad derivative. But with the right song and the right producer, these people say, you never know.

"If [Paris Hilton](#) can make a hit song, anyone can," says Erik Parker, director of content at the hip-hop Web site SOHH.com. "Paris Hilton, she swung the doors wide open."

Actually the doors were open before Hilton.

"Look, Traci Lords had a music career after she'd acted in pornographic movies as a minor," says Cohen. "People are very forgiving, and she's going to emerge as the victim in all this."

Whether any producers or managers have made any offers, we don't know. So far, the only opportunity offered publicly to Dupre has come from Penthouse, whose publisher, Diane Silberstein, said she'd "love to have her in the magazine," perhaps even on the cover.

To which we say: *P erhaps?*

If the past is any guide, Dupre is about to hear about plenty of business ventures that she'll want no part of. That's the guess of another woman who was caught in the middle of another national sex scandal -- one who had a modest singing career before achieving infamy.

"It's very scary," says Gennifer Flowers, who spoke from [Las Vegas](#), where she'd recently ended a run in a musical comedy. Flowers recounted the fallout from revelations of her affair with then-governor [Bill Clinton](#). She'd been a local-to-Arkansas nightclub singer until her name went household during the 1992 presidential campaign.

After that, the professional offers she got were "a lot of stuff like, have sex with a Bill Clinton look-alike. Or pose naked with a Bill Clinton look-alike." The publicity put a serious kibosh on Flowers's career prospects for years, she says, because no club owner wanted to hire a singer who'd be accompanied by a pack of reporters.

"What is fame without dignity?" she says.

We'll see! Music publicist Diana Baron suggested that Dupre's best shot is to end up in some glossy lad magazines, then segue from that platform to a music contract. Switching into "American Idol" voice critique mode, Baron adds that Dupre needs to convey more confidence when she sings. Some "clear intent and feeling of who she is" would be a good idea, too.

Eh, details. To judge from the feedback she's getting online, Dupre already has some ardent fans. "I wouldn't have known about this artist without her recent play in the political press," wrote one. "Oddly, I think she's going to take off in clubs!"

Another gave a very strong, perhaps totally sarcastic, thumbs up. "Best song of the century BAR NONE!"

"Good beat," quipped another poster, "love the scandal behind it."

Staff writer J. Freedom du Lac contributed to this report.

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