

Amy Aguilera

By Jeanne Cotroneo Darrow and Lauren Fitzgerald



From childhood, Amy Aguilera felt torn between two powerful callings—one for the uniform; the other for the stage. Growing up, she remembers watching *G.I. Jane* and being “convinced I wanted to shave my head and be Demi Moore,” shares Amy. Yet, music pulled at her just as strongly, especially while listening to Bonnie Raitt, Shania Twain and Aretha Franklin, among other favorites. “With dreams of serving in the military, above all else, I wanted to perform.”

She managed to carve out a career that seamlessly blended both.

MUSICAL MILITARY CAREER

Amy followed in her dad’s footsteps to California State University, Long Beach, where she earned her bachelor’s in voice performance and jazz studies at the Bob Cole Music Conservatory. When she got the call to audition for the Heritage of America Band at Langley Air Force Base, she jumped at the chance, flew to Virginia and won the position as vocalist. Immediately after, she enlisted in the Air Force, launching a military career that continues to this day, nearly two decades later.



Photos courtesy of Amy Aguilera

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Master Sergeant Amy Aguilera has been a member of the Pennsylvania Air National Guard since 2011.



She loved performing with her bandmates all over the world, especially lifting the spirits of children and deployed soldiers.



Along with her deployment experiences, Amy (left) has performed at Pocono Speedway for NASCAR, Subaru Stadium for Philadelphia Union Soccer and Citizens Bank Park for the Philadelphia Phillies.



She was the first American woman to publicly perform live music in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

After her active-duty service from 2007 to 2011, she continued her Air Force career as a musician by joining the Pennsylvania Air National Guard and the 553d Air National Guard Band of the Northeast. A Veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Inherent Resolve and Operation Resolute Support, Amy answered the call of duty during two deployments to the Middle East: from February 2009 to June 2009 and again in January 2020 to April 2020.

MISSIONS BEYOND MUSIC

Over the years, the singer has performed for dignitaries, foreign leaders and troops stationed overseas, finding joy in lifting their spirits. "Giving a handshake and a hug to someone missing home amidst the symphony of explosions in Mosul, Iraq, my missions went far beyond music," says Amy, admitting that, "With a pistol strapped to my leg and a rifle over my shoulder, *Proud Mary* never felt so strange!"

In 2020, she became the first American woman to publicly perform live music in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, and performed a variety of pop music from Van Halen to Bruno Mars, at the 75th anniversary celebration of the historic meeting between President Franklin Roosevelt and Saudi Arabian King Abdulaziz.

When the Air National Guard Band program ended in 2022, Amy became the Unit Training Manager for the 211th Engineering Installation Squadron at Fort Indiantown Gap, Penn. In addition to this role, Amy is her unit's CCAF Advisor, helping enlisted colleagues pursue associate degrees through the Community College of the Air Force (CCAF). She's also a student herself, at West Chester University, where she's earning a master's in human resource management.

JOURNEY TO EAST FISHKILL

In 2011, she used the post-9/11 GI Bill to pursue another passion. She moved to East Fishkill to attend the Culinary Institute of America in nearby Hyde Park. She later held several food-service management roles before landing her current job at OCS Industries Inc., a Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned construction company in Poughkeepsie.

Perhaps her most important role is that of mom to Abigail, 9, who shares Amy's love for the arts and discipline. "Abby is a beautiful firecracker who loves karate, softball, dogs, and to sing, draw and create," Amy says of her "military kid," whose father served in the Army. Abigail also "likes a schedule, to be on time, and to line her shoes and squishmallows in straight rows." They love their quiet and friendly neighborhood in East Fishkill. "This community is about people and family—we are home here," says Amy.

CIVILIAN SOLDIER

Amy is proud to be a "civilian soldier," seamlessly transitioning from civilian to airman, mother to Master Sergeant, once a month when she leaves for drill weekends. "Every time I kiss my little girl goodbye, it takes a toll," Amy admits. "However, there is no higher honor than to be an example to her."

When she puts on the uniform, Amy says she becomes "something greater than myself. I am a better mother, daughter, friend and human." ♦

Amy with her daughter Abby, who loves karate and to sing, draw and create, like her mom.

