



# Patti LaBelle

Life is precious to Patti LaBelle and she's making the most of it at every turn. This dynamo, with a singing voice to stop a freight train, is all about diversity. She's appeared in several films, including the recently released "Idlewood"; authored a bunch of books; stars in the TV One series "Living It Up With Patti LaBelle"; does a ton of work on behalf of the American Diabetes Association and scads of other charitable causes; and has successfully launched her own lines of clothing, jewelry, and perfume with the Home Shopping Network (HSN). LaBelle is putting into practice the mantra that seems to sustain her: "The only time you run out of chances is when you stop taking them."

Sounds like simple enough advice, and to the eye it would seem that chance taking is just part of LaBelle's personality. Onstage, she's known to connect so closely with her music and audience that she often kicks off her spike heels and drops to the floor as she belts out songs she seems to summon from her toes. Her voice eloquently spans four—count 'em—four octaves, and when she travels through them in her performances, you better fasten your seatbelt. You're definitely going along for the ride.

So it's surprising when the super songstress suggests that the mere thought of taking chances can sometimes stop her cold in her tracks. A shy kid, she was born Patricia "Patsy" Holt in Philadelphia and didn't really come out of her cocoon until singing in her Baptist Church choir gave her the courage to fly free. Every evolution of her career (from the Ordettes, to Patti and The Bluebells – with Nona Hendryx, Sarah Dash, and future Supreme Cindy Birdsong, to LaBelle, to her solo career)

# AS REAL AS REAL GETS

By  
ERIN  
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has been prefaced with a strong fear of the unknown, an uneasiness with taking the next chance. It was a predicament that befell the star in her personal life, as well.

"My three sisters all died of cancer before they turned 44," LaBelle reveals. "You can get to a point where you get so afraid that you're going to be diagnosed yourself that you just stop. I almost stopped taking chances on things and in my life, but then I thought 'Who's to know what's still out there for me?' I'm a diamond in the rough. I've been shining for a long

time and  
have to  
keep  
going



forward. I  
thank God

for every day I get."

With a sense of spirit to sustain her and that give-you-the-goosebumps voice to accompany her, LaBelle has earned two Grammy Awards and eight nominations; enjoyed such No. 1 hit songs as "Lady Marmalade" and "On My Own" (a duet with Michael McDonald); recorded with Sir Elton John on her 2005 "Classic Moments" album; received two American Music

Awards, three Emmy nominations and twice won the NAACP Entertainer of the Year Award.

Her newest release, which hit record stores in September, pays testament to the soulful style she's synonymous with. Titled "The Gospel According to Patti LaBelle," it marks the singer's first completely Gospel offering and features duets with Winona Judd, Stacey Winan, Yolanda Adams, Mary Mary and Candy West. "All the proceeds are going to cancer research so I hope nobody downloads," she cautions.

LaBelle recently graced the big screen in a small role in "Idlewood," released this summer by Universal/HBO Films. Set in a 1930s Georgia speakeasy, Ben Vereen, Cicely Tyson, Ving Rhames, and Terrence Howard also star. "Idlewood" marked Patti's second cinematic appearance of 2006, following on the heels of "Preaching to the Choir."

"If you blink your eye, you'll miss me," she muses.

"Neither of the roles were big, but I'm happy to be in them. I'm proud of the things that I do because I don't say 'yes' to just anything. I do things that are important to my heart."

Something that's always made LaBelle's heart happy is cooking. "From the time I was a little girl, I knew there were two things in this world I was born to do: sing and cook. I've spent my life developing my voice and my recipes, and to tell you the truth, I'm hard pressed to say where I'm happiest—in concert or in the kitchen—making music or making meals," she writes on her website.

She learned from the Southern cooks in her family and shares some of these prized family heirlooms in her cookbooks "Patti Labelle's Lite Cuisine, and Labelle Cuisine: Recipes to Sing About." The star's taken her own pots and pans on tour for years and often cooks up a storm for her road crew. "I still do sometimes, if I'm going to be in a hotel for more than two days," she says.

"Because I'm diabetic, I have to be careful of what I eat and how it's prepared."

LaBelle has become very much identifiable with diabetes. Her TV commercials are just a part of the extensive work she does to raise awareness – and funds – on behalf of the American Diabetes Association. Although the disease claimed her mother's life, LaBelle says, about her own diagnosis, "I have diabetes but diabetes doesn't have me."

Her singing, acting, cooking, and writing all converge in "Living It Up With Patti LaBelle," which airs regularly on the TV One Network. In this lifestyle show, the performer takes viewers with her as she goes on the road, shoe shops, travels, cooks, or even when she just chills out at her kitchen table in comfy clothes. Life can be glamorous – and sometimes not so glamorous – for this legend that lives the everyday with a simple grace. Life definitely leaned more to the glamorous for LaBelle when she was whisked off to Oprah Winfrey's Legends Ball last year and honored as one of 20 extraordinary African-American women who have paved the way for others. Some of the other celebrated women included Rosa Parks, Tina Turner, and Coretta Scott King. "I was so truly honored to be one of the ladies," Patti says. "When Oprah was first starting out with her TV show in Baltimore, it was sometimes hard for her to get guests, and I'd always do her show when I performed in Baltimore. We go way, way, way back."

But ahead is where LaBelle is looking. "If you feel what you're doing — if you have that soul, spirit and motivation — you can do anything. As for me, I'm ready for the world."

At 62 years young, this powerhouse has a lot to offer this world. Not because of the fame she reaps, but because of the humility she sows. "I'm blessed with everyday that I'm here and I try to put out some kind of positive energy to people that I touch every day."