

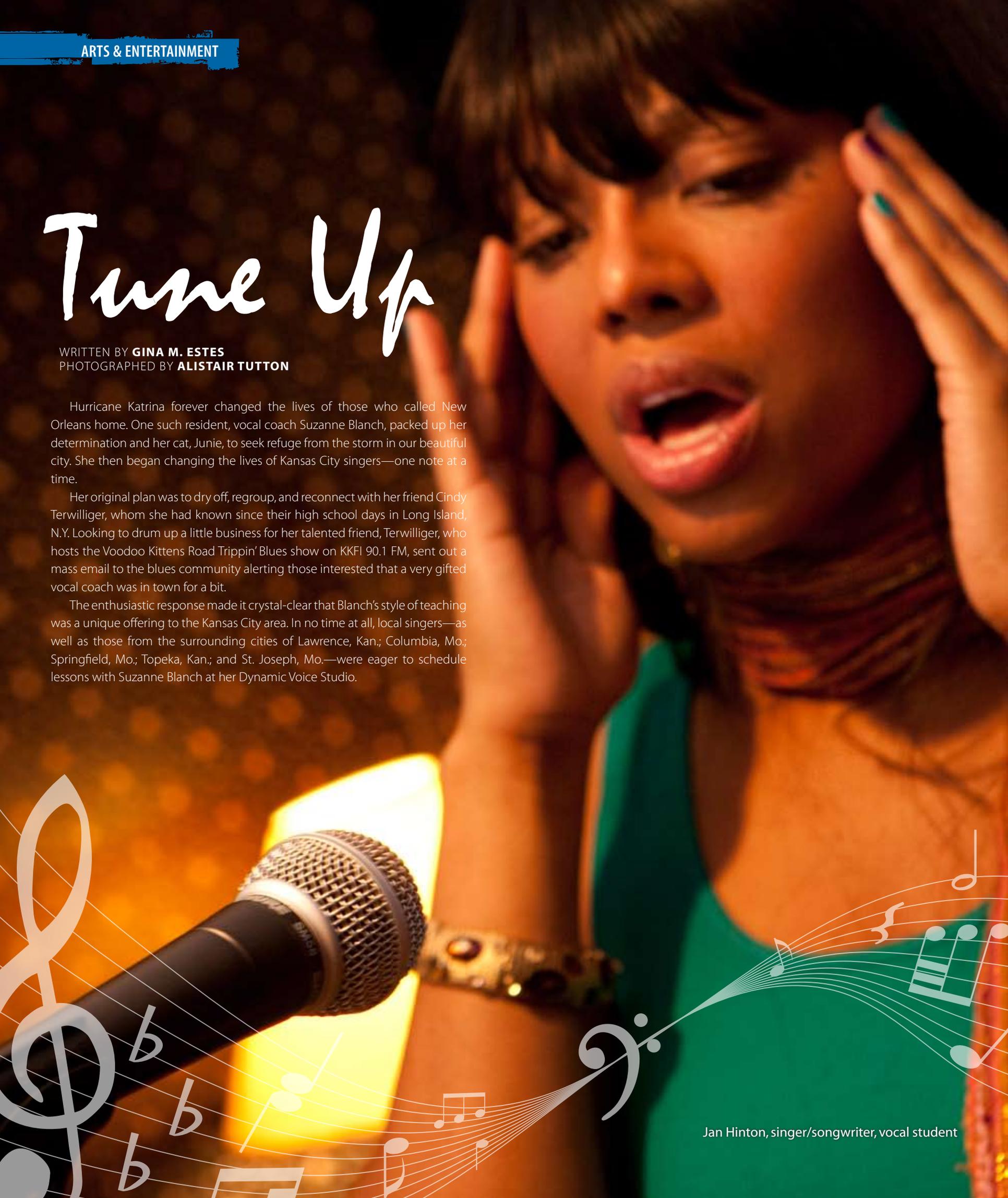
Tune Up

WRITTEN BY **GINA M. ESTES**
PHOTOGRAPHED BY **ALISTAIR TUTTON**

Hurricane Katrina forever changed the lives of those who called New Orleans home. One such resident, vocal coach Suzanne Blanch, packed up her determination and her cat, Junie, to seek refuge from the storm in our beautiful city. She then began changing the lives of Kansas City singers—one note at a time.

Her original plan was to dry off, regroup, and reconnect with her friend Cindy Terwilliger, whom she had known since their high school days in Long Island, N.Y. Looking to drum up a little business for her talented friend, Terwilliger, who hosts the Voodoo Kittens Road Trippin' Blues show on KKFI 90.1 FM, sent out a mass email to the blues community alerting those interested that a very gifted vocal coach was in town for a bit.

The enthusiastic response made it crystal-clear that Blanch's style of teaching was a unique offering to the Kansas City area. In no time at all, local singers—as well as those from the surrounding cities of Lawrence, Kan.; Columbia, Mo.; Springfield, Mo.; Topeka, Kan.; and St. Joseph, Mo.—were eager to schedule lessons with Suzanne Blanch at her Dynamic Voice Studio.



Jan Hinton, singer/songwriter, vocal student

"We do all these goofy weird exercises that make my students crack up, and sometimes I do, too," says Suzanne Blanch, certified voice coach and owner of Dynamic Voice Studio. "...But when they start working on songs and it all comes together they're like, 'Holy crap! Whose voice is that?' It never ceases to bring me joy."

Blanch has developed her unique teaching style over the years and is certified in multiple singing techniques, including Voices Unlimited's 6-Point Vocal WAV Method and Eric Bruner's Sing With Power technique, in which she holds an advanced degree of master teacher.

Bruner is a certified vocal coach of voice coach to the stars Seth Riggs. Riggs has worked with Michael Jackson, Madonna, Barbara Streisand, Josh Groban, and Stevie Wonder. It is Bruner's technique that takes the spotlight in Blanch's teaching style. The style is far different from a classical approach to singing, which she feels can pigeonhole a singer into a narrow range.

"It's all about connecting the chest voice and the head voice—upper and lower registers—so it feels like you have one continuous voice that sounds full like your speaking voice," Blanch says. "This allows you to really wail without hurting yourself. I focus on building strength, endurance, and power. I've also picked up some great tips from several nationally known rock

vocal coaches. I'm always on the lookout for new exercises and techniques to add to my toolbox. It makes me a more effective teacher and keeps things fresh and interesting."

Her students include a wide range of ages and musical styles, from young rock, hip-hop, and honky-tonk singers to middle-aged jazz and blues singers—the total beginner to the seasoned professional. Locally, she has worked with lead singers from rock bands The Belated, The Popsicles, Forever Greye, and Flee The Seen (Kim Anderson, who won a *Heavy Frequency* magazine award in 2005 for best vocalist), and blues singers Shannon Basham from Shannon and the Rhythm Kings, Connie Hawkins from Connie and the Choir Boys, and Samantha Fish. Country singer/songwriters Nate Dean and James Riggs have both studied with Blanch and have since moved to Nashville, Tenn., to pursue their careers.

Currently, Blanch is working with Prep School, cousins of hip-hop artist Tech N9ne. "These boys have danced on stage with Tech N9ne and Usher and now they're writing this great old-school hip-hop," she says. "I told them I can't wait till they release their first CD so I can buy it!"

Blanch guarantees that students will increase their vocal power and range in the first lesson and sets a goal for every student of singing three octaves. Before they begin lessons, she takes time to explain to her students how their voice works and she prides herself in offering a safe and comfortable singing environment where her students can freely express themselves.

"We do all these goofy weird exercises that make my students crack up, and sometimes I do, too. I've had several people half-jokingly look for hidden cameras in my studio," Blanch says with a laugh. "But when they start working on songs and it all comes together they're like, 'Holy crap! Whose voice is that?' It never ceases to bring me joy."

Her passion for music and the people who have a desire to sing it is ever evident in the energetic hand gestures she uses to make her points clear. Born into a family of singers, Blanch grew up listening to everything from The Beatles to Billie Holiday to Broadway show tunes, The Rolling Stones and The Supremes to Annie Lennox. "In seventh grade, I heard Gershwin for the first time," she says. "I immediately fell in love. Jazz and blues—that was it for me. The weirder the chords, the better. I also love singing R&B and rock; basically anything that is soulful!"

At 23, with a bachelor of arts in psychology accompanied by a double minor in philosophy and religious studies, adventure called out to Suzanne. She bought a one-way ticket to Taiwan without a job or a place to stay, and an intended six-month trip turned into seven years of worldly experiences that included teaching English, recording vocals for greeting cards and audio books, and teaching chi kung. This diverse background—along with her experience in singing in rock, blues, and jazz bands, doing studio session work, and running vocal studios in both Denver and New Orleans—benefits her students today.

"I am honored to witness and be trusted to guide people through this process of self-discovery and self-expression," Blanch says. "It can be very emotional for people. Let's just say I keep a box of tissues handy." 



Allen Carpenter, jazz singer, vocal student

For more information, visit www.DynamicVoiceStudio.com or call 816-786-8751