

Former 'American Idol' contestant Devyn Rush is now lifting her voice against high school bullying

During October - National Stop Bullying Month - Rush has teamed with an organization called Hey U.G.L.Y. to stage anti-bullying assemblies at high schools around the country

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Washington Heights' singing waitress is hitting a new note, and this time it's personal.

Devyn Rush, who was working at Ellen's Stardust Diner when she gained notoriety on "American Idol" in 2011, is teaming up with an organization called Hey U.G.L.Y. to help combat bullying in high schools.

The chanteuse is set to hit the road to conduct Hey U.G.L.Y. anti-bullying assemblies in high schools. She takes the stage on Tuesday in Galliano, LA., and travels to Yorktown, N.Y., on Oct. 25. October marks National Stop Bullying Month.

Rush, 22, has become a big voice in the fight against bullying. Her extended-play debut CD meshes her vocal talents with Hey U.G.L.Y.'s messages of inner peace and self esteem.

One of the songs Rush performs in schools, "The Alchemist," urges teens to love themselves, while "I am Enough" tells a semi-autobiographical tale of a girl who realizes she can be successful. A third song, "Run Away," confronts bullying head on.

"Songwriting is passionate and cathartic, it helps me get through my problems," Rush said about the process she uses to create her music, which she describes as "soul/pop with a tinge of jazz."

Rush's work with teens is more personal than some might think. She says she was a victim of bullying from seventh grade until graduation, and the feelings triggered by the experience lingered into her adult life.

"I did not know how to love myself," Rush says, recalling the self-loathing and confusion that plagued her as an adolescent. "I was scrawny and had a big personality. I even had to repeat sixth grade because the bullying was so bad."

The turbulent ups and downs were magnified when her family moved from Philadelphia, settling in New Hope, Pa.

When she was 18, Rush moved to New York City to pursue her singing dreams, relying on her rich talent and lots of encouragement from her musical parents.

Unfortunately, arriving on "American Idol" became as much of a curse as a blessing, arousing some unpleasant memories of her childhood.



“The time I spent on ‘American Idol’ made me feel judged all the time,” Rush said. “You think you have to dress to please the judges, but I realized I should have dressed the way I wanted.”

“Idol” also cost Rush her gig at Ellen’s Stardust Diner, a job she held for three years, ostensibly because the Broadway eatery could not stomach her trips out of town. The story got picked up by the Internet gossip sites and local TV news.



“It was kind of a funny situation, but there are no hard feelings,” she said.

In the year since, Rush has been focusing on her music; she and her back-up band perform several nights per week, and she’s currently booking dates for a national tour. Her next performance is scheduled for this Friday at the Studio at Webster Hall.

Rush also puts a lot of energy into her work with teens. In addition to Hey U.G.L.Y., she works regularly with Big Brothers Big Sisters, schooling youngsters in songwriting and

singing along with the importance of emotional self awareness.

Hey U.G.L.Y. was created in Indiana, in 2002, to reduce the prevalence of teen suicide, bullying, drug abuse and obesity. The name stands for “Unique Gifted Lovable You.”

Rush’s life may seem as frenzied as her name, but the singer has also worked as a yoga instructor and says the discipline helps keep her centered.

“We can control our breathing,” Rush says, explaining a lesson that she also teaches to teens. “The metaphor for breathing: take control of your life; move forward; manage stress, and realize you can make choices.”

To book an anti-bullying assembly at your child’s school, email preventbullyingnow@heyugly.org.