

# Forget the 'Batmobile,' Houston contest winner cherishes friendships\_22105

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## Forget the 'Batmobile,' Houston contest winner cherishes friendships

**By Martha Morrow**

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HOUSTON-When J.J. Worthen's sister first called him about entering *Gimme the Mike, Houston*, the local NBC affiliate's voice talent contest, he didn't give it much thought.

Auditions were the following day, and Worthen-a student at Houston Baptist University and member of First Baptist Church of Crosby-already had seen on the news hundreds of people lining up to spend the night to audition. But when he got up the next morning, he decided to take his chances.

He arrived at the auditions with just over an hour to spare and didn't think he would get the opportunity to show off his vocal talents. But Worthen got his chance and took full advantage of the moment, winning out over hundreds of Houston-area residents to ultimately become the contest's top winner.

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J.J.  
Wortham,  
a student  
at  
Houston  
Baptist  
University,  
felt God's  
presence,  
even when  
he thought  
he lost a  
local  
talent  
contest.  
(Photo by  
Martha  
Morrow)

Wortham, a music theory and composition major at HBU, beat out more than 2,000 other singers who auditioned to make the cut to be one of 25 performers who competed on-air. During his first performance, Wortham received perfect scores from all four judges. He began to think he might really have a chance.

Unlike many of the other contestants who were lured to compete by the top prize of a new automobile and a two-song recording contract, Wortham saw the opportunity to spread his witness for Christ and positively represent HBU.

“After all,” he joked, “I had a perfectly good car. OK, maybe my friends complained because you had to roll up the windows by pushing them up

with your hands, but it got me where I needed to go.”

With four perfect scores under his belt, Worthen advanced to the final round. His song selection that night wasn't as big a hit with the judges.

“I didn't get a perfect score,” Worthen said. “They all seemed to feel like the song I chose wasn't the best showcase for my voice. So, as the evening progressed, I wasn't expecting to win.”

After all the finalists had performed, three artists ended up with tie scores, and it didn't take the judges but a few seconds to come to a unanimous conclusion that Worthen was the big winner.

“I really didn't see this coming. After I performed, I talked with God about my disappointment but decided to focus on the opportunity I had been given to share my witness. That feeling changed to anticipation when the three-way tie was announced. And even though I was excited to win, my overwhelming feeling was just how humbling it was to win against the quality of performers I had heard that night. They were just awesome.”

As part of his grand prize package, Worthen received a new red Pontiac G6.

“It's like the Batmobile; it's such a cool car!” he said.

Music comes naturally to Worthen, whose mother was his high school choir teacher and whose father once worked as a music minister. The sister who encouraged him to enter the talent contest is also a music teacher.

He sang his first solo at the age of 4, but became more interested in instrumental music as he grew older. He chose music theory and composition as his major because he enjoys writing music and plays four instruments.

“My major helps me understand things that I can apply to every aspect of my music,” Worthen said. “And I can't say enough good things about the

music department at HBU. They are like family.

“They don't treat us as students they have to teach. They work to develop us as musicians and teach us to be well-rounded people.”

Worthen was drawn to HBU after hearing the university's music ministry group, Focus, at his home church, First Baptist of Crosby. “I wanted to go to a university that was well-rounded, and after I heard Focus, I knew that HBU was where I belonged,” he explained. Today he is a member of Focus, performing at hundreds of schools and churches across Texas each year.

“I love performing, because it really is about communicating,” he said. “It's about talking to people in your audience. When you realize how simple it really is, you find the secret to performing.”

While Worthen drives around campus in his new car pondering his recording deal, he relishes the true prize he found from the competition.

“After the show, I got so many phone calls and e-mails. When I think about all the people who helped raise me and who have loved me and been my friends for so long, it is just something I will always cherish. I got phone calls from people who to me are giants in my life, and to think that they called just meant so much.”

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