

# His musical coaching takes the crown

**KC man's clients among the top beauty pageant contestants, including nine Miss Americas.**

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On a quiet, shaded street in Hyde Park, music streams down the steps of a three-story stucco home.

Inside, a blond beauty queen belts "Son of a Preacher Man." Reaching for a note, she lifts her eyes and lets its tension wrinkle her forehead.

Bill Wolfe, a talent consultant who's lived in Kansas City for more than 30 years, pounds the same note on his grand piano.

"See, you can hit your B's if you lift your eyebrows," Wolfe says.

Dairyn Tye, an aspiring Miss Illinois, commits the tip to memory.

Every year, hundreds of beauty pageant contestants travel from across the country for lessons like this — to purchase competition tracks, to discover a talent or to perfect one. And they will pay up to \$125 an hour because, in the pageant world of performance, Wolfe is one of the top dogs.

Since 1990, Wolfe has worked on music for nine Miss Ameri-

ca winners, and has had between one and nine contestants place among the 15 semi-finalists every year. At the 2015 Miss America Pageant, he did music for the 1st, 3rd and 4th runners-up, plus four of the other top 10 semi-finalists.

He specializes in preparing contestants for the talent portion, which accounts for 35 percent of their total score — more than any other category. Meaning, apart from stunning the judges with beauty, poise and a worthy platform, a fierce competitor has to be able to stay on pitch.

Mary Ann Owens, a Missouri pageant director who's been sending competitors to Wolfe for 15 years, said he's an expert at developing potential.

"Bill will take a girl who can't carry a note and turn her into a fairly competitive singer," Owens said. "Give him some talent, and he'll turn her into Miss America."



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**Talent consultant Bill Wolfe worked with singer and pageant contestant Dairyn Tye, an aspiring Miss Illinois.**

## Made in the Midwest

The path to one of the most specialized jobs in the music industry began for Wolfe, 61, in his hometown of Norfolk, Neb., where as a child he was drawn to music.

For five years after earning his music education degree from the University of Nebraska, Wolfe taught middle and high school music in the small town of Neligh, Neb. He also led the school's choir. On his first day, seven girls showed up. Dissatisfied, Wolfe organized a dance and hired a DJ.

"The only way you could get into that dance was if you signed up for choir," Wolfe said.

Of the 240 students at the high school, 180 of them signed up, and Wolfe had to move practice to the gym.

In 1984, Wolfe moved to Kansas City. While doing graduate work at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, he came across a girl who needed a pageant track — 1 minute and 30 seconds of musical accompaniment. He did the arrangement. His friend made the track.

After attending a few pageants, Wolfe was hooked.

Soon, he became the director of Miss Kansas City, a local pageant held at the Music Hall. With his eyes on the then-struggling state pageant, Wolfe invited several board members to judge Miss Kansas City.

"They took one look at what I'd done and asked me to produce Miss Missouri," Wolfe said.

Then, pressing his index finger below his lips: "I said, 'Gee, maybe.'"

Wolfe bustles about his great room — sitting, singing, keeping time with his leather loafers and introducing, with a flourish, everyone who enters his home. Even the washer repair man.

In September, Wolfe will attend the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City.

But on the final night, he'll be at home to host a watch party for his friends and neighbors. He is an entertainer, after all.