

Hilary Duff wants to drop 'Lizzy' identity

BY NEKESA MUMBI MOODY
AP MUSIC WRITER

NEW YORK — On a recent hot summer's day, as hundreds of children waited anxiously with their parents to meet the latest, hottest teen star, one uninformed parent asked who all the fuss was about.

"It's Lizzie McGuire!" another adult proclaimed excitedly.

Not quite. Although Hilary Duff became a multimedia sensation based upon the hugely popular Disney Channel television series "Lizzie McGuire," she made a very public break from the character — and its mega-million dollar franchise — in May.

Although the 15-year-old knows it will take some time before people stop calling her "Lizzie," she's confident that a spate of new projects — including a debut album due out next month — will help carve out her own identity.

"It doesn't really bother me that people call me that," she says of her TV namesake. "But my music is kind of what helps, I think, for people to get to know me better."

Hot teens

Fewer and fewer are needing an introduction. Hilary recently landed on the cover of Vanity Fair magazine, along with Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen, Amanda Bynes and others, as among the 20 "hot teens" in Hollywood. She will appear in two upcoming films, including "Cheaper by the Dozen," with Steve Martin and Ashton Kutcher. She's set to star in two WB music specials in the fall. And her

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music videos have been among the more anticipated among the MTV set.

"I think she's definitely one of the hot people to watch right now, and I don't see that waning," says Amy Doyle, vice president of music programming at MTV. "She's become the fabric of pop culture with teens right now."

"At this point, she's obviously already a franchise," boasts Bob Cavallo, chairman of Buena Vista Music Group, Hilary's Disney-based record label.

Star power

While she may not be as omnipresent as the Olsen twins, there are few teen stars that rival her in name recognition and star power.

Her good looks, wholesome image and comedic flair helped make "Lizzie McGuire," which chronicled the growing pains of a teen-age girl, the highest rated show on the Disney Channel. The show — which premiered in 2001 and will continue to air new episodes until early 2004 — spawned video games, toys and books about the character, as well as "The Lizzie McGuire Movie," which made a respectable \$40 million at the box office this summer.

She also sang on two "Lizzie McGuire" soundtracks — one for the television series

and one for the movie — which have sold more than two million copies, according to her record company.

As the character's popularity skyrocketed, so did Hilary's. She co-starred in "Agent Cody Banks," which has made approximately \$50 million since its release earlier this year.

Hasbro picked her to help launch their "VIDEONOW" disc player, which plays 20-minute video clips on a portable, monochrome screen. It was her appearance to promote the player that brought lines and lines of kids to Toys 'R Us' gargantuan Times Square store.

Duff moved to Hollywood when she was about nine, leaving her hometown of Houston with her family to pursue her acting dream. Her breakthrough role came in 1998, in the TV movie "Caspar Meets Wendy."

In the spotlight

The enormity of her current fame is sometimes hard for even Hilary to grasp.

"It's very weird because it's like, I'm such a normal 15-year-old girl when I'm not working," she says with a cheery smile, amid a series of media interviews and autograph signings at the store.

"At home, I have to do chores, I hang out



MOVING ON — Hilary Duff, known for her role in the Disney television series "Lizzie McGuire," smiles during an interview in a toy store on New York's Times Square July 17. Duff, 15, is moving away from her "Lizzie" image with a debut pop music album, set for release Aug. 26. AP photo.

with my friends. I have to pinch myself sometimes, it just seems so unreal. But it's cool."

She's not just popular with kids: Her good-girl image also makes a hit with parents. She's proud to be a role model: "It's good that people are looking up to me, and it's always very important to set a good example," she says earnestly.

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