



Oh, Say, Can You Sing? Helen Hudson Hits a Record by Doing the Anthem in 14 Ballparks and May Warble over All 26

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If there were a Hall of Fame for national anthem singers, Helen Hudson would be well on her way. Thus far this season she has soloed "The Star-Spangled Banner" at 17 major-league ballparks—the old record for one season being 13—and she is aiming to perform Francis Scott Key's creation in all 26.

Hudson's magnificent obsession began as an attempt to close a common communication gap with her husband, John. "I was a typical nagging housewife," says the New York City-based singer-songwriter-actress. "Do you always have to have a game on TV?" I'd ask. I thought this would be a good way to learn about my husband's world." Her strategy has worked, perhaps too well. "Now we're fighting over who gets the sports page first," she says. She is also very close to success in her quest: Every major-league team except the Yankees and the Phillies have agreed to let her to do the anthem.

Hudson has never forgotten the lyrics—unlike a host of other anthem singers—but that's not to say she hasn't had problems. "People don't realize anthem singers don't get paid," says Hudson, who must also shell out for her plane fare, hotel and more. "One team was so cheap they wanted me to pay for my own ticket to the game." But she'd rather dwell on the good times. "I've had some hilarious moments," she says, recalling the day she showed up for a Mets game attired in a pantsuit. "They said I couldn't sing unless I was wearing a dress. I began frantically asking strangers in the stands if they'd change clothes with me." One lady finally volunteered. "She raced ahead of me, and by the time I got to the bathroom, she was already naked and yelling, 'Come on, get your clothes off, we've only got a few minutes!' Everyone thought we were nuts. Moments later I walked out onto the field in her dress as she watched in my pant-suit." Perhaps her most magical moment occurred in Texas. As she went on, "Ranger manager Bobby Valentine yelled, 'Break a leg!' I turned around, and all the guys were giving me the thumbs-up sign. Made me feel I was part of the team."