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These Boots Were Made For Rockin?: Magna Hoedown Showdown names its Top 10



By Anna Cianni

There's no better way to end summer than with a community-wide festival full of ribs, sweet treats, and of course, country music. The Magna Hoedown Showdown semi-finals took place on Aug. 25 at this year's annual Aurora Ribfest.

As part of the free entertainment in Machell Park, 20 semi-finalists of the Ontario-wide contest each got a chance to perform on stage in front of judges and an audience who braved the rain. They competed for a finalist spot in the top ten, and the opportunity to perform at this year's Magna Hoedown on September 14.

By mid-afternoon, judges Steve Hinder, Tom Cross, and Joan Kelley Walker ? along with the help of emcee Beverley Mahood ? narrowed down the selection to ten finalists. Their names are Katie Sacco, Dustin Bird, Vicki Biersteker, Patrick James Clark, Dayna Reid, Amir Brandon, Mary Paige St. Onge, Derek Reilly, Zoe Jayne, and Molly McNulty.

?[Judging] that was exceptionally difficult,? said Walker. ?It's my third year judging and every year the bar raises.? She said this year they were really looking for people who were comfortable on stage and who belonged there. ?We want someone who sounds unique and sounds like themselves,? said Walker. ?I want to close my eyes and hear these songs on the radio!?

These finalists will compete again at this year's Magna Hoedown on September 14, where the winner of the Hoedown Showdown will be determined. The winner will receive a $2,500 cash prize, Yamaha guitar and amp package, $2,500 styling and gift card package from Upper Canada, two full days of recording at Metalworks Studios, ?The Ultimate Artist Package' with professional management, coaching, styling, and songwriting by industry professionals, as well as the opportunity to perform again on the second night of the hoedown.

Walker has seen how winning the Hoedown Showdown has changed the lives of the last two winners. Mac Shepherd won in 2016 and John Anderson won in 2017. ?[They both] have done incredibly well performing all over the place,? said Walker. ?It's a real leg up, especially now that the Hoedown Showdown has its own momentum. It's really leaving its mark in the Canadian country music scene.?

Anderson, winner of last year's Hoedown Showdown, also performed at the Aurora Ribfest after the semi-finals took place. Since winning the competition, his career has taken off and he is getting ready to release his first album. He said he's gotten lots of mentorship, opportunities, and advice from the judges. ?Everyone wanted to help me out in some way,? said Anderson.

Finalist Patrick James Clark from Mulmur is looking to be the 2018 winner. He made it to the finals last year too. ?This year I came with a little more grit. I truly believe winning [the Hoedown Showdown] would help take me to the next step of my career.? He said he's played at over 100 shows since last year, but ?the opportunities [that] the Hoedown presents are astronomical and something that any indie artist would have a very tough time securing on their own.?

Derek Reilly, another one of the finalists, he said he's very excited for the Hoedown. ?I'm just speechless!? Reilly's first time performing was around a campfire with friends and family.

Hinder called Reilly's performance at the semi-finals ?a great stage debut.?

After the show, Reilly said, ?I've never been so engaged with a crowd before. It just felt amazing!? His family came out to support him and his mom, Kerri, said, ?We are beyond excited for him! I just can't wait to see what happens at the Hoedown. It'll be the best experience yet!?