

Female avengers start to assemble for Temple of Fame centenary



By Brock Weir

"It is hardly needful for me, Great Goddess, to tell thee who I am," said the Egyptian queen as she strode out before her public. "I have ruled my world for three decades, becoming near the last of my kind. I speak a dozen languages and have studied with great scholars, have led battles, and influenced entire worlds with my beauty.

"I have but to appear and the charms of all other women sink into nothingness. Their beauty becomes ugliness; their wit and wisdom become mere childish babbling. Dost thou not remember my magnificence in the old days of Egypt's glory?"

In short, Cleopatra is basically standing at the door of her favourite club asking the bouncer the age-old phrase so popular with inebriated actors and celebrities: "Don't you know who I am?"

"She's like the original Kardashian," came the unlikely note from director Sara Moyle as Cerys Ford took the stage.

The Grade 10 student from Aurora High School was one of scores of women of all ages who turned out last week for two open auditions hoping to score roles in this spring's production of *The Temple of Fame*, a project spearheaded by the Aurora Museum & Archives to mark the 100th anniversary of the last time this unique play was staged in Aurora – then to aid the war effort.

Brought up to date by writer Corie Clark, the centennial edition of *The Temple of Fame* will see leading figures from history, today's world stage, and popular fiction take the stage to make their best pitch to the Goddess on who is most worthy to join her pantheon.

Among the contenders are Hypatia; Elizabeth I; Mary, Queen of Scots; Queen Victoria; Joan of Arc; War of 1812 heroine Laura Secord; artist Emily Carr; suffragist Frances Willard; Mother Teresa; Queen Isabella; English warrior queen Boudica; writer Pauline Johnson; nurse Edith Cavell; Marie Antoinette; Helen of Troy; Mother Goose; author Harriet Beecher Stowe; Irish pirate queen Grace O'Malley; Elsie MacGill; Khutulun; and representations of a child, a mother, a "woman of the next century", and Canada.

Also up for consideration: poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who was also one of the roles for which Cerys prepared.

"This year, we are starting to make our drama program bigger and we decided to enrol in the Sears Festival with our theme the Status of Women," Cerys told *The Auroran* on why she auditioned. "The Temple of Fame has such a big role in female empowerment and I love all the stuff that is going on with it. I am really passionate about that and it is a great play."

When Cerys hit the stage, she put herself in the shoes of Barrett Browning first, the director telling her that she's there to challenge the conventional attitudes of her time that poetry was the dominion of men. Cleopatra was up next.

"We're not going to let Cleopatra move too much," the director said. "Does she need to move? No. Everybody moves for her. She needs a drink and it is in her hand even before she looks. She's like the original Kardashian. To you, all of us in this room are gross, ugly ladies. We're the ones who didn't make it onto America's Next Top Model. Let's hear you feel really and truly superior – and that is hard for women. We all have trouble feeling really and truly superior. They are tall stilettos to fill for this character, but I really need to you to feel that you are superior to the rest of us."

?Cleopatra says these are the reasons why and then there's a sudden stop. She says, ?I want you to make a decision, lady. If your soul isn't large enough to comprehend the greatness of my gifts, okay, I'm outta here, the limo's waiting, and they're lucky you even bothered showing up today. If you don't get this, y'all don't deserve me.?

Evidently, Moyle, Clark, and Shawna White, Curator of the Aurora Museum and Archives ?got? Cerys and she will be one of the many actresses taking the stage when The Temple of Fame opens once again, 100 years later ? this time at Trinity Anglican Church on Mother's Day Weekend.

For more, please see Aurora.ca/museum.