

I just wanted my voice back: Showdown semi-finalist



By Brock Weir

Colette Zorzella often felt she was simply taking up too much space growing up.

One of six children, she describes her young self as 'big and loud,' always talking, always dancing, always singing, but there came a point where she found herself always trying to 'tone it down.'

'But, I think I toned it down to a point where it suffocated me,' says the Aurora resident.

Recently, however, she hit a double turning point when one of her three kids graduated from high school.

'I am always trying to tell my son he can do anything he wants to do,' says Colette. 'He said, 'But, mom, you have never done what you want to do!' and he put me in my place.'

So, it was with some degree of nerves that Ms. Zorzella strode out onto the stage of Theatre Aurora on Thursday afternoon as one of the contestants from all across Ontario who made the Hoedown Showdown Top 40.

The Hoedown Showdown, the annual Province-wide talent competition looking for Canada's next country superstar, is held in conjunction with Magna's Wild, Wild West Hoedown.

Attracting video entries from far and wide, the Top 40 were whittled down to a Top 20 by judges Tom Cross of Metal Works Studios, Magna's Steve Hinder, country star Beverley Mahood, and media personality and philanthropist Joan Walker.

'Everyone is so unique and different from one another, which is going to make it tough because there is nothing to compare it to,' said Ms. Mahood. 'Each have their own thing and we're just sitting here impressed with the originality of each one of the contestants so far.'

Added Ms. Walker: 'Some of the contestants we have seen are back from previous years and the improvements have been incredible. It is really nice to see that growth and that is why we are doing this: to give people a stage, an opportunity, give them some feedback, and hopefully they learn and grow from it.'

This was the first year though that judges had the opportunity to hear Colette.

'I have spent my life being nervous,' she confirmed when judges questioned her jitters. 'But there is excitement for sure. When I was young, I was told, 'Shh! Be quiet! You're too big, you're too loud, you're too all of these things,' and I just shut up forever, and I just want my voice back.'

And did she ever? Colette wowed judges with her a capella rendition of Leadbelly's Cotton Fields, a country-folk standard which has been covered by generations of country stars.

'You got your voice back,' exclaimed Mr. Hinder.

Praised for her voice reminiscent of Janis Joplin, she sailed into the Top 20, who will be performing their semi-final round at this month's Aurora Ribfest on Saturday, August 26.

It is a long way from the woman, now 40, who first submitted her voice to the competition last year. 12 months ago, she bent the rules, sending in just an audio track rather than the full video audition requested because she says she was afraid to be on camera. What a difference a year makes.

Joining her in representing Aurora in the Top 20 is 2016 Aurora Teen Idol Melissa Suma, who performed a rendition of Angel Mine.

Melissa made the Top 20 last year but after performing this time around she was praised for her maturity.

"I have been experimenting on all kinds of different music and I think I am settling into a sound now," she told judges following her performance.

The Top 20, in alphabetical order are:

1. John Anderson, 16, Barrie
2. Kylie Angel, 28, Ancaster
3. Sarah Campbell Mills, 14, Burlington
4. Mike Chianelli, 17, Sutton West
5. Pierina Cincinato, 46, Mississauga
6. Patrick James Clark, 23, Mulmur
7. Darren Evorglens, 41, Oakville
8. Abby J. Hall, 17, Burlington
9. Zoe Jayne, 17, Schomberg
10. Dave Lang, 41, Newmarket
11. Alannah Lipsett, 21, Claremont
12. Nicole Mastrangelo, 20, Enniskillen
13. Christopher Normandeau, 29, Stouffville
14. Omarr Rahal, 21, Stouffville
15. Jayme Lynn Reed, 21, Keswick
16. Katie Sacco, 17, Toronto
17. Melissa Suma, 15, Aurora
18. Lauren (Renee) Vandervecht, 22, Sharon
19. Cameron von Criegern, 19, Peterborough
20. Colette Zorzella, 40, Aurora