

Last 12 months was ?amazing experience? for 2013 Aurora Teen Idol



By Brock Weir

It is difficult to put into words exactly what the last 12 months have meant to Samantha Ryan.

The St. Maximilian Kolbe Catholic High School student, due to start Grade 11 in September, is now in the final week of her reign as Aurora Teen Idol. It will come to a close on Canada Day when she helps crown her successor at Lambert Willson Park.

Samantha was named last year's winner in her second attempt at the title. Although she didn't make it through the first time around, it may have been worth it in the end as she was able to preside over many events in the second half of 2013 and the first half of this year, ranging from events tied in with the Aurora 150 Celebrations, and, most recently, the visit of the Duke of York.

?I have had so many opportunities I only dreamed of having and I can't put into words how happy I have been over the past year,? she says.

Among her most memorable experiences, she says, was meeting teen singer Tyler Shaw at an Aurora 150 event, who imparted on her a piece of very valuable advice. Shaw told her to put her passion into her voice, make sure her voice is strong and powerful, and sing as if there is ?no one else in the room and you are singing to yourself.?

It is advice that has stood her in good stead, she says, despite ultimately having to sing in front of hordes of people at events ranging from Concerts in the Park to awards ceremonies in Town Hall.

To prepare, it is essential to get used to singing in front of people, even if they are your parents.

Also helping her along the way has been some sage advice on music selection from her grandfather, who was instrumental in her choice to seal the 2013 competition with a stirring rendition courtesy of Janis Joplin.

?When I select my songs, I want to make sure it is something that kids not just my age are familiar with, but something everyone knows,? says Samantha. ?We try and pick out songs that would best fit the age group that is watching. We would rather it be a classic everyone knows, rather than having people trying to figure out what song it is!

?When I first started auditioning, I used to have a really high-pitched voice and my grandfather would always say I should sing a

Janis Joplin song [Me & Bobby McGee] because I had the perfect vocal range for it. I tried it out, and I really liked it because it had a raspiness to it and the song told a story.?

At the start of her reign, Samantha says she didn't quite have a handle on how to define her own musical style. As she progressed, she came to lean away from pop and more towards rock and country to suit her raspiness, twang? and her ability to belt out the notes when required.

?My voice has become way stronger and I have been finding songs that suit my voice,? she says. ?I didn't really understand the type of musical voice I had. I didn't know if it was pop, rock, or classical. Once I started doing this, I found something my voice actually suited and it helped because a lot of people in the Town of Aurora actually like the type of music I sing. It was easier for me to perform knowing that they enjoyed listening.?

Just a little over two weeks ago, Samantha joined some of her friends at the 2014 Aurora Teen Idol audition rounds. Although she was just there to cheer her friends on, she was then called upon to actually emcee the remainder of the event, and sing a song or two.

From her perspective, she has seen what has become a Top 8 become a mix of pop singers, but each with a unique style and spin on what they perform. This unique spin each puts on things is what will ultimately carry the day, she says.

?Before you go on stage, take a deep breath and put all your emotion into a song,? she says of advice she would give to next week's contestants. ?The next 12 months are going to be some of the best 12 months of their lives. A lot of amazing experiences happen when you are the Aurora Teen Idol.?