

Olivia Varma is Aurora's 2022 Teen Idol



Striding onto the band shell stage at Town Park on Saturday, Olivia Varma looked firmly to her future.

With a dream of treading the boards on Broadway, she took the microphone and let her clear voice ring out, interpreting the title number from the musical *Carrie*.

Putting heart and passion into her performance, Olivia closed out the first annual Aurora Performing Arts Festival being crowned the Town's 2022 Teen Idol.

"I am kind of in a state of shock," Olivia told *The Auroran* after receiving congratulations from her family following her performance. "I am really excited and overwhelmed with joy."

Aurora's Teen Idol is traditionally crowned during the Town's Canada Day celebrations, but this year was different. For the first time, the Town partnered with Marquee Theatrical Productions on a performing arts festival that gave local youth the chance to compete not just in vocal categories but drama and dance as well.

Olivia, a Grade 11 student at Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, was encouraged by her mother to put herself in contention and she said she is so glad she took the chance.

"I have always had a passion for singing," she said. "I don't know exactly where it comes from in my family line, but I started when I was little and it is definitely something I want to pursue when I'm older."

"I really love musical theatre and really wanted to perform [*Carrie*]. I take dance lessons and singing lessons, musical theatre lessons at Bravo Academy, so it all comes together with supporting parents who help me out as well. I just love sharing my passion with others and I am super-excited to sing for everybody."

Olivia was one of three finalists in the Senior Vocal category.

Joining her, and claiming second place, was Katelyn Shulver, a Grade 11 student at Newmarket's Sacred Heart Catholic High School, a lifeguard and swim instructor with the Town of Aurora, who wowed the judges with "You Used to Be Mine," a number penned by Sara Bareilles for the Broadway musical *Waitress*.

Rounding out the top three was Jessica Bell, a Grade 11 student at Newmarket's Huron Heights Secondary School, whose performance of Britney Spears' 'Toxic', as reinterpreted by singer-songwriter Melanie Martinez, secured her a place on the podium.

'The talent was phenomenal,' said event organizer Sheryl Thomas, founder of Marquee. 'Of course, there's always going to be a sound glitch here and there, but they were handled so professionally it didn't faze the kids and that is always so impressive to me.'

'Collectively, the talent was incredible and the prizes that came together just made everything even that much more worthwhile to try and compete for something ' not just the title, but they actually got some goods. The first prize winners all got cash -- \$100, \$200, or \$300, depending on the age category they were in ' but they also got some scholarships and swag from different merchants. This festival is going to be on again next year, for sure, only bigger and better.'

Additional winners included Melina Black-Salmon who took home top honours in the Junior Vocal category and, in the Intermediate vocals, Alexis Chow, who came in first, followed by Domenica Castillo in second place, and Shanaya Birmhan in third.

Top prize in Senior Acting went to Alissa Gokhshteyn with second prize awarded to Zoye Fortier. Prizes in the Junior Dance category went to Lily Aapter (First), Ella Davies (Second), and Maya Trimarchi (Third). Intermediate Dance prizes went to Leah Grassa (First), Ella Johnson (Second), and Shanaya Birmhan (Third). Senior dancers honoured included Sydney Magerman (First) and Samantha Tyler (Second).

By Brock WeirEditorLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter