

Top 20 aspiring country stars selected for 2018 Hoedown Showdown



By Brock Weir

Singers from Aurora, King, Simcoe and Dufferin counties, and from towns and cities across Ontario, will be vying for a place in the Top 10 next week in the 2018 Hoedown Showdown competition.

30 aspiring country singers from just about every corner of the Province gathered at Theatre Aurora last week for the preliminary rounds. Some were familiar faces to the competition, others had put themselves forward for the first time, but they all had one thing in common ? their submitted videos had just the right amount of 'it' factor to wow the panel of industry professionals.

The Hoedown Showdown is a country music competition held each year to coincide with the Magna Hoedown, York Region's largest annual fundraiser which has raised over \$12 million since its inception for hundreds of local charities, non-profits and community groups across the GTA.

The Showdown is Ontario-wide and offers contestants a grand prize valued at over \$25,000, which includes a \$2,500 cash prize, a Yamaha Guitar and amp package, a \$2,500 styling and gift card package from Newmarket's Upper Canada Mall, two full days of recording at Metalworks Studios, and the Ultimate Artist Package, comprising of professional management, coaching, styling and song-writing from industry professionals.

The Top 10 earn the chance to perform before an audience of thousands on the first of the two-night Magna Hoedown, with the ultimate winner performing the following evening ahead of the big headliner, which is set to be announced early next week.

This year's semi-finalists include Collette Zorzella of Aurora, Zoe Jayne of Schomberg and Patrick James Clark, all of whom competed in the 2017 Hoedown Showdown, as well as Brooklyn McAuley of Innisfil.

Rounding out the Top 20 are Vicki Bierstecker, also of Schomberg, Dustin Bird of Stirling, Amir Brandon of Toronto, Mike Chianelli of Sutton, Adam Cousins of Brussels, Lennon Daniels of Stouffville, Evan Farrell of Stouffville, Molly McNulty of Barrie, Omar Rahal of Stouffville, Dayna Reid of Elmvale, Derek Reilly of Queensville, Paige Rutledge of Oakville, Katie Sacco of Toronto, Mary Paige St. Onge of Seaforth, Celine Tellier of Chelmsford, and Evan Richard Thomas of Keswick.

'We have some fantastic talent that is going to do the Hoedown proud,' says judge Tom Cross of Metalworks. 'I am always looking for the 'it' factor. I love people who can write, I love people who can perform, and the most important thing is you have to be entertaining ? and I think we've got that. I think we have got that in six or seven people for sure and that is just from the first audition. After we work with [the Top 10] for a week, man, who knows?'

The Top 20 face off in the semifinals next Saturday, August 25, which will take place at Machell Park, from 1 p.m. to approximately 4.30 p.m. at Aurora Ribfest. From Mr. Cross' perspective, this is a time for the judges to decide who they feel can really elevate their performance and how they can work with each of them to make them a winner.