

Aurora's 2016 Teen Idol ready for the CNE spotlight

By Jake Courtepatte

Aurora's jazzy golden voice is taking her next step towards stardom on the Canadian National Exhibition stage.

Melissa Suma, who was crowned Aurora Teen Idol in 2016 for her rendition of Nina Simone's 'Feeling Good', has been chosen from hundreds of applicants to compete in this year's CNE Rising Star talent competition.

'I thought it would be a good opportunity to perform in front of a live audience at a great venue,' said the fifteen-year old Suma, who will be competing in the Youth category for those ages 13 to 21.

An end-of-summer tradition for over three decades, the Rising Star contest gives singers, dancers, and other performers their first opportunity to perform on a grand stage in front of a large audience, while the judges base their decisions on natural ability, audience appeal, stage presence, and quality of performance.

It was actually the video of Suma performing at the Aurora Teen Idol competition that booked her ticket to the big stage.

'When I won 2016's Aurora Teen Idol, that was the first time I sang jazz in a competition,' said Suma, who had previously felt more of a passion for pop music. 'Teen Idol was a great experience.'

In a case of 'don't fix what isn't broke,' Suma will stick with a Nina Simone jazz piece at the CNE when she performs her classic 'I Put a Spell on You', something she said she has been working really hard on.

She has even learned to 'scat,' a challenging vocal practice unique to the jazz culture.

'Scat singing is when you improvise a section of music, often without words, and use your voice more like an instrument,' said Suma. 'I enjoy singing many different styles of music, but I chose this song because it's really fun to sing, and I think it is a classic that many people in the audience will know.'

Despite her young age, Suma is no stranger to performing in front of a large audience. She sang in front of close to 3,000 guests at the annual Magna Hoedown finals two years ago, and has been on a number of stages both small and large locally over the last few years. She has once again made the Top 40 contestants of the Hoedown Showdown, the preliminaries for which get underway this Thursday.

'I love singing, but still get a bit nervous before I go on stage, no matter what size the crowd,' said Suma. 'I don't know how many people will be in the audience that night.'

Other than the usual pre-show jitters, however, Suma said she is not worried about the size of the event or stage at the CNE, and just wants to make sure to 'prepare well and deliver a great performance.'

The preliminary rounds begin on August 24 at downtown Toronto's Enercare Centre, while Suma hopes to advance to the semifinals and finals the following week.

With hopes of future stardom, the budding singer said she is 'really honoured' to represent Aurora.