

Hoedown Showdown prize is biggest ever for aspiring country stars



By Brock Weir

The Hoedown Showdown is back and this year, it is bigger and better than ever.

Applications for the 2018 Hoedown Showdown, the annual search for Canada's next country star, are now being accepted through 4 p.m. on July 22.

Successful applicants from across Ontario will compete in preliminary rounds (Top 40), before being whittled down to a Top 20. Finally the Top 10 finalists will rehearse with music industry professionals and the Showdown Band during a mentorship week, all for a chance to perform at Magna's Wild West Hoedown, York Region's biggest annual party, held in each year in September. A long-standing tradition, the Hoedown Showdown talent competition was revived five years ago to complement the Magna Hoedown, which, each year, raises hundreds of thousands of dollars for community charities. Since its revival, the competition has only grown, attracting contestants from further and further afield, and awarding bigger and bigger prize packs.

"This year, we have upped the grand prize from a \$20,000 prize pack to one valued at \$25,000, which we are really excited about," says organizer Erin Cerenzia of Magna International. "The [extra value] comes from bringing Upper Canada Mall in as a sponsor with us this year."

Upper Canada Mall will provide a \$2,500 styling and gift card package so the 2018 Hoedown Showdown winner will be able to look the part as well as sound the part, in addition to a prize including three guitars, a full day recording session at Metalworks studios, and the "ultimate artist" package, which allows the winner to work with industry professionals Beverley Mahood and Tom Cross.

This, according to Ms. Cerenzia, will give the winning performer a chance for professional management, coaching, styling, song-writing, and an opportunity to really grow the artist and work with them to try and get them on the radio and be successful country music artists.

"That is what the end goal is, really, of the whole show," she says. "This will now be five years of the Hoedown Showdown, and what has really struck me is the true talent that comes through the competition and even watching the progression of each individual artist from the prelims to the time they get to the final round, the feedback they take from the judges, the expertise, and I can't stress enough the importance of the expertise and working with industry professionals in order for the artists to really develop their craft. It is just really amazing to watch them grow and I think it is inspiring that people put themselves out there. One of the reasons why Hoedown has always featured as its headliners Canadian country artists is we have incredible talent in our own country and, more specifically, locally in Ontario, which we see with the Showdown every year. I think just in terms of the progression of the artists themselves it really is an incredible thing to watch and everyone who comes to the final on the Friday night of the Hoedown is blown away by the caliber of the competition. Time and time again we hear people say these top ten finalists are as good as any headliner we have ever seen."

While there are other country music talent contests out there, Ms. Cerenzia says one of the things that really sets the Hoedown Showdown apart from the rest is the chance for contestants to learn, grow, and elevate their platform and launch their career, while at the same time participating in an event that gives back to the community.

"There is no template for what the Showdown winner looks like it can be anyone," says Ms. Cerenzia, encouraging everyone to

consider putting their talents forward for the competition. ?We have had people in the finals who were 13, we have had people in the competition who were in their late 70s, we've had men, women, and it is not some cookie cutter performer we're looking for. If you feel like you may have something and kind of wondered, there is no better competition to try out for because we are the most welcoming, receptive group and we're all about community and supporting one another. That is what the Hoedown is all about and I would encourage you to apply.?

For more information on the Hoedown Showdown, and how to apply, visit www.hoedown.ca/showdown.