

?Rising Star? doesn't let setback take her eye off singing stardom



By Brock Weir

Amanda MacDonald is not one to rest idle when faced with a setback.

An Irish Dancer at heart, Ms. MacDonald is counting down the days until she can get back into fine form after two stress fractures in her ankles forced her to scuttle her dreams of taking part in the Canadian Championships last year, but she has used her downtime to keep on top of her other passion ? singing.

Having served as Aurora's Teen Idol in 2011, fun-loving Aurorans will soon have another chance to see her in action, this time in Toronto, as one of the ?Rising Stars? of the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE).

Amanda is set to show off her vocal chops this August on the CNE's Variety Stage as part of the annual summer festival. She is no stranger to the competition, having put herself forward twice previously, but she is coming in this year well prepared.

?I get a lot of constructive criticism from judges out of these competitions,? she explains. ?The more experience, the better. It is just about getting my name out there, meeting other musicians, making connections to collaborate, and, of course, knowing people in the industry is always great. It is a win-win for everybody.

?We have to go to a seminar beforehand to prepare as much as possible so that you are 100 per cent on the day giving it everything you've got. It is really engaging the audience and learning to share with them. It is not just being on the stage, but being part of something for everybody to enjoy and participate in. Engaging the judges and the audience is always fun ? taking them on a story, if it is not a fun song ? and just going for it.?

Holding back is not a watchword in the MacDonald house. Her father, for instance, is a member of the ?Fab Four? Beatles tribute band, which recently wowed the crowds at Aurora's Canada Day Celebrations. Her mother was also an actress, a profession which has also caught Amanda's eye. It almost goes without saying that she has grown up in a house full of classic rock, and that is where her first love lies.

Singing ?I Want To Hold Your Hand? at a family wedding several years ago is when she first had the inkling her passion was on the stage. But, she says, she is still finding her own way, developing a love for what she describes as the ?jazz pop? sounds of people like Nikki Yanovski and Michael Buble.

?It is just a matter of finding a way to combine it all,? she says, noting her temporary physical setback has given her a chance to

reflect.

?I had made it into a professional Irish Dance show that was going to be in Germany and Switzerland. I graduated high school last year and took the year off to go into the Irish Dancing professional world. Since my ankles broke, I started from scratch and reworked my plan.?

So far, that plan includes going to college or university to study jazz, while looking for just about any singing competition she can find to gain experience, and even securing a job for herself as a singer on a cruise ship.

?I am just doing what I can and building a plan from there,? she says. ?It is important to have short-term and long-term goals for myself. [In the long term], it is hard to know because everyone has a path they go on, so it is hard to pinpoint exactly where they will be. I definitely want to be performing [in 10 years], recording some songs, and I am learning how to write songs and play guitar. My dream is just performing wherever I can.?

But, in the ?now?, her eyes are firmly set on the CNE's Variety Stage where she is preparing to wow the judges. She hasn't quite decided which song will knock them out of the park, but she'll know it when it clicks.

?The most fulfilling part of it is the moment I am on stage and everything is clicking,? she says. ?It might sound cheesy, but when I feel at home on the stage, I am just completely happy and I realise it is exactly where I should be and what I want to do. It's the little moments while performing that make it make sense and make it worth all the hard work, lessons, and the trial and error process.?

For more information on the Rising Star competition, visit tinyurl.com/risingstar-CNE.