

Top 20 to contend in Hoedown Showdown this weekend



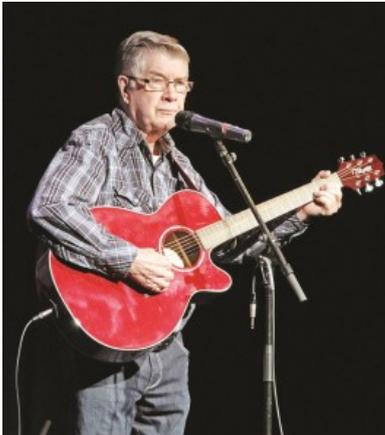
(18-year-old Aurora singer Amanda MacDonald will vie to be named winner of the revived Hoedown Showdown competition at this weekend's Ribfest. Below, 83-year-old Jim Edwards is another Aurora resident in contention for the top prize. Auroran photos by David Falconer)

By Brock Weir

Amanda MacDonald's stride as she confidently took the stage at Theatre Aurora last week belied any nerves she said she had.

She was there with a mission, and by mid-week the next step in her mission was accomplished, at least for a little while.

Belting out Shania Twain's, 'Up?', Ms. MacDonald, 18, not only raised the roof but also secured her place as a Top 20 finalist in the re-launched Hoedown Showdown.



Ms. MacDonald is one of seven Aurora residents to make the cut after a long day of auditions last Monday. Over 70 aspiring country singers answered Magna's call when they first put out word of the revived competition to mark the 25th anniversary of the Wild, Wild West Hoedown. By the time they reached Theatre Aurora, however, this list was whittled down to 40.

Proving age is no determining factor in taste or talent, among Aurora's representation in the Top 20 are Daniele Niesing, 20; Jim Edwards, 83; Councillor John Abel, 58; Laura Janzen, 19; and Shannon Beresford, 20.

The list is rounded out by Delaney Grant, 16, of Pakenham; Elyse Saunders, 24, of Richmond Hill; Erica Fontana, 21, of Newmarket; Glenn Code, 45, of Barrie; Jessie Treneer, 21, of Kitchener; Jiva Loves, 25, of Toronto; Johnny Green, 25, of Georgina;

Judy Belanger, 52, of Newmarket; Kelsi Jean Mayne, 24, of Toronto; Shauna Denis, 22, of Gatineau; Stacey Jamieson, 23, and Tanya Caines, 27 both of Innisfil; and Wayne Nichols, 52, of Richmond Hill.

The Top 20 will belt it out for the crowds this Friday, September 6, in the Semi-Final rounds at Ribfest at Machell Park. After a lull on Saturday, the Top 6 return to the stage for the Finals on Sunday, September 8 to close out Ribfest. The ultimate winner will receive not only a cash prize of \$1,000, a Yamaha Guitar, and a full day of studio recording, but also the chance to perform at Hoedown on September 14.

After she finished her performance last week, Ms. MacDonald's eyes were fixed firmly on the prize.

"One of my friends in Irish Dance told me about the competition and it seemed like an awesome experience," she said. "I just love the music and the feel to it. There are so many ways a song can get the emotions out there and cause a lot of fun up on the stage. I grew up playing Shania in my car. She is a really good role model and it is an uplifting song.

"I was a little bit nervous, but it is all good now!?"

Having recently graduated from her high school arts program at Thornhill's St. Elizabeth High School, she made her mark on home turf in July, crowned the winner in the Aurora's Got The Voice talent search, held by Canadian Idol judge Farley Flex in conjunction with the Celebrate Aurora music festival.

Taking a year off to focus on her Irish dancing before setting out her future goals, she knows that she wants to explore more vocal opportunities and keep heading in that direction. Part of that direction is going to university, but also picking up experience anywhere she can.

For Sherilyn Vance of Holland Landing, trying out for this year's Hoedown Showdown was quite an experience. Although she didn't secure a place in the top 20, her performance last week was the first time performing country outside of the confines of Dr. Denison High School in Newmarket.

She was convinced by her friend Jasmine to come out and take a chance.

"I have only ever sung at two school events in my lifetime and I have never sung by myself!?" she said afterwards. "I was just a ball of nerves [but] country music is my favourite genre and I find with pop, a lot of the songs are just repetition of words and then you get autotune in there. I like how country music sounds genuine.?"

Although she said she was a ball of nerves, when pressed, she said if she had to get used to being on stage, that's a problem she wouldn't mind dealing with!

For more information on this year's Wild, Wild West Hoedown, visit www.hoedown.ca.