

Young singer aims to hit operatic heights ? Italian style



By Brock Weir

Most teens counting down the days to the end of June have their sights set on a couple of months lounging by a pool, soaking up the sun and listening to the songs of summer. Kaylah Paquette, however, has other ideas.

Rather than kicking back with the tunes, she plans on kicking it old school: studying the techniques of Luciano Pavarotti and other masters of what she describes as the 'old technique' of opera in a very appropriate place: Italy.

The talented 16-year-old Aurora student has been invited to participate in the Operavision Academy, being held this year from July 12 ? August 8 in Urbania, Italy, where she will hone her craft through one-on-one training from the masters, nearly 20 hours of Italian language lessons, sessions to perfect her diction, drama, dance, character study and body movement, and the history to back it up.

'I would really love to support Canada through singing,' says Kaylah, a student at Richmond Hill's Alexander Mackenzie High School. 'I find we [Canadian singers] need to get out there. I am not from Italy, but I am going down there and singing with substantial Italian opera singers, and I would like to represent youth. Normally these opportunities come to people who have already graduated high school, so for me to get this opportunity is absolutely incredible.'

Over the course of her month in Europe, Kaylah says she hopes to find out if she can reach semi-professional to professional levels. She considers herself an apprentice at this point, and would love to develop her talents to sing at the level of a 30-year-old.

'At my age, I feel this is a huge learning experience because I am not 30 yet, but if I am portraying a 30 year old, [how to convey] the experiences of a 30 year old is something they would teach down there and how to become that character,' she says.

She has come a long way from a flirtation with opera which began innocently enough at the age of five, taking in a presentation of The Nutcracker. She was captivated by the form and began taking voice lessons with Dr. Mary Lou Vetere, who is also participating in the Academy. She told her young student there was more to her voice than she was letting out and they set to work training so she could sing over an orchestra and a chorus to reach up to 3,000 people.

'It is this journey of not being able to sing into a microphone and just singing straight on her air,' she says of why the old techniques appeal to her. 'With our older style, we are [relying] more on our air and using our bodies to project our voices, and less using the throat and more using the mask, letting it resonate in there and using our bodies to get that air up and out to the audience.'

'It is extremely hard today to find singers that you can hear over the orchestra of string and trumpets. Those are soft instruments. Today, their technique isn't as refined. They are controlling their voices and holding them back.'

Kaylah is set to audition for her master classes this month. She's tasked with singing two songs of her choice suitable to her age level and range. Once selected for the programs, she looks forward to combining these lessons of technique, drama, history and language to help her not only get under the skin of another character, but comfortable being there as well.

Her more immediate goals include finishing high school as well as her training, before taking a year off to develop the game plan for

her ultimate goal of singing internationally.

“This is an amazing experience just being with a family of people, treating other people like you should be treated yourself,” she says. “There is no jealousy, there is no competition, it is purely supporting other people. That is something our studio believes in very, very strongly. Music heals the soul and that is something we feel going into opera. In terms of going on stage and performing with no microphone and being alone either with an orchestra or piano, there will be more lessons to learn, but this is about supporting other people who want to become opera singers because it is not an easy dream to accomplish.”

In order to make Kaylah's dream of travelling to Italy for the program, she and her family are looking to raise up to \$10,000 to cover the costs of travel, accommodation, along with the acting, language and master classes. For more information, visit www.kaylahpaquette.com or www.gofundme.com/kaylahjourney.