

Calling all country singers: applications now open for Hoedown Showdown

By Brock Weir

The hunt is on once again for Canada's next country star.

Applications are now being accepted for the 2016 Hoedown Showdown.

The annual competition, hosted by Magna International, is open to all aspiring amateur singers 13-years of age or older, and will give participants the chance to showcase their talents in a variety of local venues ? and, if they go the distance, before an audience of thousands at this September's Wild, Wild West Hoedown.

?It is a once in a lifetime opportunity for me,? said King Township resident Sarah MacRae, 25, the winner of last year's Showdown. ?Every level of the Showdown process got more and more exciting, and it is just such an inspiring event to be part of. On Friday night [of last year's Hoedown] there were just so many new experiences to me, being on stage in front of thousands of people, which gets your blood going, you're so excited ? you feel like you're getting spoiled and the stars are aligning.?

This year's Hoedown Showdown winner will receive, in addition to that feeling of being on that famous stage, a grand prize valued at over \$20,000, including a Yamaha guitar, mentorship, and professional studio recording time courtesy of Metal Works.

Online applications will be collected through July 28 and, from there, the applications will be whittled down to a Top 40. Preliminary rounds of the Top 40 performers will get underway on Thursday, August 11 before the Top 40 is halved. The semi-final round of the Top 20 performer will take place on Saturday, August 27 in Aurora and the Top 10 will move onto the finals.

Following the Top 20 round, the remaining will spend September 12 to September 15 in a Mentorship Week, featuring one two-hour session with a celebrity coach and the Showdown Band, and one 30 minute rehearsal before the masses gather in the Magna Corral for the main events on September 16. There, the Top 10 will perform two songs with the eventual winner being selected by a panel of judges.

But, there can only be one ? and that one will take the stage September 17, performing at York Region's biggest party ahead of event headliner Paul Brandt.

?Because we have had such success with the Showdown, we have been fortunate enough through Magna and through our Showdown sponsors to up the prize pack once again,? said Erin Cerenzia of Magna for the Community, who is helping to spearhead this year's Showdown. ?Our grand prize this year is actually valued at over \$20,000 and this includes amazing opportunities for aspiring country music singers, a \$2,500 cash prize, a beautiful Yamaha guitar and case. Of course, it is a fantastic opportunity to perform at the Magna Hoedown on Saturday night. We call it the ultimate artist package: the opportunity to work with talent mentors and people who are in the country music and music agency and industry to have performance styling, coaching, mentorship, and come up with song writing and new songs, which they will then have two full days to record in studio at Metalworks.?

Ms. Cerenzia touted this year's prize pack at Hoedown's official launch earlier this month. There, before Ms. MacRae performed some new music, Ms. Cerenzia said performers like her are what the Hoedown Showdown is all about.

?It is really special that we have a showdown winner who truly embodies what the Hoedown is and what the Hoedown means to us,? she said. ?Sarah truly cares about the community. She cares about people. She is so compassionate and so kind and it really is a privilege to have a winner who not only is as incredibly talented musically as she is, but someone who embodies that Hoedown spirit we try and share with the community.

?She is a great reason why we Hoedown and Magna is always looking to support the community in different ways, not just by supporting organizations but by supporting arts and culture and that is what Showdown does for us.?

For more on this year's Hoedown, including information on this year's Showdown application process, visit www.hoedown.ca.