

Kelowna teen recognized nationally

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By **Holly Miyasaki**

Thanks to talent and some good timing, a Kelowna singer got the chance of a lifetime.

Cynthia Leigh Ann Bjalek recently participated in the Top Teen of Canada Development Program held in Langley this summer.

Bjalek first learned of the program from a former winner and decided it was something she'd like to try.

"I was really interested in finding what it's all about," says Bjalek, a 17-year-old Immaculata high school student.

She checked out the Top Teen website and couldn't find an application form for the program. After inquiring, she discovered a participant had dropped out at the last minute creating a spot for her just three days before the camp.

The program sees contestants representing all 10 provinces and three territories attending professional workshops focusing on public speaking and interview skills, skills to better themselves and instill self confidence.

Bjalek was named Top Personal Showcase at the Top Teen final showcase. The personal showcase saw the performers displaying their skill and passion in their presentation.

"Many people chose to do videos or read poetry," recalls Bjalek. "I chose to do vocals and my guitar."

In addition to taking home the title of Top Personal Showcase, she was also given a \$500 scholarship. "It was a huge accomplishment for me, being an artist trying to emerge in the music world."

The Top Teen of Canada award was given to Danby Felker of Vernon.

Music has been a part of Bjalek's life from a young age. The musician, who uses the stage name Cynthia Leigh Ann, got a jumpstart at age 14 when she participated in a competition in Edmonton.

The fact she'd had no lessons didn't deter her, and the risk was worth it as she got two callbacks from Nashville producers. "I went down there and recorded two songs," she recalls.

Later that year she went to the British Columbia Country Music Association awards where she was introduced to Don Adams, emcee of the Merritt Mountain Music Festival.

She gave Adams a copy of her demo CD recorded in Nashville and says he was astounded at her vocal skills at just 15 years old. Adams helped get her a spot on the Little Big Stage at Merritt this year, something she considers a career coup.

The teen writes her own music and gathers inspiration from life experiences, like *It's You*, a ballad about young, unrequited love. As a country singer, she's happy to see other teens making it big.



Cynthia Leigh-Ann Bjalek participated in Top Teen of Canada earlier this year. (Photo contributed)

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Two of her idols are Jaydee Bixby, who was featured on Canadian Idol, and Taylor Swift a fast-rising superstar in the country music world.

“She is my age and a lot of the stuff she sings about I can relate to,” explains Bjalek. “I hope someone will relate to my songs, I can make people feel more powerful personally, uplift their confidence and self-esteem and make them feel better about themselves.”

In the near future Bjalek sees herself attending UBC Okanagan for a couple years before transferring to the University of Calgary to study a bachelor of arts in music. But her long term goal is to become a performing artist working on stage, having audiences hear her music and sell albums through mass markets.

Bjalek will be performing at the BCCMAs this month in Coquitlam.

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