

Local News

Home News Local News Three Penny Opus earns 'gold star' and spot in jamboree

Three Penny Opus earns 'gold star' and spot in jamboree

Posted By Mark Hoult

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Havelock-Belmont-Methuen - The Cookstown roots band Three Penny Opus impressed the judges and took first place at the Seventh Annual Ontario Country Showdown in Havelock Saturday.

The win earned the band an appearance at next weekend's 20th Annual Havelock Country Jamboree, an opportunity band member Vince Therrien said would "put a little gold star on our resume." The duo Nikki and Keith, of Peterborough, earned second place and a spot in the lineup of the eighth annual Marmora Country Jamboree in September. Rachel Smith, of Belleville, sang her way to third place, while Naomi Bristow, "the yodelin' cowgirl," captured the hearts of the audience and the Fans' Choice Award.

Three Penny Opus band members said they were surprised by their win, given what singer and songwriter Mary Lou Minor called "the phenomenal talent" at the country showdown. "But we were hoping that we had a bit of a unique sound that was wanted," added Therrien, who finds his inspiration in the old roots country of Hank Williams and Willie Nelson. "I think playing all original music had something to do with it," he said. "We're pretty proud of our compositions, and confident we can play them anywhere."

And that "anywhere" includes the stage of the Havelock Jamboree before thousands of country music fans. "Hopefully we're not going to feel intimidated," said Minor, who praised both the audience and the organizers of the country showdown, both of whom gave the band the opportunity to get more exposure on the jamboree stage. "Playing in front of such an appreciative audience was just so satisfying. And this is the classiest event we've ever attended, just with all the photos and the displays."

Pam Steingard, who has a classical music background, said each band member's range of musical influences, from traditional to alternate country and from classical to reggae and motown, has contributed to the unique sound of Three Penny Opus. "The divisions here allow alot of flexibility. We throw these combinations around and see what happens."

Ireland Brothers Band member Daniel Ireland, one of four people from the music industry to judge the Aug. 8 event, said Three Penny Opus earned first place because of their professional stage presence and songwriting skills. "They really had their act together. They were very tight, they were calm on stage and each one knew how to talk to the audience."

But judges were most impressed by the well-written, original songs, said Ireland, whose band won the country showdown in 2003. "I was just amazed with their songwriting craft and what they did with it." And judges were amazed by the harmonies of the second-place winners, Nikki and Keith, he said.

Country showdown spokesperson Chris Deline said the 2009 show had "the best performers we've had to date." Each one put on a professional show and deserves a recording contract, she said, noting that there is great satisfaction knowing that the showdown is giving talented musicians exposure on the stages of the Havelock and Marmora jamborees. "And hopefully someone will see them and sign them, that's our goal."

More than 400 people attended the Ontario Country Showdown at the Havelock arena, helping to promote new talent and raise funds for local charities and causes, including All profits from the annual event are donated to charities and local youth organizations, including the SickKids Foundation, the Five Counties Children's Centre, Havelock minor hockey, ball and soccer, the Havelock Skating Club and the Cordova Recreation Centre.

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Pam Steingard, Andre Paraskevas, Vince Therrien and Mary Lou Minor are all smiles after being named the winners of the Seventh Annual Ontario Country Showdown.

Mark Hoult

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