

# Celebration highlights York's artistry

BY SIMONE JOSEPH  
Staff Writer

Alexander Seredenko, 15, sits wearing black gloves, thinking of the piece he is about to play — Franz Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 2.

For close to 10 minutes, the eyes and ears of more than 600 people will be focused on his fingers on the keyboard.

Being excited and nervous before performing is good, Mr. Seredenko, said in an interview.

"It's healthy to get nervous. If you're not nervous, then you tend to play badly. You don't centre in on the performance."

Mr. Seredenko was at Markham Hilton Suites, performing in the Celebration of the Arts, a gala performance and bursary awards show presented by the York Region Newspaper Group.

Last Sunday's show featured artists from across York Region and was an appreciation night for the newspaper group's clients and a chance to celebrate and support the arts in York Region.

Mr. Seredenko, a Richmond Hill resident, certainly got support from the audience. In fact, he received a standing ovation.

"They were cheering for me a long time and it felt good to be up there," he said.

Ron Dinelle, general manager of Upper Canada Mall, was among the fans in the audience. Mr. Dinelle called the young musician's playing "unbelievable."

"He was amazing. The piece he played was obviously very difficult," he said.

Aurora Mayor Tim Jones was also impressed, calling the 15-year-old's performance "flawless."

But Mr. Seredenko was more critical. "I played OK, I could do better... I know my own mistakes."

This kind of humility was typical of the night's performers, said Brenda Larson, one of the hosts of the event and director of marketing and new product development for the York Region Newspaper Group.

"These kids have gifts and yet there's a certain humility about them all."

"They were sitting backstage admiring each other's work," she said.

Doug Pettigrew, executive producer for the show, wanted to create an atmosphere where the audience could get to know aspects of the artists' personalities because this rarely happens at performances, he said.

"Very rarely do we get to know who they are, what their personalities are, the person behind the per-



STAFF PHOTO/BILL ROBERTS

Singer Gisele Fredette performs playful number among the crowd attending Sunday's second annual York Region Celebration Of The Arts gala at Markham's Hilton Suites Hotel. Enjoying the moment in the background are York Region chairperson Bill Fisch (far right) and Markham Mayor Don Cousens (second from left). The event is sponsored by the York Region Newspaper Group.

formance," he said. "They are our neighbours and they are excited about where they are going and we wanted to feel that."

*'People aren't aware in York Region of the tremendous amount of arts and culture that does exist.'*

So, Mr. Pettigrew had the hosts interview artists before and after performances in the interview area, a relaxed setting of couches and subtle background colour.

Mr. Pettigrew was helped by five of Newmarket's Huron Heights Secondary School students in cre-

ating this effect.

"They are an invaluable team of people that put in hours of work," he said.

Last Sunday at 7 a.m., the students off-loaded trucks filled with sound and lighting equipment, crawled under stages to check wiring, made sure equipment worked and handled technical aspects of the show.

They were also the last ones to leave after taking down the set and equipment and packing it.

Mr. Pettigrew's company, In House Productions, gave the team—which worked on the show for the second year in a row—a new \$1,500 bursary called the producer's award.

Technical teams that work behind the scenes are often the unsung heroes of productions, he

said.

"The artists get recognized, but the technical people never do."

As part of the Celebration of the Arts, 16 young artists from across York Region received bursaries funded by different sources.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens' charitable foundation, for example, donated \$1,500 in bursary money.

Most of the recipients will use the money to further their musical education.

The gala was a good way to remind people of the incredible talent of artists in York Region, York Region Newspaper Group publisher Ian Proudfoot said.

"Arts define a community. People aren't aware in York Region of the tremendous amount of arts and culture that does exist," he

said. "More people need to realize you don't need to go to Toronto."

York Region and its schools have been investing in the arts, said Bill Hogarth, director for York Region's board of education.

"There's a myth because of the change taking place that some boards don't support the arts."

"In York Region, that just wasn't true. I want to separate us out and recognize how important the arts are," Mr. Hogarth said.

Mr. Pettigrew said he was pleased with the show.

"We've accomplished what we set out to do. The talent has shone through."

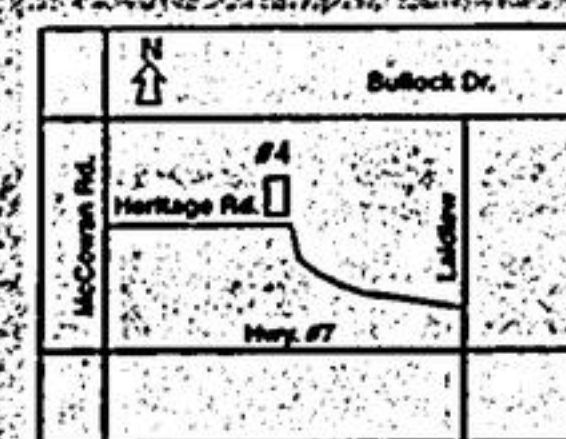
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