



JESSE COOPER (Producer), BETH ANDERSON (Performer) and ERIK GOW (MC).
Photo: 'Keith Anderson / Rotary Club of Parksville'

MOSAIC YOUTH TALENT SHOWCASE: THE KIDS ARE ALRIGHT

BY DAVID MORRISON

One of French painter Paul Gauguin's many incisive observations on the human condition was that "there is always a heavy demand for fresh mediocrity." Over a century since his passing, this point is perfectly illustrated by our species' increasingly voracious appetite for the lowest common denominator. It's bewildering, but the great majority of us are content to amuse ourselves with utter garbage.

Among the guilty parties perpetuating this are the television networks, with novelty variant after gimmicky permutation of "talent" show piled high upon our plates. But who can blame them? As with "reality" shows, it's cheap television to produce and these are, after all, proven winning formulae.

The consequences however are, firstly, that just about anyone can become a star these days, woefully inept auditioners often becoming more famous than the genuinely gifted for merely being amusingly hopeless. I feel this sends out a dangerous message to anyone hoping to make it that it's acceptable to lower your game, that any old rope will do. Secondly, such intense saturation only serves to dilute standards and expectations, further dumbing down popular culture.

This, then, is the bizarre, confusing climate in which dedicated young talent is supposed to thrive and progress in the early 21st century.

All this in mind, my wife and I attended the 3rd Annual Mosaic Youth Talent Showcase

at the Knox United Church in Parksville last month. This was the first event of its kind I'd been to in many years and I was curious as to how, if at all, this irritating cultural shift may have impacted a grassroots shindig such as this. Had the universal acceptance of mediocrity as the new excellence noticeably infiltrated even here? Would the evening present a parade of substandard drivel in tune with the times? Or might we actually see potential, promise or real star quality on display?

Organized by the Rotary Club of Parksville, the evening was aimed purely at celebrating the diverse artistic pursuits of a bunch of local youngsters, and raising funds to help them continue to do so. They were being granted the opportunity to further hone their stagecraft by strutting their stuff before the community – but all proceeds would be to assist towards scholarships, new instruments and other relevancies requested in advance by the performers.

It wasn't too long into the show before all fears concerning quality were categorically allayed. So much so, in fact, that the levels of both entertainment and energy in the room effortlessly eclipsed the \$40 performance by an internationally renowned act of twenty years' standing we'd witnessed elsewhere on the Island in the preceding week. I kid you not. At that show, we left numb with boredom at the interval, whereas we'd have remained enthusiastic had the Mosaic bash continued into the small hours.

I'll be totally honest here in stating that there were acts that did not meet our tastes,

but I feel this is not important. Susan and I are intelligent enough to appreciate that something is unarguably good, even if it doesn't speak our language. What should be noted is that we truly thoroughly enjoyed the evening as a whole package. Even then, this was not all down to what transpired onstage. What particularly heartened us was the spirit of community present in that room. It was so very tangible, all witnesses emotionally wrapped up in every dance step executed and each note sung or played, bursting with pride as they willed 'their' youth on to the peak of achievement.

It would be unfair to single out individual performances for praise, so I won't. With an age range of eleven to twenty-one, why differentiate? Let's just say that across the board we were party to some transcendent "Billy Elliott moments"; displays of instrumental dexterity, subtlety and power; voices rare and pure; comedic skills par excellence; impressive song-craft and an uncanny grasp of swing from a clowder of teenage jazz cats.

If there is something this wonderful evening was not, it's mediocre. The performances were occasionally rough around the edges or a little nervy, but considering the tender years of the entertainers it was of a dazzling overall standard. So a little faith is restored – at least at local level – that not everyone is happy to buy into disposable entertainment, or considers their kid talented simply because he can gargle "Summer of '69" with root beer. It comes as some relief, I can tell you. ~