

COVER STORIES

Satin-smooth voiced Dallo a star in waiting

Vaughan teenager invited to tour with celebrity acts

BY MAX MACCARI

As I sit here listening to the song selections on Christopher Dallo's MySpace page, I think back to the day when I first heard Paul Potts singing *Nessun Dorma* during the preliminary auditions of Britain's Got Talent. I remember his voice affecting me almost instantly, as if I'd been thrust deep into space where everything around me seemed to fade to black and all that mattered, right then and there, was that voice.

It's happened again, this time with the 17-year-old I am about to meet. His name is Christopher Dallo and when you hear him sing, you'll realize that here's a very special talent. If you haven't heard of him, you will soon.

This Vaughan resident may not be the talk of the music industry just yet, but the reputation he carries in tow definitely precedes him. He's what I would consider one of the "good ones" – very polite, attentive, and soft spoken. Mature beyond his years. His unassuming demeanour is welcoming and his subdued yet camera-friendly good looks clean up nice.



Ready for the big time... Dallo, who wowed David Foster with his audition of *Nights in White Satin*, on stage with the superstar producer at the piano

Dallo has just returned from a performance in New Jersey, one of the stops in a 10-city concert tour organized by superstar producer and songwriter David Foster. The David Foster & Friends tour, featuring a number of celebrity acts, includes a talent search component where two emerging artists are selected to perform in each city; the winner of that showdown to appear at the "Hit Man" tour's last stop in Vancouver.

I already know he has made the cut and I could feel the excitement in his voice. His version of Josh Groban's *You Raise Me Up* beat out his nine-year-old competitor's version of *To Where You Are*.

"That was David's choice for me," says Dallo. "He wanted me to sing one of his songs that not only matched my vocal abilities but could make the audience relate."

For those that don't realize the impact this contest could have on our subject's future, David Foster is a big name in music. Huge, actually. Winner of 15 Grammy Awards, he

has worked with some of the biggest names in music including Whitney Houston, Barbra Streisand, Josh Groban, Celine Dion, Michael Buble, Andrea Bocelli and Madonna. So, even if Dallo doesn't bring home the gold, he will have caught the eye of a producer who could shuttle him down the road towards that enviable little place called fame.

For Dallo, who has performed at major fundraisers, galas, and other local and regional events since 2005, sending in his recorded audition of *Nights in White Satin* was one of those efforts that didn't come with any high hopes. "I had no expectations. It's just one of those things you do and see what happens."

At the Prudential Center in New Jersey, Dallo recalls the moment he first walked into the arena, nerves clinging like spiderwebs. And then, the icebreaker: "Mr. Nights in White Satin!" Foster shouts from the stage, welcoming our Vaughan native into the grasp of what could turn out to be the turning point of this young man's career.

Dallo's music falls into a subgenre called "pop-opera" (or "popera" in industry terms) – pop music performed in the classical operatic style. You have heard it before in hitmakers like Andrea Bocelli and Josh Groban. Even Pavarotti embraced it with his Pavarotti and Friends tours back in the 90s, singing alongside artists such as Bono, Sting and Zucchero.

It's a sound that's refreshing, captivating and adds some real depth to our Top 40 obsessed music culture. What will be interesting, though, will be how Dallo applies his pop-operatic style to original songwriting. His yet-to-be-named debut album is still being recorded and no release date has been set.

At 17, about five years after he realized that he wanted to be a musician, Dallo knows what he needs to do. He knows that he has yet to grow vocally, to refine his sound, his style. He is committed to his craft, and has his vocal coach, trainers and manager on speed dial.

Dallo knows that the climb to the top won't be easy ("There is always someone out there bigger than you," he says), but he is also self-confident enough to know it's not impossible.

The Canadian music industry has had its share of successful exports, all of whom first had their start on home turf. Is Canada ready for the pop-opera sound? Ready enough to give contenders like Dallo a shot at the international hit parade? There's no reason why not. All it takes is striking the right chord at the right time.

Dallo remarks: "The Canadian music market is small... too small for all the talent that lies out there to have an equal shot at success. Before you step outside, you have to get a name at home. I see it as a stepping stone to a world of possibilities."

With a strong and supportive network of family and friends, this rising star's journey will not be a solo one. His talent and "guy next door" personality are winning him a growing fan base, and he is determined to earn their continued support.

"An artist needs to relate to his fans, be down-to-earth. I want my fans to feel the same way David Foster made me feel – safe, comfortable, connected."

Dallo's fast-growing list of musical credits, achievements and celebrity connections could well see a music career that explodes before he turns 20. With the right management, marketing and packaging, success may be but a stone's throw away.

• Catch video footage and audio samples of Christopher Dallo on his website www.christopherdallo.org.

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