

CBC LIVE

Q&A: Tenille on Her CCMA Humanitarian Award

8

110

0

Tweet

Like

+1



June 26, 2012

By Calum Shanlin | @calumshanlin



The **Canadian Country Music Association** has today (June 26) announced the recipient of the **2012 Slight Music Humanitarian Award** - eighteen year old singer songwriter **Tenille** from Grande Prairie, AB. Tenille created, organised and executed one of the largest fundraising events her city of Grande Prairie has seen, raising almost **\$200,000** since the first **Big Hearts for Big Kids** in 2010. Proceeds raised by the annual event benefit **Sunrise House**, the only youth **emergency shelter** north of Edmonton. If not for Tenille's efforts, the shelter would have been forced to close its doors. No stranger to the CCMA Awards, Tenille was nominated last year and has been attending since the age of fourteen. She'll now be heading to **Saskatoon on September 9** for the 2012 Awards ceremony where the likes of **Miranda Lambert**, **Paul Brandt**, **Johnny Reid** and **Eric Church** will perform. We'll be bringing you all the backstage action from Saskatoon, and in the meantime we spoke to Tenille about her charitable work, her award and what's in store for her fledgling music **career**...

CBC Live: [Congratulations](#) on the award, are you looking forward to heading out to Saskatoon in September?

Tenille: Thank you very, very much. I am so excited to head out to Saskatoon, I honestly look forward to the CCMAs every year - it's so fantastic being able to return. It's almost like a family being able to see everybody. This will be my fifth year taking in all of the workshops and seminars. This year I'm definitely looking forward to the gala night as well.

What age did you start going to the CCMAs?

T: I believe I was fourteen. I was sitting in the front row of every educational seminar taking as many notes and business cards as I could. I still look back on that. I met so many people that first year that I'm still honoured to be working with. Every year, it's just an amazing experience. Networking and communicating with so many wonderful people in the industry.

So you've been doing this since you were fourteen. How did you find the time to graduate, let alone do all the charity work?

T: I honestly have been singing since I could talk. Music has always been such a huge part of my life and I remember asking for singing lessons when I was five years old. School was an awesome experience because I was able to also do music at the same time. That's thanks to a lot of classmates who helped me catch up and teachers that excused a lot of my absences. School was a phenomenal experience and I loved being a part of that.

Tell us about Sunrise House, and how you started Big Hearts for Big Kids.

T: I believe I was fifteen or sixteen the first time I heard about Sunrise House. I was so moved by the statistics of how many kids in my own community - even within my own school - had been using Sunrise House which is the Grand Prairie Youth Emergency Shelter Society. Their doors are open to youths at risk of homelessness. They have a specific street team that goes out to find youth and they have statistics showing that they have a two week turnaround time when somebody leaves home and they're found on the streets. They have two weeks before it's a severe addiction to drugs or before they're really too far gone. So, the Sunrise House is an amazing organisation that directly reaches out to a lot of youth, and it's the only one north of Edmonton so it covers a really large area of kids that need a safe place to turn to.

After hearing about this and realising that kids my own age needed it, I was so excited to do something about it. The whole idea of this event started with, you know, "let's just have something in our own back yard. We'll invite people to bring supplies to the shelter and we'll put everybody's hearts together and see what we can do." This brainstorming led to this formal concert fundraiser. We started this we three hundred people and in our first event we raised \$30,000, which was insane. We brought in a ton of country music artists who shared a lot of great music. The day before the first event the shelter doors had closed. This fundraiser helped reopen those doors and re-establish the shelter. We helped with renovations and in the following two years we did the same thing. We've expanded the event to fit five hundred people and this community has been so supportive in being a part of the magic in this event. We've raised over \$194,000 in two years for these kids.

That's an amazing amount of money, in such little time...

T: Thank you, and that's on behalf of so many people. All the volunteers and sponsors. I went door to door with a letter and a poster and asked the local companies to be a part of this. So many people said yes, and that's the reason this was a success.

Last year, you were nominated for a CCMA Award and you've also won an Alberta Country Music Award. How does the humanitarian award compare to being awarded for your music?

T: You know what, the humanitarian award speaks so much to me. That's what I believe music is about, it's about bringing people together, it's about making a positive change with a lot of people and it's such a special way to communicate. I mean, the first year I attended the CCMAs I got to watch the gala and watch the actual live television show. I remember George Canyon received it. I remember sitting there, thinking to myself, "that is the most amazing award of them all... that represents what this whole community of music should be about." To be able to now receive that... this award means so much to me.

And you'll get to see George Canyon in Saskatoon.

T: Yes, I believe I will!

Even though you're so young, you've already done so much. What's been the career highlight?

T: I mean, every piece of it is a piece of making this whole experience a favourite thing. I'm just so grateful to be able to do what I love and to make a difference with that. I would have to say that the three years of Big Hearts were probably my favourite part of this career so far. Being able to bring in a lot of money to my musical friends and help out the shelter has been a huge highlight for me.

In your wildest dreams - where do you see yourself in ten years?

T: I have to tell you that when I was nine, I was at a Shania Twain concert. She is a huge idol of mine, I have always looked up to her for Canadian originality and her success and her personality. I really love her music. I knew all the words to her songs when I was nine years old, sitting in the second row with a sign that said 'Shania, can I please sing with you?' She brought me up on stage at the Rexall Centre in front of what I learned to be was 18,000 people. I'll never forget standing next to my idol going "this is exactly what I want to be doing..." So, in ten years, I would love to pack the Rexall Centre and bring up some little girl to make that same dream come true.