

Singing humanitarian hosts concert for cats

Arts Scene

by Heather Solomon

Alexandra Cohen may be only 18 years old, but she's already earned local and national kudos for a lifetime of good deeds that she continues to spread in her wake. On Aug. 23 at 7:30 p.m., she hosts the fifth annual Cat's Meow Concert featuring the Musicians of the World Symphony Orchestra (MWSO) and benefiting the Trap Neuter Release/Adopt Program of the Cote Saint-Luc Cats Committee, a cause close to her heart.

"We humanely trap stray cats, bring them to the vet for neutering, vaccinations and any other health problems then socialize these cats in foster homes and adopt them out," says Cohen. "When that isn't possible, we release them back outdoors into an environment where they're fed and sheltered in the winter. Our fundraising covers the costs for all this."

For the concert, the Syd Wise Auditorium at 5785 Parkhaven St. will fill with lovers of cats and music. "I perform every year for it and have been involved with the commit-



Alexandra Cohen sings for her favourite cause in the Cat's Meow Concert Aug. 23.

HEATHER SOLOMON PHOTO

tee since its inception six years ago," says Cohen who in 2014 was named volunteer of the year in Cote Saint-Luc for her work with the group and later earned the Canada-wide Terry Fox Humanitarian Award for volunteerism and humanitarian efforts.

That her own beloved cat, a tortoiseshell named Cleo, was acquired from a rescue shelter affirms Cohen's commitment to the committee's mandate. "Right now in Cote Saint-Luc there are around 10,000 homeless cats which is horrifying," says Cohen. "The root of it is human beings. We abandon our animals and also don't

sterilize them, so they go out and reproduce, perpetuating the problem. I feel we're responsible, and therefore we need to do something about it."

Not only did Cohen institute an education program, producing a film featuring interviews with committee members, the city's supportive vet and the SPCA's Alanna Devine, but she uses it as a teaching tool with fifth and sixth graders.

"Speaking to youth is important, because they are the next generation of pet owners. At the same time, children go home and talk to their parents about it," says Cohen.

Her singing voice that she nurtured with classical lessons through high school is another way for her to help out. To open the concert, she performs two selections from Broadway musicals, a genre she says appeals to audiences as a form of universal storytelling. Then Maestro Joseph Milo and the MWSO take the stage, playing this year's theme, A Bouquet of Classics: The Music We All Love. It's a chance to hear the orchestra locally after their Aug. 21 concert titled From the Shtetl to Broadway for Chabad of St-Sauveur at Manoir St-Sauveur. "Our Cat's concert is specially designed to provide a summery, light

program of short, popular classical music as well as some Broadway or other pop songs, keeping in mind the variety of the audience's taste," says Milo.

Cohen is sensitive to different audience tastes from her appearances at the Mackay Centre for Children with Disabilities and at Maimonides Geriatric Centre, among other institutions, where she toured with the Marianopolis College show choir Singers for a Cause. It's a group that she founded in CEGEP and has since handed to a successor to uplift those in hospitals, seniors' homes, schools and community centres. She is still elated when she thinks of how disabled children rallied to sing *Let It Go* with them.

Cohen continues to put in many hours of volunteer work at Maimonides working with patients in the advanced stages of dementia. This fall, she is among the chosen few, one of 75 among 800 applicants, to gain acceptance into McGill University's pre-med program. "I love human physiology and I've always been concerned about the quality of the lives of others," she says. ■

Ticket information for the concert is at www.cotesaintluc.org/cats, or call 514-485-6806 ext. 2200.

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