

Singing out strong

Montreal sensation Nikki Yanofsky, 13, kicks off UNICEF AIDS benefit

T'CHA DUNLEVY

The Gazette

Thursday, November 29, 2007

Avril Lavigne, Sarah McLachlan and John Mayer were among the international and homegrown music talent on hand to raise money and awareness for UNICEF's United for Children, United Against AIDS campaign, before a crowd of almost 8,000 last night at the Bell Centre.

Ben Mulroney hosted the event, which also featured fiery African French singer Angélique Kidjo and Montrealers Corneille, Marie-Mai and Nikki Yanofsky.

Lavigne headlined the night, and judging by the cheers that greeted her entrance, her fans had come out to support both her and the cause. She played a mix of old and new, from the giddy punch of her first song Boyfriend (off her latest CD the Best Damn Thing) to her career-launching power-ballad Losing Grip and the mandatory Sk8r Boi.

While her new material leans heavily toward peppy bubblegum-pop, Lavigne showed depth by including a wide range of styles in her set. She offered a sneak peek of her upcoming tour, which comes to the Bell Centre April 2, complete with costume changes and backup dancers.

McLachlan - on hiatus to take care of her newborn second child - was breathtaking. "It's my very first show since I had my baby," she said. "I'm very nervous. I haven't sang out loud for almost a year." She needn't have worried. Her performance was the highlight of the night.

She started on guitar with Building a Mystery, and moved to the piano for Push. She was joined halfway through the next song, Adia, by the first of two surprise guests - Lavigne, who sang into an oversized pink microphone, her voice sounding impressively strong. Perhaps she was inspired by McLachlan's mature mood - a far cry from her own bratty teen-pop. Mayer was next, adding intuitive guitar licks to World On Fire.

He returned soon after to play a short set of his own. Alone on guitar, he sang and strummed his way through a couple of soulful blues numbers. He led off, appropriately, with Waiting for the World to Change; and his playing shined on the airy Gravity. Short but sweet.



CREDIT: Tim Snow/The Gazette

Nikki Yanofsky performs at a UNICEF AIDS benefit concert at Montreal's Bell Centre on Nov. 27, 2007.

After him came Kidjo, who graced a Montreal stage for the second time this year (following her standout performance at the Montreal International Jazz Festival). Her voice was otherworldly, and her energy irrepressible. She got the party started by inviting audience members up to dance during her last song.

Quebec soul crooner Corneille received a hero's welcome, earlier the night. The female screams that returned throughout his 20-minute performance were confirmation of his pop star status. He sang material from his first English-language album *The Birth of Cornelius*.

Montreal sensation Yanofsky, 13, kicked off the show with a few lines from *When You Wish Upon a Star*, segueing into the Beatles' *With a Little Help From My Friends*. The boomer material only highlighted the gap between the singer's stunning voice and her young age.

Former *Star Académie* competitor Marie-Mai had the most grating set of the evening, her generic rock simply not fitting in with the otherwise solid program. Mercifully, she was kept to just two songs.

tdunlevy@thegazette.canwest.com

Concert Clips: To see a gallery of images from last night's concert, go to montrealgazette.com/artslife

© The Gazette (Montreal) 2007

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.