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Yamin returns to town for Pops holiday concert

by Susan L. Pena - Reading Eagle Correspondent • Jan. 11, 2016



Courtesy of Peter Boehi | Elliott Yamin performs Sunday at 4 p.m. at RACC.

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Reading, PA

If you go

Event: Reading Area Community College's Downtown Performing Arts Series Partner Program presents the Reading Pops Orchestra's "A Pops Holiday With Elliott Yamin"

When: 4 p.m. Sunday

Where: Miller Center for the Arts, 4 N. Second St.

Tickets: \$40 adults and students, \$35 members.

Phone: 610-607-6270

Web: www.racc.edu/MillerCenter

Vocalist Elliott Yamin, who came in third in the fifth season (2006) of "American Idol," will join the Reading Pops Orchestra for "A Pops Holiday With Elliott Yamin" on Sunday at 4 p.m. in Reading Area Community College's Miller Center for the Arts.

It will be Yamin's second visit to Berks County this year, since he appeared in April during Boscov's Berks Jazz Fest in "Jazz Attack" with guitarist

Peter White, saxophonist Euge Groove and trumpeter Rick Braun. When Yamin talks about his life and career, the word "blessed" comes up quite often. He can't believe how far he has come from his directionless situation before "American Idol" to a life full of travel, acclaim and, most importantly, the means to do good in the world. "I wouldn't trade places with anybody," he said in a telephone interview recently from his home in Los Angeles. He was born in Los Angeles to Shaul Yamin, an Israeli, and the late Claudette Goldberg Yamin. (They divorced when Elliott was 14.) He said his mother sang throughout his childhood - not professionally - and she was his first musical influence. "I never had anything to do with music, except for chorus in middle school," he said. "I can't read music. (Singing) is just something natural that I was always able to do." During his childhood, he said, he used to hum along with tunes in the car, trying to imitate his mother. He would sing loudly enough to attract the attention of their neighbors, who had a recording studio in their home. One day, when he was about 9, they invited him over and recorded him singing "Hound Dog" a la Elvis Presley. When they played it back to him, he couldn't believe his ears. "I was blown away," he said. "It was a warm, fuzzy feeling, and I thought, 'I'm gonna chase that feeling.' I got the bug." When he was 11, the family moved to Richmond, Va.; he would sing at his grandmother's convalescent home for her bridge friends, and at family reunions. But his teen years were difficult, and he was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. He dropped out of high school, earned his G.E.D. and in his late teens and early 20s worked at various dead-end jobs. But he still sang, sometimes at the karaoke night at T.G.I. Friday's, and even did a short stint with a jazz band, performing on alternate weekends for about six months. But he seemed to be going nowhere until his three best friends said, "If you don't get out of here and do something with your voice, we're gonna kill you." They were joking, but serious at the same time. With their support and encouragement, and that of his girlfriend at the time, a country singer, Yamin started checking the web for "American Idol" auditions. The closest one he found was in Boston. He found the courage to make the trip and try out. "If it wasn't for (my friends), I don't know if I'd have had the courage to do it," he said. "It was scary, intimidating, overwhelming. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. But it was exhilarating; so exciting and so new." As he moved through the process, he said: "I was a sponge; I had the time of my life. It was such an adventure and a roller coaster. I just kept putting one foot in front of the other. I had to get over my stage fright. I never thought I'd make it as far as I did." Along the way, he decided that he just wanted to have a career in music. "I didn't want

to go back to Richmond and work some job I hated," he said. "'Idol' not only afforded me those opportunities, but so many more: things I never would have imagined myself doing. That experience was the best thing in my life. I loved every second of it." Yamin credits the training he received from Dorian Holley, "American Idol's" director and vocal coach, with developing his ability to connect with an audience and to emote. He also learned a great deal about the music business from the show. And best of all, he said, his mom, who would die two years later, was in the audience every week. "She soaked it up," he said. "She put up with so much from me, it felt good to give something back to her and let her enjoy that moment. I was very blessed to have that experience with her." Yamin remains a spokesman for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation. "Having a platform to do some good - I'm blessed to be in that position," he said. "If I can be a little beacon of hope for just one person with diabetes, I'm honored to use my voice and my platform to do that." *Email Susan L. Pena: weekend@readingeagle.com.*

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