

## Local musicians perform for music industry icons



Kirk Bates and 62North at the Next Country Music Star Finals

**By Sarah Vance**

Local musicians Kirk Bates, Dylan Mader, DJ Brown, Frank Towns and Chester McCann received insights from industry icons like eight-time Juno award winner Bruce Good, during the Next Country Music Star final, held last Saturday at the Ranch Resort in Bethany.

‘Kirk is a musician who is working to pursue his dreams,’ said Jane Doidge, an organizer of the competition, as Bates and 62North took the stage at Saturday’s finals. Competitions have been underway for 10 weeks, as 37 musicians worked towards the chance of playing at the Havelock Country Music Festival’s Twin stage this summer. ‘Kirk is the only musician who hand-delivered his application after parking an 18-wheel rig in the Ranch parking lot,’ added Doidge.

62North, a Canadian indie-band that combines the talents of Mader, Brown and Towns, joined Bates at the semi-finals and again over the weekend. The band is well known along Ontario’s indie-music circuit for their 2015 cover of ‘Whistling Dixie,’ which achieved 3,500 downloads only hours after its release.

‘We were really pleased that Kirk reached out to us and we see ways that we can collaborate in the future,’ said Brown. ‘We only had three practices before tonight.’

‘The most difficult thing for artists is to believe in their own voices,’ said expert judge Bruce Good, who founded The Good Brothers. He told Bates and his band: ‘A great Canadian artist once told me to have faith in what I was writing, and that artist was Gordon Lightfoot.’

Feedback for original songs like Hotel 379, written by Bates about the place behind the driver’s seat where truckers sleep, received positive feedback from the Juno award winner. ‘Please continue to write originals; you will do well by them,’ said Good, who added. ‘We are here to prepare you for the next time that you go on stage.’

All of the members of the band supporting Bates on Saturday night, including Chester McCann on steel guitar, have connections in Bancroft. ‘I used to work at Bancroft Auto Body,’ said McCann, whose 20-minute steel-guitar set on Saturday was his first jam with Bates. ‘Kirk texted me his original songs about a week ago, along with some chord changes, so it has been a whirlwind to learn.’

‘I like the original material that artists are singing tonight. Each one of you should write more, because it forms your voice,’ said Bruce Good, addressing all of the finalists before the grand winner was announced. ‘You need to believe in your own voice.’

Female vocalist Sacha, who refers to herself as ‘a small town girl with a guitar full of dreams,’ was Saturday’s grand prize winner and the Next Country Music Star. The only female lead performer, Sacha, an independent artist from Montreal, describes herself as ‘a small town girl with a guitar full of dreams.’ She offered a fresh sound, distinct from the mainstream male voices that dominated the night. Her delivery is soft with an impressive vocal range. She has performed at venues such as the Toronto Center of Performing Arts. And this summer, she will be a featured performer on the twin stages of Canada’s largest country music festival.