

Family, faith helped singer overcome loss of her dad

Newbury Park teen takes center stage

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By Dawn Megli

dawn@theacorn.com



VOCALIZING—Newbury Park resident Sofia Lewis, 19, sings during Chick Singer Night on July 17 at the Sound Palace in Oxnard. She will direct the program's next concert in November. RICHARD GILLARD/Acorn Newspapers

After a year of COVID-19 restrictions, Sofia Lewis stepped out of the shadows and into the spotlight. When the teen opened her mouth, a voice outsize for her small frame sang in perfect pitch.

"Cause I carried on like the wayward son and now through and through, I've come undone," she sang from Matt Maeson's "Hallucinogenics."

The 19-year-old Newbury Park performer took center stage Saturday during a live, all-woman musical performance dubbed Chick Singer Night.

In a performance venue in an industrial park in Oxnard, the budding vocalist sang not just for herself, but also for her late father, Paul Lewis, who died from acute lymphoblastic leukemia five years ago when Sofia was in middle school.

Paul was an avid musician, and the father and daughter bonded over music.

"He was one of my biggest inspirations to stay in music. It was something he always wanted me to do. I think he would be so proud," she told the *Acorn*. "I think he would be overjoyed that I'm following what I want to do in my life."

Sofia Lewis, who is attending Moorpark College with plans to become a nurse, performed three songs to close out the July 17 songfest. Last weekend's performance was the first Chick Singer Night in more than a year and a half due to the pandemic.

The concert was started by Newbury Park resident and Pepperdine voice professor Lori Maier in Chicago 32 years ago as a way to showcase the talent of her fellow vocalists and music students in a format free of competition and criticism. Chick Singer Nights are now held in over a dozen cities across the country and internationally.

The concept is simple. Each singer shows up the afternoon of the performance and runs through her songs one time with the house band. They return that night to perform in front of an audience.

It was the biggest performance yet for Lewis, who has previously performed with the praise band at Monte Vista Presbyterian Church in Newbury Park.

Lewis grew up in a musical family and taught herself to sing. She said when she lost her father, who was an Emmy-winning sound mixer, she relied on music and her faith to pull her through.

"I know that my God is always with me. It taught me to not be scared, have courage and don't be afraid," she said. "As much as it sucks, I know I wouldn't be half the person I am without going through that. It has inspired me to do what I want to do and be a good example for others to show that when you're given a crappy situation in life, instead of using it to stay miserable, you can use it to your advantage."

Her mother, Rosalia, who was born in Sicily, said her late husband was a self-taught singer, guitarist and pianist. She said her daughter, who started singing when she was 3, has followed in her father's footsteps.

"She's been singing since she was a little munchkin," Rosalia Lewis said. "I used to sing when I was young, so she got it from both of us, I think."

When asked what she hopes lies ahead for her daughter, Rosalia Lewis said the answer was simple.

"That she becomes a star," she said, laughing.

She said her daughter plans to audition for "American Idol" next month.

Sofia Lewis was joined Saturday by Angela Parrish; Jade Hendrix and her mother, Sharon; and Susan Wolf, a Santa Rosa Valley resident and co-founder of the musical instrument and audio equipment manufacturer Line 6.

Parrish, the singer and pianist who sang "Another Day of Sun," which opens the Academy Award-winning film "La La Land," also had her late father top-of-mind as she took the stage last weekend.

The Los Angeles resident told the crowd that Saturday's concert was the first time she had performed in public since her father died the week before. She sang "I'll Be Seeing You" in his honor.

"I'll find you in the morning sun and when the night is new. I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you," she sang.

"I thought it would be sad but it's sort of like I get to have a telephone line to him," she told the *Acorn* after the performance. "I played at his funeral and I played today, and it was kind of like talking to him, so it was actually really lovely."

When asked what she thinks of sharing the stage with budding artists like Lewis, Parrish said she thinks it's great that Maier has created an event to encourage emerging vocalists early in their careers.

"I've had really encouraging people in my life, and it's so great that Lori is being so encouraging of Sofia," Parrish said. "She's fantastic. She has a wonderful voice, so I think it's wonderful that there's an event like this that can help nurture new artists, and I'm really proud of her and excited for her, and I can't wait to see what she does."

At the end of Saturday's show Maier announced what Lewis will do next. The budding chanteuse is the new director of Ventura County's Chick Singer Night, which will hold its next concert in November.

Lewis said she is grateful for the opportunity and knows her father would be proud.

"I know he's happy and he's here with me," she said.