



PHOTOGRAPHY • DEAN MARRANTZ

Liona Boyd and Andrew Dolson of Waterloo rehearse at her Toronto home for their upcoming mini tour. Updates and tour dates can be found on Boyd's website, classicalguitar.com

Andrew Dolson gets his big break

Classical guitarist Liona Boyd finds new duet partner in our September fashion model

BY BRIAN WILLIAMS

When a life-changing moment occurs, you may be visiting your sister, or you may be on the side of a mountain. But, if you choose to believe in serendipity, sweet music is always a possibility.

Internationally acclaimed musician Liona Boyd certainly believes there was a master plan at work in how she discovered Andrew

Dolson of Waterloo.

Dolson, 25, was Grand magazine's cover and men's fashion model for the September-October issue. Our Meet the Model story talked about how he is classically trained as a guitarist and opera singer. In the article, he spoke of being blessed to have had outstanding music teachers throughout high school and university. The blessing of receiving his big break had yet to happen, but it seemed only a matter of time.

He didn't have to wait much longer.

The story of how he became Boyd's duet partner is full of meant-to-be moments, starting with Grand's fashion photographer, Alisha Townsend. In the summer, during our prolonged process of choosing our next model, Townsend gently put her foot down: "I know a guy who will be great," she said. "Let me call Dolson."

The next bit of magic happened when Grand magazine arrived at the Kitchener

home of Dr. Vivien Boyd. She read the story and thought her classical guitarist sister, who just happened to be visiting, would enjoy seeing it too.

Vivien left it on a coffee table but before Liona could get her hands on it, their mom, Eileen Boyd, was flipping through the pages, and she was the one who drew Liona's attention to Dolson.

Liona read about how he used to practise eight hours a day, and she could relate because she used to do the same. She also recognized the names of a couple of the teachers – Terry McKenna and James Westman – who guided Dolson during his time at Wilfrid Laurier University.

With a tour coming up, Boyd had been looking for a duet partner. She had tried out a couple of musicians, but it wasn't clicking. "I was quite in a panic," she says in a telephone interview.

And then along comes Dolson. Rare is the classical guitarist who both plays and sings well, she says, so why not check him out?

She first tried to reach him through Gemini Models in Kitchener and then found an email address for him. She fired off a note. He received it while rock climbing at Rattlesnake Point with his younger brother, Brendan.

Dolson says it showed up as a LinkedIn message, so he deleted it. It didn't make sense to him that a young unknown musician on the side of a mountain would be receiving a message from such a huge figure in the world of classical guitar.

Then, through the wonders of Facebook and with her sister's help, Liona got his attention. Time was ticking. She was leaving Kitchener the next morning.

About three hours later, after driving home to Waterloo and showering, a barefoot Dolson – he hates to wear shoes – was at the door of Vivien's home with

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his guitar.

“It was hilarious,” he says. “I think I still smelled like campfire.”

Because he’d been rock climbing, the fingernails required for classical guitar playing were worn down, but the show – in this case, an impromptu audition – must go on.

“I knew from the moment he started playing and singing with me this was going to work,” Boyd says.

High praise from the winner of five Juno Awards, recipient of five honorary doctorates and numerous other honours, including the Order of Canada.

After the audition, the Dolson brothers returned to their campsite, but there may be less time for rock climbing in the near future.

With Boyd’s endorsement, Dolson finds himself preparing to head out on tour. After playing a couple of dates closer to home, the pair heads west later in November, where a Christmas-themed mini tour will see them play dates in British Columbia and Banff, Alta., before returning to Mississauga’s Living Arts Centre for a show Dec. 9.

Boyd sees Dolson as the complete package. He can play, he can sing – “He sounds like one of the Tenors” – he’s a genuinely great guy, and his appearance doesn’t hurt the cause, either. Boyd, who is in her 60s, figures the ladies attending the shows will be impressed on all fronts. “I’m glad I’m old enough that they won’t think I’m a cougar,” she says, laughing.

Dolson has also found himself in a studio with Boyd’s producer, Peter Bond, where Dolson’s talents were added to one of the songs on Boyd’s CD that is set for release in the spring.

Boyd says Bond is also impressed with how quickly Dolson picks up new material. The song Dolson plays on also features Rompin’ Ronnie Hawkins and is a tribute to Gordon Lightfoot, for whom Boyd was the opening act in the 1970s.



Boyd says she hopes to have Dolson more involved in future albums. She also sees them doing a more extensive tour next year, with hopes of playing a show in Kitchener or Waterloo.

Before hitting the road, Dolson is spending his days delivering furniture for St. Jacobs Furnishings and his evenings practising the songs Boyd needs him to learn. The program is called “A Winter Fantasy” and he will have solos to sing.

He says the people at his day job – store owner Byron Shantz and manager Bob Smith – have been supportive and approve any time off he needs to pursue this dream.

Everything has happened so fast, Dolson says he’s overwhelmed. He’s trying to keep his mind from getting too far ahead of himself, even though all of his friends keep saying he’s going to be famous.

The Boyd-effect has certainly helped others taken under her wing in the past. “I basically put Pavlo on the map,” she says, recalling how they toured together in the early 1990s.

Boyd is pleased to be the influential person in the music industry to give Dolson his start.

And she wants to give Townsend, our fashion stylist, a hug for putting him in front of her camera.

“Blessings came my way, too, in the form of Andrew.” 