

# Between Motherhood and Melody

By Sue Seaborn

What do the great vocalists Michael Bublé, Céline Dion, Chicago, Josh Groban, Natalie Cole, Whitney Houston, Lionel Richie, and others have in common with Mount Allison's talented, 1991 music graduate Eleanor McCain? All have caught the musical eye of and graced the stage with Canadian songwriter, multiple Grammy winner, and superstar David Foster.

Performing at the concert charity gala *Crescendo*, in what she described as one of the "most amazing musical events of her life," Eleanor McCain wowed the crowd. She walked out on stage at the Halifax Trade Centre singing *Shenandoah*, and raised the roof with a large standing ovation from a supportive and spontaneous audience. Once the crowd had settled, emcee David Foster asked of Eleanor's parents, Margie and Wallace McCain, "Do you own a plane? Good, because this young lady will be in need of it, as she is going to go places!" Foster, who is known for discovering great talent worldwide, had discovered yet another huge gift at the gala — soprano Eleanor McCain.

*Crescendo*, which successfully raised \$1.6 million for the David Foster Foundation, was a big event in Eleanor's life. But even topping that has been her discovery of the joys of motherhood and the arrival of her baby girl, Laura, almost six years ago. Taking time out to raise a daughter in one way put a hold on Eleanor's singing career, but in another way enhanced it. After launching her first album *Intimate* in 2001, the Florenceville, NB-born songstress released *Bundle of Joy* in 2007, which was recorded in Nashville and was filled with some of Eleanor's favourite lullabies from her childhood, and which she was passing on to Laura.

In fact, it was Eleanor's mother Margie who was actually her first "Voice Mom" and who instilled the love of music in her daughter. An accomplished piano and organ player herself, Margie used to accompany Eleanor as a young girl in her singing at home and at various outings. It was as a nine-year-

old that Eleanor really got "hooked on classics," though, after being impressed by the New York musical *Annie*. After that memorable occasion, it was just about raising the volume and pursuing musical notes of her own. To help Eleanor follow her dreams Margie took her 13-year-old on a 90-minute drive into Fredericton every week for music lessons, various musicals, and singing events.



Photo by Rob Waymen

Following a long family tradition, Eleanor later attended Mount Allison and studied voice with the late music professor, Patricia Lee. Eleanor also worked with professors Willis Noble and the late Carleton Elliott (who incidentally also taught her mother). Like any normally busy Mount Allison student, Eleanor combined her academics with participation in various choirs, choruses, and chorales, and in her grad year starred as Laurie, in the Garnet and Gold production of *Oklahoma*. But the pinnacle of her Mount A musical career had to be when she received her music degree from a very special heroine in her life. In 1991 Eleanor's mother wasn't just her "voice mom" — she was Mount Allison's Chancellor — and in May that year, she proudly conferred a Bachelor of Music degree on her daughter. Eleanor felt touched to have received a degree from her musical mom and mentor, Chancellor Margie McCain.

Currently living in Toronto, Eleanor now divides her time between the consuming job of motherhood and finding her place in the ever so competitive music world. She continues to develop her soft, intimate style of song, which, for her, has become a blending of all the best "genres" from her own life.

Up until now her main inspiration and focus has been raising her daughter...but what if David Foster, Canada's musical icon and Grammy guru, came knocking on Eleanor's door, in search of that McCain melody? Would she seize the opportunity to pursue her musical dreams further?

"In an instant," says Eleanor, "in an instant!" ■