

Country Showdown excitement returns to Shuler Theater in Raton

By Tim Keller - For the Comet | Posted: Wednesday, October 15, 2014 10:57 am

RATON – For the fourth consecutive year, the Shuler Theater will pack an excited crowd shoulder-to-shoulder as it presents the Southwest Regional Country Showdown, pitting seven state winners in a talent competition that will send its winner to Nashville’s storied Ryman Auditorium for the January national final.

The 33rd annual Country Showdown in Nashville will be broadcast nationally, the winner taking home a check for \$100,000 and gaining a potent springboard for a national career in country music. Crystal Yates came from North Texas last October to win the Shuler event, then proceeded to take the national prize at the Ryman. Her first single was just released on iTunes; meantime, she was so grateful to Raton and the Shuler Theater that she returned to play a local benefit in May.

Saturday night’s free show at the Shuler will feature diverse performers so talented that they’ve survived elimination rounds held this year in more than 75 contests with 1,000 aspiring country music acts. Local winners were Arrianna Gabrielle Bustos, sponsored by KBKZ in Raton, and Kristi Hoopes, sponsored by KCRT in Trinidad.

Saturday night, Colorado winner Katey Laura of Salida will join Keeira Lyn Ford of Las Vegas, NV, representing Arizona, along with Jana Lee Cox from Oklahoma, Matt Coleman from Kansas, and Tyler Hammond from Dallas. The Missouri and South Texas finals were held last weekend; their winners, too, will each travel to Raton to sing two songs to a full house at the Shuler. Last year’s audience included fans from 16 states plus a couple from Manchester, England.

Sitting amidst the audience will be four music-industry professionals who will judge the acts and name the winner. The contest does not reveal the judges until after the event ends, but they’ve included performers, agents, talent scouts, and music media professionals.

Part of the fun is listening to the excited chatter of the crowd after the last performance while the judges tabulate their scores. All the acts are so good that there’s never a consensus. Ask four people and you’re



Crystal Yates at last year's event

Crystal Yates won last year’s Southwest Regional Country Showdown at Raton’s Shuler Theater, propelling her to the national championship at Nashville’s storied Ryman Auditorium where she won the \$100,000 first place award.

likely to get four conflicting predictions of who will win.

Local favorite Colfax Reunion opens the show at 6:30 p.m., then accompanies many of the contestant acts in their short sets. Colfax Reunion plays a short closing set at the end while the judges confer and decide on a winner.

Saturday night's winning performer will travel to Nashville in January to represent the Southwest for the national prize, joining the four other winning regional acts from the Northwest, the Midwest, the Southeast, and the Northeast. Last year's win by Crystal Yates at both famous theaters—the Shuler and the Ryman—underscores the stakes, and the level of talent converging on Raton Saturday night.

Shuler Theater doors open at 6 p.m. Saturday night. There is no charge for the event, and no tickets are available in advance. Seating is available on a first come basis.